Excerpts from the Cluetrain Manifesto

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I. Markets

Markets are conversations
The first markets were markets. Not bulls, bears, or invisible hands. Not battle-fields, targets, or arenas. Not demographics, eyeballs, or seats. Most of all, not consumers.

The first markets were filled with people, not abstractions or statistical aggre-gates; they were the places where supply met demand with a firm handshake. Buyers and sellers looked each other in the eye, met, and connected. The first markets were places for exchange, where people came to buy what others had to sell -- and to talk.

The first markets were filled with talk. Some of it was about goods and products. Some of it was news, opinion, and gossip. Little of it mattered to everyone; all of it engaged someone. There were often conversations about the work of hands: "Feel this knife. See how it fits your palm." "The cotton in this shirt, where did it come from?" "Taste this apple. We won't have them next week. If you like it you should take some today." Some of these conversations ended in a sale, but don't let that fool you. The sale was merely the exclamation mark at the end of the sentence.
(...)
For thousands of years, we knew exactly what markets were: conversations be-tween people who sought out others who shared the same interests. Buyers had as much to say as sellers. They spoke directly to each other without the filter of media, the artifice of positioning statements, the arrogance of advertising, or the shading of public relations.
(...)
"Markets were conversations" doesn't mean "markets were noisy." It means mar-kets were places where people met to see and talk about each other's work.

Conversation is a profound act of humanity. So once were markets.

Marketing is not conversation
The advent of the Industrial Age did more than just enable industry to produce products much more efficiently. Management's approach to production and its workers was quickly echoed in its approach to the market and its customers.
(...)
The goal was simple. Customers had to be convinced to desire the same thing, the same Model-T in any color, so long as it's black. And if workers could be bet-ter organized through the repetitive nature of their tasks, so customers were

more easily defined by the collective nature of their tastes. Just as management developed a new organizational model to enhance economies of scale in production, it developed the techniques of mass marketing to do the same for consumption.

So the customers who once looked you in the eye while hefting your wares in the market were transformed into consumers. In the words of industry analyst Jerry Michalski, a consumer was no more than "a gullet whose only purpose in life is to gulp products and crap cash." Power swung so decisively to the supply side that "market" became a verb: something you do to customers.

In the twentieth century, the rise of mass communications media enhanced industry's ability to address even larger markets with no loss of shoe leather, and mass marketing truly came into its own. With larger markets came larger rewards, and larger rewards had to be protected. More bureaucracy, more hierarchy, and more command and control meant the customer who looked you in the eye was promptly escorted out of the building by security.

The product of mass marketing was the message, delivered in as many forms as there were media and in as many guises as there were marketers to invent them. Delivered locally, shipped globally, repeated inescapably, the business of marketing devoted itself to delivering the message.
(...)
One problem: there is no demand for messages. The customer doesn't want to hear from business, thank you very much. The message that gets broadcast to you, me, and the rest of the earth's population has nothing to do with me in particular. It's worse than noise. It's an interruption. It's the Anti-Conversation.

That's the awful truth about marketing. It broadcasts messages to people who don't want to listen. Every advertisement, press release, publicity stunt, and giveaway engineered by a Marketing department is colored by the fact that it's going to a public that doesn't ask to hear it.

With the Internet, conversation is returning to the market
The long silence -- the industrial interruption of the human conversation -- is coming to an end. On the Internet, markets are getting more connected and more powerfully vocal every day. These markets want to talk, just as they did for the thousands of years that passed before market became a verb with us as its object.

The Internet is a place. We buy books and tickets on the Web. Not over, through, or beside it. (...) The Net is a real place where people can go to learn, to talk to each other, and to do business together. It is a bazaar where customers look for wares, vendors spread goods for display, and people gather around topics that interest them. It is a conversation. At last and again.

