



## Chapter 2

### *Make meaning, not buzz*

**T**he problem in making decisions today isn't a lack of information. The problem is trying to make sense of so much information amid so much sterile, all-about-us marketing information. If you want people to listen to you, don't think of yourself as a content producer or an information distributor. Be a meaning maker, not a buzz maker.

Organizations that help customers make sense of an abundance of choices become trusted advisers and sources to which people turn. This chapter explains:

- \* Why people want meaning, not buzz
- \* Why a goal of marketing—and of a marketing conversation—is to create understanding, and how “meaning making” helps accomplish this goal
- \* The four ingredients of meaning making are context, relevancy, pattern making, and emotion
- \* How adults make meaning with a five-year-old mind, and what this means to marketing

### **Overwhelmed and desperately seeking meaning**

What if everyone is talking about a company, product, or issue, but the talk leads nowhere? No sales increase. No tick in market share. No big wins. That's what often happens with buzz-marketing programs and glitzy, attention-grabbing advertising campaigns.

There was a lot of buzz about the Segway scooter, but sales fell flat. Burger King's "Subservient Chicken" campaign was talked about all over the Internet and at real-world watercoolers, but the buzz didn't increase sales of Burger King chicken products.

Presidential hopeful Howard Dean ramped up the political buzz machine a few years back, but he still failed to win the Democratic nomination.

Too often, short-term buzz and awareness lead to a business dead end. It's entertaining but it's like eating cotton candy—novel, fun, but in a couple hours you're hungry for real food. Or buzz is just flat-out wrong for the product category, such as marketing a complex, expensive business-to-business product or service that could never be considered "cool."

It's not buzz or more information that people want; it's meaning. My health insurance company recently ran television ads announcing a new plan for small businesses and then sent me a large packet of information about the new plan, my current plan, and all the other available plans. I was interested in this information because the price of my existing health insurance was increasing 32 percent that year, putting the monthly insurance bill over \$1,000. But darned if I could figure out the right health plan to choose for my family. I couldn't figure out the differences

among my existing plan, the new plan, and all the other plans—aside from their having different names and different price tags. I couldn't figure out which was more relevant to our family needs, or the trade-off in services and deductibles. I was overwhelmed, annoyed, and frustrated. There was so much information, so many facts—yet so little meaning.

The social and economic issues in Africa are far more complex than my health plan, yet I have a better grasp of those issues because of a rock musician who is also a highly effective meaning maker. Have you ever heard U2's Bono talk about his DATA organization, which is dedicated to reducing debt, increasing trade, and treating AIDS in Africa? He has an astute command of the facts around the issues and talks about them with a genuine passion that draws you into the discussion, making you want to learn more about some complex and substantive issues and, yes, maybe even donate money or time to the cause.

Bono has framed the issues in ways that are relevant to world leaders, business executives, U2 fans, and even highly skeptical politicians and evangelical Christians.

“[O]f evangelicals polled in 2000, only 6 percent felt it incumbent upon them to respond to the AIDS emergency,” he explained in a PBS *Frontline* interview.<sup>1</sup> “I was deeply offended by that, so I asked to meet with as many church leaders as I could, and used examples from the Scriptures. . . . I argued . . . ‘Isn't this what Christ spent his time with?’”

When Bono met with ultraconservative U.S. Senator Jesse Helms, his conversation focused on discussing AIDS in a way that would be most meaningful to Helms. “‘I started talking about Scripture. I talked about AIDS as the leprosy of our age.’ Finally the flinty old Southerner rose to his feet, grabbed for his cane, and said, ‘I want to give you a blessing.’”<sup>2</sup>

Using meaning-making techniques, Bono talks about the issues with an urgent relevancy and emotional wallop. He helps to speed public understanding as well as policy decisions.

When a fan complimented Bono on his cause, Bono corrected him. “I don’t think 6,000 Africans a day dying from AIDS is a cause, it’s an *emergency*.”<sup>3</sup>

Now *that’s* something meaningful to talk about.

