



The Reciprocity Advantage

A New Way to Partner for Innovation and Growth

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

A powerful new kind of competitive advantage is now possible thanks to technological and social disruptions that are already occurring. These disruptions revolutionize how companies can partner to create new growth.

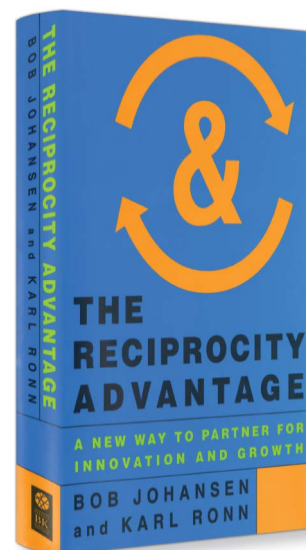
The Reciprocity Advantage shares a model for creating that growth: define your right-of-way (the underutilized resources you already own that you can share with others), partner to do what you can't do alone, experiment to learn and scale the new business at low risk.

“Reciprocity” and “advantage” are words that are not normally seen together, but reciprocity — giving now to get later — will become a normal part of winning in the future. Provocative and pragmatic, leading 10-year forecaster Bob Johansen and experienced business developer Karl Ronn describe how to lean in to disruptions to create new growth for your business. They show you how to leverage new forces like digital natives and cloud-served supercomputing into massively scalable, profitable, incremental growth for your business.

Distilled from hands-on work, *The Reciprocity Advantage* will get you started on creating your own reciprocity advantage.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The future forces that will disrupt your business.
- A three-step process for uncovering your right-of-way.
- Why reciprocity will be key to business growth in the future.
- How to scale a new business at low risk.



by Bob Johansen and
Karl Ronn

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE RECIPROCITY ADVANTAGE

by Bob Johansen and Karl Ronn

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Introduction: The New Way to Grow a Business

Reciprocity lives in the space between transactions (buying and selling) and philanthropy (giving for good causes). Advantage lives in a world where businesses seek a superior position that leads to profit and growth. Advantage means achieving a winning position, but it doesn't necessarily mean that others must lose in order for you to win.

Reciprocity advantage will be a new type of competitive advantage.

- It will be grounded in a right-of-way that you already own.
- It will require that you give away some of your assets in intelligent ways now in order to make money and grow your business over time.
- It can happen only when a company is able to *both* practice reciprocity and make money.
- It must be designed to be massively scalable.

Society is just entering a unique period when doing good and doing well will have to be combined in ways that have never before been imagined. A reciprocity advantage is a chance to do good while also doing very well. ●

PART I: RECIPROCITY ON A MASSIVE SCALE

Reciprocity Right-of-Way

Right-of-way is an unrealized opportunity space where you can create a new large-scale practice of exchanging

with others for mutual benefit. Right-of-way is the space within which you can create your reciprocity advantage. Indeed, a reciprocity advantage becomes possible only within your right-of-way.

The Historic Right-of-Way Story

The transcontinental railroad was cutting-edge technology for its day when finished in 1869. Suddenly it became possible to travel or send goods across the continent in what, at the time, was amazing speed. The railroad developed into the major growth industry of the late 19th century. But commuter trains, planes, trucks and cars have now replaced the bulk of the transportation — and disrupted the trains business.

As much as the railroad companies missed the transition from trains to modes of transportation that did not require rails, the big miss was not foreseeing the potential that arose from thinking differently about the land that was under and above the rails. The land under the tracks is the classic right-of-way. But above those tracks, invisible in plain view, was a right-of-way that railroads owned but completely missed: communications.

The railroads already had the land underneath their trains when the telegraph developers approached them and wanted to string wires above the tracks. To the railroads, this new telegraph technology allowed them to know where all their trains were, for free.

It was a windfall to the railroads at the time, but years later we all now realize that the railroads missed claiming most of the benefits from their own right-of-way. The railroads completely missed the communications revolution — which turned out to be even more important than railroads.



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Uncovering your own right-of-way involves understanding what the railroads never did learn, that every company is really in three businesses.

- **Product:** Railroads that move people and goods.
- **Service:** Transportation, any way that moves people or goods en masse.
- **Experience:** Communications, any way to get the benefit of travel without physical movement. (The railroads' missed reciprocity advantage.)