In this new place, every product you can name, from fashion to office supplies, can be discussed, argued over, researched, and bought as part of a vast conversation among the people interested in it. "I'm in the market for a new computer," someone says, and she's off to the Dell site. But she probably won't buy that cool new laptop right away. She'll ask around first -- on Web pages, on newsgroups, via e-mail: "What do you think? Is this a good one? Has anybody checked it out? What's the real battery life? How's their customer support? Recommendations? Horror stories?"

(...)

These conversations are most often about value: the value of products and of the businesses that sell them. Not just prices, but the market currencies of reputation, location, position, and every other quality that is subject to rising or falling opinion.

It's nothing new, in one sense. The only advertising that was ever truly effective was word of mouth, which is nothing more than conversation. Now word of mouth has gone global. The one-to-many scope that technology brought to mass production and then mass marketing, which producers have enjoyed for two hundred years, is now available to customers. And they're eager to make up for lost time.

(...)

Business-as-usual doesn't realize this because it continues to conceptualize markets as distant abstractions -- battlefields, targets, demographics -- and the Net as simply another conduit down which companies can broadcast messages. But the Net isn't a conduit, a pipeline, or another television channel. The Net invites your customers in to talk, to laugh with each other, and to learn from each other. Connected, they reclaim their voice in the market, but this time with more reach and wider influence than ever.

In order to talk in the market, you have to listen
The market started out as a place where people talked about what they cared about, in voices as individual as the craft goods on the table between them. As the distance between producer and consumer lengthened, so grew the gap between our business voice and our authentic voice. Marketing became a profession, an applied science, the engineering of desirable responses through the application of calibrated stimuli -- including the occasional axe in the head.

Marketing isn't going to go away. Nor should it. But it needs to evolve, rapidly and thoroughly, for markets have become networked and now know more than business, learn faster than business, are more honest than business, and are a hell of a lot more fun than business. The voices are back, and voice brings craft: work by unique individuals motivated by passion.

What's happening to the market is precisely what should -- and will -- happen to marketing. Marketing needs to become a craft. Recall that craftworkers listen to the material they're forming, shaping the pot to the feel of the clay, designing the

house to fit with and even reveal the landscape. The stuff of marketing is the market itself. Marketing can't become a craft until it can hear the new -- the old -- sound of its markets.

By listening, marketing will re-learn how to talk.

II. Organizations

With the Internet, conversation is returning to the organization
A couple of centuries ago, a new invention arrived into the world. It was called "the job." The idea was simple, really. You went to some hellhole of a factory, worked sixteen hours until you were ready to collapse, and you kept on doing that every day until you died. Cool, huh? You can see where Calvinism must have come in handy. Some people wouldn't do that even for stock options.

Among the many casualties of this arrangement was the human spirit. And of its necessary functions, conversation was the first to go. People would talk with each other while doing craft or cottage work. But talk interfered with factory production. And of course, there was Management. Management knew everything. Workers knew nothing. So shut up and get back to yer lathes and looms, ye dirty sods!

Fast-forward a hundred years or so and along comes "knowledge work" -- an even cooler invention that enabled us to have magazines like Fast Company and meant we were allowed to know something all of a sudden. Excuse us, management said, but would you mind letting us in on whatever it is, as we're rather tapped out over here?

And the rest, as they say, is history. A history that brings us right up to today with its rip-snortin' high-speed Internet with broadband everything, hold the mayo. Whoopee! But that's not the point. The point is what this latest technological wonder brings back into the world: the human story. A story that stretches back into our earliest prehistory. A story that's been in remission for two hundred years of industrial "progress." When it breaks out again in the twenty-first century, it's gonna make Ebola look like chicken pox. Catch it if you can.

Conversations subvert hierarchy
Today, the organization is hyperlinked, not hierarchical. Respect for hands-on knowledge wins over respect for abstract authority.
(...)
... The hyperlinks that replace the org chart as the primary structure of the organization are in fact conversations. They are the paths talk takes. And a business is, more than anything else, the set of conversations going on.