### **Meaning helps make sense of information**

Meaning making helps *makes sense* of an idea, concept, or product, showing us how it relates to what we already know and believe. Like Bono helping Jesse Helms understand the urgency of AIDS in Africa by talking about how it was like leprosy for the New Age.

Although buzz or advertising may spark interest, meaning making builds understanding. Meaning making grounds conversations, helping people to comprehend information and to make decisions on rational and emotional levels.

Eric Jensen, a brain-based learning expert and the author of *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, believes that meaning is more important than information because the brain is meaning-driven.

That’s why meaning making is such a powerful concept for leadership, sales, marketing, customer relationship building, and activism.

Great leaders in all fields—from Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher to GE’s Jack Welch and Ford Motors’ Jacques Nasser—have been meaning makers, helping people to make sense of new concepts.

In fact, the more innovative or disruptive the idea or product,

the greater the need for a meaning-maker approach to communications.

“We believe the need for meaning and a sense for order is universal,” state Harvard Business School professors Joel M. Podolny, Rakesh Khurana, and Marya Hill-Popper in the Harvard Business School’s *Working Knowledge* article “How to Put Meaning Back into Leading.” According to the business professors, “It is a need that is deeply linked to the definition of what it means to be human. Without meaning, individuals tend to become rigid and hollow. Organizational life seems petty and zero sum. People go through the motions, and do so amid distrust, cynicism, indifference, and a sense of alienation.”<sup>4</sup>

Adapt the Harvard professors’ management view of meaning making and apply it to marketing and we can understand that without meaning, customers tend to become skeptical and indifferent. Advertising seems petty and zero sum. Customers go through the motions and do so amid distrust, cynicism, indifference, and a sense of alienation.

In talking about his fascination with meaning making, George Siemens, instructor at Red River College in Winnipeg, Canada, says, “Knowing something is great. Knowing what it means moves us to a level where we can act—to support, change, redirect, challenge.”<sup>5</sup>

In other words, meaning making speeds action because it speeds understanding; it helps get people to buy our products, use our services, and support our issues. Without helping people make sense of information, much of that information will be overlooked, misunderstood, taken out of context, or tossed aside.

Consider the 2006 Medicare Drug Plan, the biggest expansion of Medicare since the health care program began. Information explaining the new prescription drug benefits for senior citizens is so complex and confusing that nearly 80 percent of

the people eligible for the benefit said they don't know whether or not they will sign up.

“It's so complex that churches, senior centers, and school auditoriums are filling with seniors attending information sessions and asking the same question: What do I do now?” according to *The Cincinnati Post*.<sup>6</sup>

Private health insurance companies stepped in to try to better explain the program, but many seniors considered their marketing efforts superficial, or worse. “The health plans have filled the vacuum with glossy marketing brochures, some of which are flagrantly misleading,” said *Los Angeles Times* columnist Michael Hiltzik.<sup>7</sup>

Efforts to market the Medicare Drug Plan have achieved widespread awareness, yet they lack meaning and understanding. So the marketing has failed.

At the 2004 American Association of Advertising Agencies Conference, Procter & Gamble global marketing officer Jim Stengel talked about how the old model of marketing was broken. “Now is the time for all of us to push our thinking further,” he said. “Marketing pitches can be made meaningful for your consumer, not meaningless.”<sup>8</sup>

**Four meaning-making ingredients—relevancy, emotion, context, and pattern making**

Our brains innately seek meaning by looking for and connecting with patterns of information. The patterns and connections help us to see value in information we may otherwise ignore as meaningless. Our job as marketers is to help people see the patterns, to help them connect with ideas.

