



I Am the Walrus

Side One

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Side Two

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On Parlophone 33 1/3 RPM

Side One | Track 1 ▶ I Me Mine

Consider what you have to offer (and what you don't).

“We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You.” Tom Peters succinctly labeled and called attention to the concept of a personal brand in the August 1997 issue of *Fast Company* Magazine. The Beatles had that figured out well before 1997 and built a reputation, musically and personally, that stretched from Liverpool to every corner of the planet. Maybe The Beatles didn't brand themselves— “I Me Mine, Inc.” —but we know them by their images even today; the cute one, the smart one, the quiet one, and the funny one.

What is personal brand? Branding is simply a way of distinguishing something or someone from all the rest. We'd all like to stand out from the competition, or just stand out and be known for what we do well. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Your mom, dad, grandma, 3rd grade teacher, etc. told you—you were special. You are unique (just like everyone else). The trick is figuring out exactly what “special” is for you and describing it. Every element of your business, your interactions with customers (and potential customers), the packaging of your product (and yourself), whatever it takes to engage, delight and inspire those around you—that's your brand.

Let's make it clear, as The Beatles will shortly: personal branding is not about selling. If you have a decent product or service at a reasonable price, it should sell. A lot of large companies do this all day, every day. But if you have something unique to offer, something unique to say, something that is original and very definitely you, then you have to think about your personal brand. Personal branding can cover a lot of territory. It is all about message, about culture, and about meaning.

John: *“Most of my good songs are in the first person. ‘In My Life,’ ‘I’m a Loser,’ ‘Help!’, ‘Strawberry Fields’—they’re all personal records. I always wrote about me when I could. I didn’t really enjoy writing third person songs about people who lived in concrete flats and things like that. I like first person music.”*

George: *“I wouldn’t say that my songs are autobiographical. ‘Taxman’ is, perhaps. Some of them were, later on, after The Beatles. The early ones were just any words I could think of.”*

What do you have to offer? Most people say “not much,” “about the same as anybody,” “nothing special.” Gee, who’d want to hang around with them? If one of those is your answer, who’d want to hang around with you? We are sure you have a few people who find you worth hanging around. Why? Think for yourself—what do you bring to the mix that makes it better when you’re there? And be really clear on what is not part of your brand.

Paul: *“Apple was quite a nice little record company, if that had been what we wanted to do. But, once the business hassles came in, we thought, ‘Who needs a record company? I’d rather just have my freedom.’”*

Side One | Track 2 ▶ I Am the Walrus

Stand for something. Have the reputation you want.

I am the Walrus, who are you? The Beatles are synonymous with great music that stands the test of time. What do you stand for? Can your friends, co-workers and family describe what you stand for? Can you?

Brand is not just what you do, but how you do it. So you're a teacher, a project manager, a widget maker—so are a lot of people. What makes you stand out? What made The Beatles stand out? They were musicians, but musicians that had an uncanny way of tapping into our psyches with the music they wrote and performed. Music that was different from anything that had come before. They experimented with techniques and instruments to create new sounds on every recording. Their audiences came to expect and consistently got great songs that connected emotionally to their lives.

John: *"We came out of Liverpool and we reflected our background and we reflected our thoughts in what we sang."*

How could four guys from Liverpool cause a musical revolution in a time before iPods and the Internet? How can a small company, maybe even just one or two people (like us) compete with the big companies? By believing in what we have to offer. People are weary of slick ad campaigns and empty promises. They crave authenticity and want to trust the people they work with. Just like The Beatles connected emotionally with their audiences, you have to connect with yours. Show people who you are, what you do, what you believe in.

George: *"I'll give up this sort of touring madness certainly, but music—everything is based on music. No, I'll never stop my music."*

Side One | Track 3 ▶ Don't Let Me Down

Deliver on what you promise (always).

It's harder keeping promises than it is making them, but as Henry Ford said "You can't build a reputation on what you're going to do." To build your brand, you need to deliver on your promises.

Paul: *"I saw that Meryl Streep said, 'I just want to do my job well.' And really, that's all I'm ever trying to do."*

The Beatles were writing and recording two to three albums of new material per year while touring worldwide until late 1966. They delivered to their audiences a constant stream of kept promises. Their material was always fresh, youthful, hopeful, and connected to their audience. In reality, they promised their fans only to do their best, and hoped they would like it.