Business is a conversation because the defining work of a business is conversation -- literally. And "knowledge workers" are simply those people whose job consists of having interesting conversations.

"Can I super-size that?" "Have it on my desk by the morning," "There's no I in Team," and laughing at your manager's unfunny jokes are not conversations. Conversations are where ideas happen and partnerships are formed. Sometimes they create commitments (in Fernando Flores' sense), but more often they're pulling people through fields of common interest with no known destination. The structure of conversations is always hyperlinked and is never hierarchical:

   To have a conversation, you have to be comfortable being human -- acknowledging you don't have all the answers, being eager to learn from someone else and to build new ideas together.

   You can only have a conversation if you're not afraid to be wrong. Otherwise, you're not conversing, you're just declaiming, speechifying, or reading what's on the PowerPoints. To converse, you have to be willing to be wrong in front of another person.

   Conversations occur only between equals. The time your boss's boss asked you at a meeting about your project's deadline was not a conversation. The time you sat with your boss's boss for an hour in the Polynesian-themed bar while on a business trip and you really talked, got past the corporate bullshit, told each other the truth about the dangers ahead, and ended up talking about your kids -- that maybe was a conversation.

Conversations subvert hierarchy. Hyperlinks subvert hierarchy. Being a human being among others subverts hierarchy.

The conversations in the market and in the organizations are converging
Via intranets, workers are already speaking among themselves. Via the Internet, markets are already speaking among themselves. The convergence of these two conversations is not only necessary, but inevitable. Why? Because markets, unencumbered by corporate bureaucracy and the need to ask permission at every turn, are learning faster than organizations. Markets are therefore coming into a new ascendancy, a fancy way of saying "We rule, dude!" And increasingly, we value only two qualities:

   1. The engagement and passion-for-quality of genuine craft.
   2. Conversations among recognizably human voices.

The simple, if painful, prognosis: organizations must encourage and engage in genuine conversation with workers and markets -- or go belly up.

So what, if anything, can businesses do at this juncture? They can begin by searching out people within the organization who understand what's going on. In almost every case, they're there. Make friends with them. Make friends with the marketplace again. Start listening. Find your voice. Then start talking as if your life depended on it. It does.

Business is being transformed, but not by technology. The Web is simply liberating an atavistic human desire, the longing for connection through talk. That's the one constant throughout our evolution, from caves to mud huts to open-air bazaars, from city-states to empires, nations, interdependent global powers. We've always conversed, connecting to the people of our world in our authentic voices. We connect to ourselves the same way; that's the mystery of voice.

III. Conversations

Human voices are heard in online conversation
No one's asking you to decide if you want to run your business using the Web. It's a done deal. The Internet has already set expectations for how connections ought to work. The gulf is there; a gulf caused, ironically, by the abundance of connection.

The Web is the sum of these connections. It isn't a medium, a new type of intercom, or an invention like really cool wristwatch walkie talkies. It is a broad, open place that lets everyone touch everyone else and touch every digit of information by twitching a wrist and tapping a single finger.

What connects you to me to everyone else are Web pages and e-mail and chat and discussions. These are all artifacts of human voice. Each is deliberately created and put forward as our public self, the self that is closest to us and, paradoxically, least knowable to us.
(…)
The voices are heard in conversations. That's why the Web has its transforming power: it turns out the fundamental elements of our world have been products of deep conversations all along -- conversations carried on by philosophers, artists, poets, and other crafters of language. Had those conversations across the generations been different, we would not have the world we do.

Corporations have no human voice
How do you speak in a human voice? First, you get a life. And corporations just can't do that. Corporations are like Pinocchio. Or Frankenstein. Their noses grow longer at the oddest moments, or they start breaking things for no good reason.

They want to be human, but gosh, they're not. They want the Formula for Life --
but they want it so they can institutionalize it. The problem, of course, is that life
is anti-formulaic, anti-institutional. The most fundamental quality of life is some-
thing the corporation can never capture, never possess. Life can't be shrink-
wrapped, caged, dissected, analyzed, or owned. Life is free.