Pat Wolfe, author of *Brain Matters: Translating Research into*

*Classroom Practice*, explains, “Neural networks ‘check out’ sensory stimuli as soon as they enter the brain to see if they form a familiar pattern. If they do, a match occurs, and the brain determines that the new stimuli are familiar. In this case, we could say that the new information makes sense or has meaning. What happens if there is no match? The brain may attend to the meaningless information for a short period of time because it is novel; but if it can make no sense out of the incoming stimuli, the brain will probably not process them further.”<sup>9</sup>

Brain-based learning experts have found that the four factors in making meaning are relevancy, emotions, context, and pattern making. “Relevance is a function of the brain making a connection from existing neural sites,” says brain-based learning expert Eric Jensen. “Emotions are triggered by the brain’s chemistry, and context triggers pattern making that may be related to the formation or activation of larger neural fields. All meaning making has at least one of those ingredients.”<sup>10</sup>

To make meaning, we want to know the following:

- \* How does a topic relate to the bigger picture? How does it fit with our view of the industry issues? (We need to fit information into context and existing frameworks of understanding.)
- \* What does this mean to me, to my company, and to our situation? (Meaning must be relevant.)
- \* How do the dots connect with other pieces of the issue? What are the best practices? What are the criteria for success? What lessons have been learned from failures? (Our brains want to see patterns and connect ideas in some way.)
- \* How does it make me feel? Do I feel smarter by knowing this? Do I feel more confident in making a recommendation to my boss? Do I trust the company more? Do I feel that working with the company would be more enjoyable than my other

available choices? (Emotion is the superhighway of understanding and making meaning.)

**Context and pattern making:  
Connecting the dots within a larger frame**

An idea will be meaningful only if it relates to the listener's experience. In other words, to help a customer understand a new concept or why to believe in a company, relate the company's ideas to the customer's previous experiences and perceptions of the industry.

We have to remember that we're not operating in a vacuum. Customers are forming their ideas from multiple sources, including competitors, financial and industry analysts, and the media. It's helpful to step back and ask, "What arena are our customers operating in and how do our company ideas relate within that arena?" If we ignore the customer's frame of reference, the customer will ignore us.

After World War II, one of Winston Churchill's generals remarked to the prime minister that his inspiring speeches helped bring about victory. Churchill replied that he had only said what was in people's hearts. In other words, he was speaking to meanings that already existed. He was connecting meanings in new ways, in the context of what the British already believed about war and Hitler.

Examples of companies trying to fit themselves into a broader context include fast-food companies talking about their products and values in the context of healthy eating, carmakers talking about hybrid vehicles in the context of being less dependent on gas and being better stewards of the environment, and insurance

providers talking about long-term care in the context of aging and health care policy. Today, public policy is framed in the context of security and the war against global terrorism.

As you can see, marketing *anything* requires explaining ideas within people's existing frames of reference—that is, in a context they already understand.

For example, to fend off more controls, the tobacco industry has astutely framed its position on smoking in the context of American values. Smoking is an individual right, the tobacco companies claim, and the public health community is trying to take that right away. Whether you agree or disagree with this strategy, it's a good example of how to market within an existing context.

Talking out of context is usually fruitless. After the French voted “non” and the Dutch followed with a “nay” on the European Union constitution in 2005, many policy experts, journalists, and politicians began to dissect what happened. One of the biggest issues was that the voters just didn't understand what the EU constitution would mean to them. It wasn't communicated within their frame of reference.

The pro-Union policymakers and politicians that had holed up in Brussels, diligently researching and writing dense, rhetoric-filled papers documenting the economic and political policy benefits of a more united Europe, didn't effectively market the benefits of the constitution within the context of voters' lives. Voters wanted to know how the constitution would allow them to maintain their national identities. In giving up control over things like immigration policy, how would they maintain their Dutch or French culture?