John: *"The 'Help!' single sold much better than the two before it: 'I Feel Fine' and 'Ticket To Ride.' But there were still a lot of fans who didn't like 'Help!' They said, 'Ah. The Beatles are dropping us. This isn't as good as 'A Hard Days Night.' So you can't win. Trying to please everybody is impossible—if you did that, you'd end up in the middle with nobody liking you. You've just got to make the decision about what you think is your best, and do it."*

If you take on a job, commitment or just say you will get back to someone, be sure to follow through. People remember if and how you deliver. A great spiel will get you in the door once. Good and consistent delivery will keep the door open for repeat performances.

Side One | Track 4 ▶ The Continuing Story of Bungalow Bill Keep them talking, about you.

Have you ever seen a copy of John Lennon's resume? How about Paul McCartney's CV? Do you even believe that The Beatles had resumes?

Quick, can you quote anyone's resume, even your own? But we bet you can tell a story about a co-worker that highlights something she does well. It really is all about reputation. And it really is the stories that you tell—and that other people tell—that advance your career.

The better and more compelling your story, the more likely it will spread.

What stories do you have that support your brand image that you can tell others and they can pass on? The better and more compelling your story, the more likely it will spread. However, stories that are truthful, authentic, and generate compassion with your listeners are more likely to succeed than some marketing shtick that most of us can smell upwind on a breezy day.

The explosion of Beatlemania from local to national phenomenon (in Britain) can be put down to the Beatles' appearance on "Sunday Night at The London Palladium," a television show broadcast live from London. Watched by a TV audience of fifteen million, screaming fans mobbed the theatre and many of those who filled the streets found themselves on the front page of British newspapers the next day. Suddenly photos of The Beatles were all over the tabloids. The single that got them there was "She Loves You," which went on to be Britain's best-selling single of the decade, entering the top twenty in August 1963 and staying there until February 1964.

In a little over two minutes, the Beatles managed to bottle and sell the essence of everything that made them fresh and exciting. "She Loves You" had the emotional lyrical hooks, the well-crafted harmonies, the head-shaking "woo" sound, as well as the bursting enthusiasm of the song's tempo. And, on top of everything, they laid the unmistakable "Yeah, yeah, yeah" line which became a gift to tabloid writers everywhere. From the end of 1963 until they separated, The Beatles were the story.

Donald Zec, The Daily Mirror: *"The most devastating male quartet since the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse."*

Yet the greatest stories that The Beatles developed were unquestionably their songs. The main reason we still remember the band all these years later is that we are able to hum their tunes. A melody that sticks in your mind... could you find a story better than that?

Sometimes giving away your ideas, as part of a story, works very well—isn't that what we're doing here? Ideas are free, and they can catch a ride all over the world. Instead of taking your band on tour, man, how about you just send an album out? It's worked before for a certain Lonely Hearts Club Band. Set your ideas free.

Side One | Track 5 ▶ Your Mother Should Know

Enroll people to promote your brand.

Hey, you've figured out what you have to offer, how you offer it, you deliver on what you promise and you can tell stories to support all of the above. Everything has come together. Whew! The offers must be pouring in. People must be queuing up to work with you. Not if they don't know you exist. You have to get people to talk about your brand. But how?

The Beatles were a seven-year "overnight sensation." They played a lot of small pubs and clubs in a lot of towns across the British Isles and Germany before they recorded their first song, before anyone in America even heard the first note of "Please, Please Me." Along the way they met other musicians, managers, and, of course, those who were in the pubs and clubs listening to the music. Word of mouth is powerful.

Most of us won't find playing pubs and clubs useful to promoting ourselves. We don't have a promoter/manager and there is no equivalent to a record label in most professions. We do, however, have business colleagues, friends and family. Business colleagues will know your work and can recommend you. Friends and family know you and can talk about what you do with their friends and family. You may have heard the technical term for this—it's called "networking."

Did you just say, "Well, duh. Everybody knows that." It is amazing how everybody knows, yet most are reluctant and hesitant to tell people what they do and what they are looking for. If you don't ask, how can anyone answer? Get out there. Keep in touch. Promote yourself through taking an interest in what others are doing and sharing what you are doing.

Ringo: *"Brian [Epstein, the manager] was great. He was a lot of fun and he really knew his records... He tried to educate us... persuaded us to wear ties and dress up a bit more, and it's true that he said 'Don't drink on stage, and try not to smoke through the set.' He really was instrumental in bending our attitude this much, so that the public would bend theirs that much to accept us."*

Side Two | Track 6 ▶ She Came In Through the Bathroom Window Brand Dilution, Elasticity and Evolution.