And so, finally, the question we've all been waiting for. In the newly humanized
and highly vocal global marketplace the Internet has helped create, can corpora-
tions survive at all? Not if they're unable to speak for themselves. Not if they're
literally dumbfounded by the changes taking place all around them.

But maybe -- and it's a big maybe -- companies can get out of their own way.
Maybe they can become much looser associations of free individuals. Maybe
they can cut "their" people enough slack to actually act and sound like people in-
stead of 1950s science-fiction robots. Gort need more sales! Gort need make
quota! You not buy now, Gort nuke your planet!

Easy there, Gort. Calm down boy. Here, chew on this kryptonite.
(...)
... If you think of yourself as a company, you've got much bigger worries. We
strongly suggest you repeat the following mantra as often as possible until you
feel better: "I am not a company. I am a human being."

We understand stories, not information
When you get past the mission statement and the slide showing why your current
market share and revenues are making Croesus envious, and you start to tell
your story, only then do people begin to understand your company.

And it's not just companies that have stories. Every sale worth knowing about
has one ("It looked like the bad guys were going to win this one, so I wrote this e-
mail, see, and sent it to this guy I know... "). Every repair job has one ("I tried
everything in the book to get the X405 to work, including repacking the bearings,
which is a total pain. And then while I was tightening the booster ring, I noticed
the damndest thing... "). Every product has one ("We couldn't figure out why no
one was using the cup holders in the Deluxe model, so we did a study and we
discovered that the engine is so powerful that people were afraid to let go of the
wheel. So we decreased it from 36 to 12 cylinders and scored a hit with the
scaredy-cat driver market... ").

We live in stories. We breathe stories. Most of our best conversations are about
stories. Stories are a big step sidewise and up from information:

• Unlike information, they have a start and a finish. The order counts a lot.
• They talk about events, not conditions.

- They imply a deep relationship among the events, a relationship characterized overall as "unfolding" as if the end were present in the beginning -- as of course it almost always is (as was foretold, in a fractally recursive sense, by Aristotle at our culture's beginning).
- Stories are about particular humans; no substitutions allowed.
- Unlike a set of economic forecasts or trends analysis, they do not pretend to offer the certainty that life will continue to work this way. (On the other hand, the story is more likely to be correct than the forecast because it takes all of our current understanding of the world to accept a story.)
- Stories are told in a human voice. It matters who's telling it.

So, stories are not a lot like information. But they are the way we understand.

How to apply this to your workaday world? You already have. When you are telling someone how you won this account or lost that one, when you are explaining why the competitor's trade-show booth was a disaster, or when you are telling a financial analyst how the market got to be as wacky as it is, you're already telling stories. You can't help it. You're human. Stories are how we make sense of things.

Anything else is just information.

Sometimes, good enough is just perfect
Management aims at predictability and it tries to get there via control.

The urge to manage is deep in our culture. It ultimately is defeated by the fact of human fallibility.

It's in the Web's nature to "always be a little bit broken" because it's decentralized. No one is in charge of making sure that the page you're trying to get to hasn't been taken down. There's no one to fix the Web, no one to plan it, and no one to complain to.

In fact, all big systems are broken. We don't always see that because what counts as broken is a matter of perspective. For example, on the phone system sometimes we get busy signals, and sometimes the phone rings and rings and no one answers, but we choose not to count those as signs of brokenness. If the telephone system chose to treat busy and unanswered phones as broken, it could make answering machines a standard telephone service. (...)

We choose to see the phone system as basically not broken, and choose to see the Web as inevitably broken. Why? Because fallibility is an endearing trait that seems to be a requirement for community. We of course want the people we work with to do everything they can to meet their commitments to us, but we also may find it hard to trust people who refuse to admit fallibility -- their own and oth-

ers'. We are intensely uncomfortable with people who have no weaknesses. For example: Michael Jordan, Jesus, and my older cousin Don.