When talking on National Public Radio's *The Connection* program, Jocelyne Cesari, visiting associate professor at Harvard's

Center for Middle East Studies and Divinity School, underscored the communications problem by stating, “Up until now the European Union has been seen as a bureaucratic process. When people say ‘Brussels’ they mean a very specialized place—writing treaties of thirty pages long with technical features. People in Europe didn’t understand what the story would be for them in this new union. This is very important. It is the responsibility of all national political classes to make a story that resonates.”<sup>11</sup>

Contexts in business and government are shifting more quickly than ever. Understanding the context in which we’re discussing ideas is essential; otherwise we will end up just talking to ourselves.

Related to context is how patterns are formed within the frame of reference. Pattern making involves seeing relationships among ideas and connecting ideas within the context.

One reason we enjoy hearing about best practices, observations, secrets, and lessons is that someone is pulling together and connecting different bits of information in a meaningful pattern that fits into a context we already understand.

The following quick look at some of the best-selling self-help and business books proves this point: *1,000 Places to See Before You Die* by Patricia Schultz; *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey; *The 48 Laws of Power* by Robert Greene and Joost Elffers; *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni; *Secrets of the Millionaire Mind* by T. Harv Eker; *A Life in Balance: Nourishing the Four Roots of True Happiness* by Dr. Kathleen Hall; and *96 Great Interview Questions to Ask Before You Hire* by Paul Falcone.

For marketers, observing patterns—and sharing lessons learned—is a great way to help customers because their minds are innately seeking out patterns. The old business adage, “We need to connect the dots,” is spot on.

## **Being relevant: Beyond acts of God and Congress**

Congress enacted the Sarbanes Oxley Act of 2002 to tighten up compliance and financial disclosure rules for major companies and to build back investor confidence after financial scandals at major corporations such as Enron, WorldCom, and Tyco.

It was also a gift to many business analytic software companies because it made their products especially relevant to customers. Companies like SAS Institute and Hyperion created highly effective marketing programs to suggest ways that their software products provide the financial and operational data the law now requires.

Another example to consider is the boom in business for security companies after 9/11 or for construction and engineering firms following Hurricane Katrina. The heightened relevancy makes their marketing much easier.

But what if there's no act of God—or act of Congress? You'll have to find relevant hooks to connect the views. There is no worse insult to CEOs and marketers than hearing, "You're just not relevant." (Excepting, of course, its first cousin, "You're out of touch with your customers.")

A management consultant firm asked me to review a new service it was developing to teach executives the value of a business strategy and ways to create one. The workbooks, audio programs, and workshop format were thorough, rich in content, and professionally produced. But they were unappealing.

"Why is this especially relevant for today's executives?" I asked the firm's managing partner. "Why should they pay attention to strategy now, instead of, say, figuring out how to change financial systems to comply with Sarbanes Oxley?"

He replied, “Every executive can be more effective by knowing how to more systematically develop business strategy.” I’m sure this is true, but there was nothing to talk about to help market the service. There was no especially relevant reason for people to want to care.

Even consumer-friendly topics need to be infused with relevancy. I serve on a board of a major regional theater and often remind the staff that it needs to give people a relevant reason to see a play, other than fine acting, great directing, lots of laughs, and the fact that it’s a classic. Why is a particular play so relevant that you really must see it?

Here’s an e-mail message showing the progression from merely explaining a play to finding relevant ways to talk about it.

- > -----Original Message-----
- > Hamlet by William Shakespeare directed by  
Brian McEleney In
- > January/February in the Chace Theater
- >
- > Shakespeare’s masterpiece, probably the  
most performed play in the
- > world, has never been seen at Trinity—hard  
to believe! Everyone,
- > beginners to veterans, should see this play.
- > **What is it about?**
- > Hamlet is the prince of Denmark. His uncle  
poisons his father, marries
- > his mother, and takes the throne. Hamlet  
must decide how, and if, to
- > take revenge.
- > **Is it “traditional Shakespeare”?**

Our approach to Hamlet is traditional but never in tights and doublets—think of our *Othello*, *Henry IV*, and *Henry V*. In *Hamlet*, the costumes look like the 1930s, reminiscent of *Gosford Park* and *The Remains of the Day*.