Each business has the potential to create massively scalable reciprocity if it can uncover its right-of-way for complementary growth. Land for the railroads was a physical right-of-way, embodied in the air over the tracks. But the right-of-way can include products, services and experiences.

Uncovering your right-of-way is the first step to creating a reciprocity advantage. Then you look for the partner who can help you do what you cannot do alone. ●

Partnering to Do What You Can't Do Alone

Reaching out to others — potential partners and potential customers — will become increasingly possible and increasingly necessary. Partnerships are basic to creating your reciprocity advantage, and partnerships will be possible on a scale never before imaginable.

New Ways to Partner on a Global Scale

Connectivity has grown dramatically, and potential partners can come from anywhere. Innovation in the cloud will focus on value, not just price. The greatest value and the largest margins will come from services and experiences that link to products, not just on selling for the lowest price. Price-based competition will be cutthroat and unattractive. Value-based partnerships will be the key to growth, scalability and profitability. Larger social value, beyond just transactional value, will become possible on a much grander scale.

What if the railroads had viewed the telegraph companies as potential partners to explore the emerging communications space, instead of seeing their proposal as a narrow business transaction?

As Internet connectivity expands, new potential partners become available who were simply not reachable before. The best partners will demonstrate their worth by looking out for one another.

Asymmetrical partnering, where one partner is much larger than the other, will become increasingly possible

because anyone can link to anyone else through the cloud. Non-obvious partners will become more common. Everyone will need to learn how to fish for partners efficiently and effectively. It will be easier to find partners, however, within established networks of trust.

What would your company love to do but could not do without a good partner that is unlike you? What does your right-of-way give you permission to do with others but that you are not yet doing and could not do alone? You will have to experiment to learn how to answer these questions and to create your reciprocity advantage. ●

Experimenting to Learn: How to Make Money in New Ways

In their current business, most companies already do prototyping. They make models of the product or service and share it with potential customers and then take the best versions to management to gain alignment to the new direction. The range of prototypes is bound by the limits of the existing business. This type of testing is done to prove you are right before going to market.

The market for your reciprocity advantage business probably doesn't exist yet. Therefore, you will need to prototype more broadly than you ever have before. To learn about the future, you will need to be able to produce thousands of prototypes rapidly and at low cost. This skill is called *design thinking*. Common language in the design community is to refer to these efforts as *low resolution prototypes*.

You will have to experiment to learn and do so with your partners in order to find your reciprocity advantage. Hundreds or thousands of low-resolution prototypes are needed to find the reciprocity advantage that will add onto your core business in complimentary ways without cannibalizing it.

Rapid prototyping is the ability to create quick, early versions of innovations, with the expectation that later success will require early failure. In Silicon Valley, if you haven't failed, you are perceived as not having taken enough risks. The future will be created with smart, fast, cheap experiments in the real world. ●

Amplifying to Create Scale

A reciprocity advantage happens only when people learn new ways to make money through practicing reci-

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procity. It's not a reciprocity advantage until you scale it. Once you find your reciprocity advantage, you must let it propagate as fast as it can. Competitive advantage is often fleeting. Reciprocity advantages can be enduring. The good news is that propagation will become much easier.

New Tools and Practices for Scaling

The future tools for propagation and scaling will become much more lightweight and practical, in several senses. The digital technologies that enable scaling are literally lighter than the massive industrial technologies that they are replacing. Beyond this, organizations themselves have become more lightweight because now a few people can produce economic value that in previous years would have taken an organization of hundreds to manage.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of this shift is 3D printing. Imagine going to a website to browse an online catalog. You choose a toy that looks like the perfect present for a child's upcoming birthday. At the end of the transaction, however, you do not select the "ship" option. Instead, you hit a button that says "print" and watch as the gift is mechanically fabricated before your eyes.

Increasingly, design and distribution can live in the cloud, with local manufacturing in the form of 3D printing. For some products, this will be a game-changer. 3D printing will disrupt Home Depot, Lowes and parts stores of all kinds. While the technology is in its early stages, the potential for streamlining the scaling process is staggering. 3D printing will accelerate the move to mass customization and scaling, where production is done on a large scale, and yet products have a personal or customized feel.