The Beatles struggled with being Beatles. At some point they realized their capacity to write and perform was limited by having to fit into a particular “cute” format, and they were no longer creating magic. They were in turn compelled to develop themselves as individual brands—in part as a means of escaping something they had created. But how do you change your product and still retain your customers? Perhaps you need to begin with the end in mind:

Paul: *“I took an idea back to the guys in London: ‘As we’re trying to get away from ourselves—to get away from touring and into a more surreal thing—how about if we become an alter-ego band, something like, say, ‘Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts’? I’ve got a little bit of a song cooking with that title.’”*

The Beatles made the Darwinian discovery that their brand could evolve and change as their tastes and experiences formed their views and inspirations. How far can you push a brand? Well, how long is a piece of string? A brand is infinitely elastic, providing it is based on reputation—and not products and services alone. So long as its integrity is not compromised and the brand remains credible (to its following, its customers), you are free to expand your brand horizons.

Ringo: *“Sgt. Pepper was our greatest endeavor. It gave everybody—including me—a lot of leeway to come up with ideas and to try different material.”*

One of the qualities of The Beatles music is restlessness, always looking to do something that hadn’t been done before and to take creative risks. Their fans came to expect it from them. The Beatles made being creative an everyday part of their work (always delivering on their promises), investing the time and effort to explore new frontiers, considering new points of view, and creating new mental runways.

Paul: *“Later, when we made Sgt. Pepper, I remember taking it around to Dylan at the Mayfair Hotel in London. I went round as if I were going on a pilgrimage. It was a bit like an audience with the Pope. I remember playing him some of Sgt. Pepper and he said, ‘Oh I get it—you don’t want to be cute any more.’ That was the feeling about Rubber Soul too. We’d had our cute period and now it was time to expand.”*

Keep your brand fresh. Read, explore other methods, take classes, go to seminars—anything that gets you to think about what you’re doing and how you’re doing it. It doesn’t mean you have to reinvent yourself. It doesn’t mean you have to expand and lose focus on what you love to do. Just periodically, do a gut-check and see if your brand is still true to you. If it’s not, then it’s not true to your customers.

A brand is infinitely elastic, providing it is based on reputation—and not products and services alone.

Side Two | Track 7 ▶ The Long and Winding Road

It's the journey, not the destination.

Think of your brand as a lifetime relationship. Sometimes it works, sometimes it chafes. With all good and enduring relationships, you have to work at it. Occasional changes in pace, changes in venues, or changes in process are needed to rejuvenate a brand (or a relationship).

1966 was an “interesting” year for The Beatles brand. It included an unpleasant end of their tour in the Philippines, backlash over remarks made by John, a controversial album cover for Yesterday and Today and accusations by Elvis Presley that The Beatles were anti-American. Whether or not these incidents were the reasons The Beatles stopped touring and went into the recording studio for the next few years, it was a change in their process, but worth it in the end.

John: *“Like anything, people go in trends, and the trend now is to think that it [Revolver] was the change. And the trend before was to think that Rubber Soul was the change, and then the other change was Sgt. Pepper. But the whole thing was a gradual change. We were conscious that there was some formula or something—it was moving ahead. That was for sure, that we were on the road—not physically; I mean ‘on the road’ in the studio—and the weather was clear.”*

Steve Jobs is known for saying “the journey is the reward”, but did you know Steve is a big Beatles fan? When asked about his business model (and think about how Apple’s brand has endured and evolved) Steve said: “My model for business is The Beatles; they were four guys that kept each other’s negative tendencies in check—they balanced each other. And the total was greater than the sum of the parts.” A great personal brand should be capable of bridging the gap between the present and future, allowing the audience to make the trip with you.

Side Two | Track 8 ▶ Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds

Have a visceral presence.

Do something that continually makes people think; keeps you in the conversation; invokes an emotional response. How about this:

... backwards record this playing stylus your buggered just you've, not he's No. dead is Paul. dead is Paul.

The Beatles managed to create a buzz about them, their work, their ideas and beliefs wherever they went. Well, of course, you may say, they're The Beatles—they're an easy story for the laziest of paparazzo. True. On the other hand, they created interest—real interest, not just fandom—through original ideas. Hidden marketing (aka “Easter eggs”) was one of the most powerful tools they had and they used it judiciously to stay in the conversation. Of course, this only led the public to devise their own stories about things hidden in the songs:

John: *“I saw Mel Torme introducing a Lennon-McCartney show, saying how ‘Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds’ was about LSD. It never was, and nobody believes me... I had no idea it spelt LSD. This is the truth: my son came home with a drawing and showed me this strange-looking woman flying around. I said, ‘What is it?’ and he said ‘It’s Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds’, and I thought ‘that’s beautiful’. I immediately wrote a song about it. And the song had gone out, the whole album had been published, and somebody noticed that the letters spelt out LSD. I had no idea, and of course after that I was checking all the songs to see what the letters spelt out. They didn’t spell out anything, none of the others. It wasn’t about that at all. It’s not an acid song.”*