- > The nontraditional thing here is that the role of Polonius will be
- > played as a woman, by company actress Janice Duclos. Polonius is the
- > parent of Ophelia and Laertes . . .
- “Neither a borrower nor a lender
- > be . . . to thine own self be true.”
- Trinity has a long history of
- > casting across gender, when one of our talented actors can bring
- > something exciting to the role.

The e-mail simply explained the production; there was no hook to why *now*. So I asked:

- > Why is *Hamlet*—or this production of it—especially relevant today? Why is it urgent for people to see it?

The communications director’s following reply gave me something to talk about:

- > Some thoughts from the director—Brian sees Hamlet as an arrogant, careless
- > rich kid. The play will be set in the 1930s showing a glamorous, corrupt world with distinct class separation.

Class separation and the struggles of arrogant rich kids—now, that’s more relevant and conversation worthy. It also helped make this production of *Hamlet* meaningful to audiences.

Here’s another example of adding relevancy. Consider that you are marketing a commodity like milk and trying to get more adults to drink it. How do you make it more relevant? The “Got Milk” people focused on how consuming more dairy helps you lose weight. According to the [www.got-milk.com](http://www.got-milk.com) Web site: “A growing body of research shows that when cutting calories to lose weight, including three servings of milk, cheese, or yogurt each day helps people burn more fat and lose more weight than just cutting calories alone.”<sup>12</sup> By making milk relevant to the people interested in losing weight, The Got-Milk organization found new ways to talk about milk.

Procter & Gamble originally thought that its Febreze brand, which removes odors from fabrics, would be most relevant to people who wanted to remove smoke from their clothes. But by asking, “Who is this relevant to?” the marketers found that the brand was meaningful to people who wanted to remove odors from other places—smelly gym bags, teenagers’ closets, and the backseats of cars. After P&G changed the way it promoted Febreze—from odor remover to fabric refresher—the business grew by about 50 percent over the past three years.<sup>13</sup> People other than smokers want to know how to make things smell good.

One note about relevancy: Sometimes we become too attached to the products and services we’re marketing. So we need to always step back from time to time and understand our customers’ point of view—what is relevant *to them*? (Chapter 7 provides seven ways to do this.) The more people see the relevancy connection, the greater the likelihood that they will find the conversation meaningful.

**Love this: Emotion is the  
superhighway to meaning**

Our brains are hardwired to respond to emotions and feelings. Even more important, emotions strongly influence whether a person will believe or take action.

Impassioned pleas not to drink and drive from a mother whose child has died in a drunk-driving accident are more compelling than reading a list of facts about drunk driving. An executive who exudes passion will more easily get people to listen, understand, and follow.

“CEOs shouldn’t be afraid to talk to their people in an emotional way, about what they really feel and how they really think,” former Southwest Airlines CEO Herb Kelleher once remarked.

Interestingly, however, emotion is often considered something you don’t do in business. Successful businesspeople—so goes the theory—are polished, articulate, crisp, and emotionless. It is all right to use emotion in advertisements and human resources training programs, but when you come to work, kindly check your emotions at the door.

But—big surprise—that business assumption is wrong. No emotion—too little passion—stunts communications; it bores rather than engages. Even worse, people may misinterpret sterile communications, thinking that management just doesn’t care.

Emotion isn’t to be feared. Consider the emotive styles of Kelleher and former CEO of General Electric Jack Welch, who created more shareholder wealth than any other CEO. Aside from achieving extraordinary financial returns, these executives exuded passion and peppered their conversations with “love,” the word that most executives avoid like the plague.

“A company is stronger if it’s bound more by love than fear,”

Kelleher said.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the airline's tag line for many years was, "The airline that love built."