The Web's frailty makes it more human, less threatening. It also lets us move faster. For example, Mark Gransee, VP of Information Systems at Eddie Bauer, said (in an article in InformationWeek):

In the old cycle, you could... hit analysis paralysis. Now you can't be afraid to make a decision just because the conditions are going to change and make that decision obsolete.

He adds that perfectionism isn't allowed: "You just have to do the best you can."

Meanwhile, at Owens Corning, Mike Radcliff, CIO, said (also in Information-Week):

Our staff has to be able to work with incredible ambiguity, be self-confident, simplify and trust others... Most of all we have to embrace "good enough" reengineering, good enough that we can progress... not necessarily what we'd do in the ideal world.

But it's not just systems that are imperfect. More important, so are we humans. Say it with me: humans are imperfect. I am imperfect.

Feels good, doesn't it?

Making errors is worth more than being right every time
We often use the phrase "knowledge is power" to make it seem that hierarchically granted power is justifiable. In most hierarchies, however, knowledge isn't power, it's a weapon. Being right advances you and being wrong is a defeat. That sucks.

You can see the politics of "being right" throughout most organizations. People win arguments -- and thus secure their position in the hierarchy -- through the cutting remark, through megatonnage of evidence, through agreeing with industry consultants, and through the smug refusal to ever admit being wrong.

But wrongness has a lot going for it beyond the fact that some things can only be learned through trial and error. For example:

• Some people are great at generating ideas but terrible at thinking through their impact. You want them to have as many bad ideas as possible because they will thereby randomly generate more good ideas. (I tell my clients that I try to maintain a 9:1 ratio of bad ideas to good. And, no, I can't tell which are which. If only.)

- Errors are how assumptions become visible. And there is nothing more valuable than a newly discovered assumption, because only then can you see what's holding you back and what could propel you forward.
- There's too much to know, so all important decisions are, to some extent, random. By being free to make errors, you can try more paths until you stumble on one that takes you somewhere interesting (albeit probably not where you at first thought -- mistakenly -- you should be heading).
- Errors remind us that we're fallible humans. A company that's too embarrassed to admit mistakes and that builds a culture where being wrong is humiliating literally is denying what it is to be human. And you will pay the price -- in this world, if not in the next.
- Mistakes give us something to talk about.
- Being wrong is a lot funnier than being right. The right type of laughter -- laughter at what the mistake reveals about our situation rather than laughter aimed at a person who dares to be human -- is enormously liberating. In fact, laughter is the sound that knowledge makes when it's born.

Does your company have "zero tolerance" for error? Can you change your mind without losing status? If so, consider engaging in the radical politics of wrongness. Go out and commit a whopper. Then embrace it publicly.

It's a good feeling. It's liberating. It's how you find your voice.

Openness breeds trust
Why not let your customers see your product-design process? They know that it's not perfect. They know you're going to go down wrong paths, you're going to abandon pieces you thought were locked in, you're going to squabble senselessly over trivia. That's what business is like.

Every business is dysfunctional because everything human is at least a little bit broken. It's not an accident. It's the human condition.

So what are you protecting your customers from? The obvious truth they know and live with every day? Just exactly whom do we think we're fooling?

Companies that let their customers and suppliers into the process early on deliver better products. And they forge the bonds of trust and delight that are the only ones that work in the "frictionless" Web.

IV. The Future

Where will all of this take us?

Imagine a world where everyone was constantly learning, a world where what you wondered was more interesting than what you knew, and curiosity counted for more than certain knowledge. Imagine a world where what you gave away was more valuable than what you held back, where joy was not a dirty word, where play was not forbidden after your eleventh birthday. Imagine a world in which the business of business was to imagine worlds people might actually want to live in someday. Imagine a world created by the people, for the people not perishing from the earth forever.

Yeah. Imagine that.