Most of us do not have the breadth of visibility that The Beatles enjoyed (and endured). Yet, we can delight and surprise our “audiences” through our printed and e-materials. We have gotten feedback from our clients and friends of potential clients (remember, networking does work) that our e-books and blog site showcase our brand well. Visceral design concerns itself with appearances—it is the here and now, when first impressions are formed. If you do it right, people will take one look and say, “I want it.” If you do it better, they’ll like it at first sight, and like it even more when they have a chance to connect with your brand on a deeper level.

Do something that continually makes people think; keeps you in the conversation; invokes an emotional response.

Side Two | Track 9 ▶ Everybody's Got Something To Hide Except For Me and My Monkey

Protect your Brand.

Sometimes, what seems like a good idea at the time—like taking a job that doesn't quite fit you to please a client, partner or parent—can damage your brand. We won't get into here what it can do to your self-esteem. But life is what happens to you as you're busy making other plans, as John wrote, and certainly events happen to us that aren't in line with the image we want to project.

For The Beatles, receiving the MBE award from the Queen earlier in their careers came to be in conflict with their beliefs later on. So, what would you do with a medal from the Queen that you felt was an albatross around your neck? Wait for the right moment and throw it in the trash? Bottom of a drawer? John had an idea—send it back to her majesty! It got people talking, and The Beatles fans who had followed them into flower power thought it was right on.

John: *"Anyway, I sold out, so it was always worrying me, and then the last few years I'd been thinking, 'I must get rid of that'... I was thinking how to do it, and I thought if I did it privately the press would know anyway, and it would come out, so instead of hiding it, just make an event of the whole situation. So I did it with the MBE. I was waiting for some event to tie it up with... the Queen's intelligent. It won't spoil her cornflakes."*

You may not have a medal you need to return, but you will have times where you need to "repair" or polish out those scratches on your brand. If you need to apologize, do it. If you need to explain to a client that you bit off more than you can handle, do it and find a way to help remedy the situation. If your ego can handle it, incorporate your brand oops into a story. These are all opportunities to be memorable and true to your brand.

Side Two | Track 10 ▶ Hello Goodbye

Leave them wanting you to come back.

Whenever a door closes, another one opens, so the saying goes. That's all well and good, but we like the idea of keeping all our doors ajar. The alternative is to vanish overnight, and become the soundtrack of yesterday.

You never know when you'll be back, need a favor, or want to connect others in your network. Chances are, it won't be long. It seems to us that if you have managed to connect with someone through your personal brand, you ought to apply the same care, honesty and openness that you did when you said "Hello" now that you're saying "Goodbye."

Leave your relationship in the best possible light, keep your brand strong, and earn the potential to work with that person again one day. It also is a good idea to make that Goodbye really mean, "goodbye until we meet again." Stay in touch via email, reconnect with an invitation to lunch. No sales pitch, just catch up. People remember you as much for your Goodbye as they do for your Hello.

John: *"On behalf of the band, I'd like to say thank you, and I hope we passed the audition."*

Bonus Track ▶ I'm Looking Through You

Now that you've listened to our bit, we'd like you to look through this manifesto one more time. Within each track, you'll find Beatles song and album titles. For example, "Yesterday" appears in Track 10 above. There are a total of twenty three in these pages, not counting (which we aren't) the track titles. Some are not obvious. You can check your answers by visiting our blog site, opensky.typepad.com, where we will also post some exercises (Jam Sessions) to help you define your I Me Mine, Inc.

John: *"People think of us as machines... some people have got it all wrong. We produce something, a record, and if they like it, they get it. The onus isn't on us to produce something great every time. The onus is on the public to decide whether they like it or not."*

Meet The Band

John Lennon – Guitar, Vocals

Paul McCartney – Bass, Vocals

George Harrison – Lead Guitar, Vocals

Ringo Starr – Drums, Vocals

Alan Parr –Vocals, Steno Pad

Karen Ansbaugh – Vocals, Keyboard



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Parr and Karen Ansbaugh are cofounders of the OpenSky Consortium. They approach management consulting with creativity, elegant execution and wicked senses of humor. Each having gone through several career iterations finds a “management-design-development-consultancy group” a perfect match for their respective skills and so do their clients. You can view their blog at opensky.typepad.com or email them at opensky@q.com.

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