Jack Welch, who also liberally uses the L word in conversations, believes that passion is a crucial trait for success in business. He has often said that passion is the first quality in an "A" player. "By passion, I mean a heartfelt, deep and authentic excitement about work. People with passion care—really care in their bones—about colleagues, employees, and friends winning. They love to learn and grow."<sup>15</sup>

Our brains tune into emotion to figure out whether we should pay attention, whether someone believes what he or she is saying, and whether we should trust people or disregard them. This is why talking about what you believe in is so important. If you are not connected emotionally with what you are talking about, people will disconnect. If you don't care about the idea, neither will they. Screenwriting coach Robert McKee explained to *Harvard Business Review's* Bronwyn Fryer: "A big part of a CEO's job is to motivate people to reach certain goals. The first [way to do that] is by using conventional rhetoric, which is what most executives are trained in. . . . [A] much more powerful way . . . is by uniting an idea with an emotion."<sup>16</sup>

This is why using points of view to engage people in conversations can be so effective. Points of view are not just rational facts, but ideas laden with emotional beliefs. In other words, the point of view in and of itself provokes an emotionally charged conversation.

Beyond ideas and words, we humans also make judgments based on *how* people talk. We innately tune into the emotions and attitudes of the person when listening. We often make snap judgments without consciously factoring in the words being spoken. To show the effect of these social signals, researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have studied people's

reactions during conversations. Using a social perception machine that measures social signals in conversations—but not the words themselves—MIT researchers can predict, after just a few minutes of listening and with almost 90 percent accuracy, outcomes such as these:

- \* Who would exchange business cards at a meeting
- \* Which couples would exchange phone numbers at a bar
- \* Who would come out ahead in a negotiation
- \* Subjective judgments, including whether a person felt a negotiation was honest and fair, or a conversation interesting

“What is surprising is that the largely subconscious social signaling that occurs at the start of the interaction appears to be more predictive than either the contextual facts (attractiveness and experience) or the linguistic structure (strategy chosen, arguments used) and so on,” says Professor Alex (Sandy) Pentland, who directs the Human Dynamics research group at the MIT Media Lab.<sup>17</sup> “Moreover, the decisions we examined are among the most important in life: finding a mate, getting a job, negotiating a salary, and finding a place in a social network. These are activities for which humans prepare intellectually and strategically for decades.”

In other words, we often make snap decisions based just on the tone and emotion in someone’s voice. Even if someone has thoroughly prepared reasoned and logical arguments, we make judgments based more on the social signals during the conversation than on the content of the words. Therefore, if a CEO is talking with a group of employees or customers and he or she really isn’t interested in the conversation, the listeners will know it. People can sniff out insincerity or lack of interest in minutes, according to the MIT research.

Consider, for instance, what happened when the CEO of a multibillion dollar conglomerate spoke to his company's annual "Communications Council" meeting, where the communications directors of various subsidiaries come together for a few days to talk about communications issues, how to improve corporate-wide processes, and then listen to an outside expert or two.

To open the meeting the CEO called in on speakerphone. "Gee," we thought, "this guy really must consider communications important to the business. He's running a multibillion-dollar corporation but he's making time for his communications managers. What a great thing for these people to have an enlightened CEO."

Then he started talking, saying all the right words, but in a rather pat and glib style. Within two minutes, we knew his commitment to communications was lip service. "Communicate more" was just an item on his to-do list. He probably understood, intellectually, why managers need to communicate more clearly and openly with employees. However, his lack of emotion and the disingenuousness tone in his voice gave him away.

After his fifteen-minute chat, no one in the room was particularly fired up or motivated to talk about his remarks. They didn't believe what he said because he didn't believe it. Rather than motivating these people and building his leadership credibility, he sent another message: "What you communications folks are doing isn't all that important to me."

In fact, the only time that he got somewhat fired up during his scripted fireside chat was when he warned about the need to be especially cautious in communicating. "With Sarbanes Oxley and SEC rules about information disclosure, we need to be especially careful about what we disclose and to whom," he stressed. "This is why we need to be so careful about commu-

nicating. We—particularly me—could go to jail if we make a mistake.”<sup>18</sup>

If people aren’t interested in what they’re talking about, how are they going to talk to customers, analysts, media, and employees in any meaningful way? They’re not. Faking it, as the social signaling experts have shown, rarely works. If we talk about something we don’t believe in, people ignore us and maybe even lose confidence in us. Faked emotion contributes as much to meaning making as genuine emotion and not in a positive way. The passion and conviction of our beliefs triggers emotion, the most potent meaning-making ingredient.

**Meaning-making lessons for the five-year-old mind in all of us**

One last note about meaning making is that adults make meaning with their five-year-old minds, and this has some practical implications to marketing practices.

Everything we know wasn’t learned in kindergarten, but how we learn most things is remarkably similar to how five-year-olds learn. This is true whether you’re a forty-nine-year-old PhD or a twenty-year-old assembly-line worker.

“I stand by my major claim that the mind of the five-year-old persists in most of us, in most of our daily activities, with only the disciplinary expert escaping fully from its powerful clutches in certain areas of expertise,” says Howard Gardner, education professor at Harvard University and author of *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*.<sup>19</sup>

In studying leaders, Gardner found that, as a rule, experts—scientists, artists, or accountants—who lead others in their specialized field lead directly through their work. They can go

deep into their subject matter area because their audiences share the same deep specialization.

But people who lead, or market to, a more heterogeneous group lead through communication, particularly through stories and conversations. This type of leadership involves tapping into the five-year-old that lives in each of us. And that five-year-old learns largely through conversations.

As marketers we often forget that many audiences are not specialists, but more heterogeneous. Examples of this include marketing drugs to consumers rather than physicians, accounting software to small business owners instead of accountants, John Deere tractors to suburbanites versus experienced farmers, or expensive enterprise software to senior executives instead of IT specialists.

Here's a look at how a five-year-old learns and what that means to marketing practices:

- \* Likes to argue and reason; uses words like "because": *Explain why and why not.*
- \* Uses five to eight words in a sentence: *Keep it brief; use short sentences.*
- \* Is interested in cause and effect: *Explain, "if we do this, then this is what will happen. If we don't do this, then here are the likely consequences."*
- \* Understands and uses comparative terms: *Analogies help understanding.*
- \* Enjoys creating and telling stories: *Storytelling remains one of the best ways to make meaning and help people remember, understand, and repeat ideas.*
- \* Uses swear words to get attention: *Disruptive ideas and language get attention.*

- \* Likes to try new things: *People get bored and like new ideas and experiences.*
- \* Likes simple rules: *Don't make things too complicated or impose too many new "musts."*
- \* Has a good sense of humor: *Keep a perspective; lighten up.*

In explaining how he picks successful children's books like *Harry Potter*, Barry Cunningham, publisher of Chicken House Children's Books, says that he taps into the child within him, which might be good advice for marketers as they seek to become meaning makers. "If you carry the child within you, that's what works. You need a real ability to feel the hope, wonder, burning sense of injustice, fear, or rage of childhood—an unfettered mind that still dreams, that goes with the truth of a story."<sup>20</sup>

Marketing needs more meaning, because as people try to digest more information and more choices, they want help in sorting it all out so that they can make a decision. They want to know what is relevant within their frame of reference, and they want genuine advice. This is why so many of us turn to our peers for help. It's also why a marketing goal is to make our companies sources that customers want to turn to for help. By helping customers better understand and make meaning, our companies become trusted sources, not just promoters to whom customers may or may not listen.

One of the best ways to reach out to customers and begin the meaning-making process is to have a point of view that provokes discussion around ideas that are relevant to customers, fit within their frame of context, and move them emotionally. Chapter 3 explains points of view and shows how three very different organizations use them in conversational marketing programs.