With the emergence of the Internet, online software and services have become increasingly important. Indeed, we are now at an inversion point. As centralized systems enter their twilight and mobile platforms reach their zenith, the cloud is the place to look for future innovations in computation. The cloud will be the amplifier for propagation — not just innovation.

Shoppers, too, will have the power of supercomputing driving their purchasing decisions. They will have access to as much or as little information as they desire, and neither manufacturers nor retailers will be able to control the flow of this information, even in the buying environment. However, they could offer trusted filtering options. Indeed, competition for trusted filters at the point of purchase will be fierce. Trust will fuel scale. Reciprocity will be increasingly scalable. ●

PART II: FUTURE FORCES THAT WILL DEMAND RECIPROCITY

One of the biggest challenges in creating new businesses is designing for a changing world. Four future forces will shape and disrupt your ability to uncover your right-of-way, to find the best partners, to develop a give-to-learn strategy and to scale your business for greater impact: The digital natives, socialstructuring, gameful engagement and cloud-served supercomputing will disrupt old economic models and create opportunities for new ones.

How the Digital Natives Will Disrupt Rights-of-Way

In 10 years, everyone on the planet 28 years or younger — rich or poor — will be a digital native, someone who grew up in the interconnected world of early-stage social media, vivid video gaming interfaces and early-stage cloud-served supercomputing. The digital natives will demand new rights-of-way in physical and virtual space. They also will speak or text or videotape their own languages, tell their own stories and embody a wild mix of cultures — all amplified through the cloud on a global scale.

Kids becoming adults in the next 10 years will have a sense that they can connect personally with anyone on the planet — and they will be correct. This sense of global connectedness could spawn a new era of global empathy, although it is too early to tell. What is apparent is that growing up in a digitally enhanced world will be different — *very* different — for better *and* for worse.

Language Will Change as the Digital Natives Become Adults

As we think 10 years ahead about reciprocity advantage, consider the importance of language and how the digital natives write, think and communicate. Careful framing of the future with just the right words will be very important to reach them. If you use the right words and concepts, digital natives will draw you toward the kind future you want to create. If you don't use the right words, your failure to communicate will constrain you. For example, instead of calling them consumers, the best companies are already calling them what they should have been called all along: people.

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Rights-of-way will be uncovered, cultivated, nurtured and grown through cloud-amplified networks of trust. Instead of calling it *marketing*, *advertising* or *commercials*, the best companies are already calling it what they should have been calling it all along: engagement. The digital natives will distrust traditional marketing and not want to be marketed to; they will want to be engaged with. The younger you are, the more you already expect this kind of engagement.

The Digital Natives Will Be Attracted by IP-Free Practices

What will right-of-way mean in a world where it is becoming increasingly difficult to own intellectual property (IP)? The space where you are trusted may well be a space you cannot own.

The direction for intellectual property over the next 10 years will go from closed to more open, but it will be a very messy process along the way. In many cases, it will be much more attractive to think of IP as currency that must be exchanged to derive value rather than property that must be protected.

In many cases, it will be smarter to uncover your right-of-way and give away small amounts of access to these assets in order to learn how to make money in new ways. This is the essence of the reciprocity advantage and why it will be the wave of the future in a world led by digital natives. ●

How Socialstructuring Will Disrupt Partnering

Socialstructuring is a term invented by author Marina Gorbis, and it refers to a process that includes microcontributions, nonmonetary rewards, technology-enabled sociality, community organizers, not managers, and large network participation. Socialstructuring will mean radically new ways of partnering. Expect a big shift in the diversity of potential partners — and the diversity of ways in which the partners will be able to work together.

In a socialstructured world, partners can come from anywhere, and they can be any size. In particular, we expect more partnerships involving very large and very small players because it will become much easier to find potential partners and work together. Collaboration, teaming and partnerships will become possible on a scale that could never before have been imagined.

Traditionally, corporations and jobs have evolved out of necessity and have been effective ways of organizing work.

But it is becoming possible to break tasks down much more precisely than before, and new ways of structuring work are developing rapidly. Innovation can be broken down into tasks and microtasks. The leadership challenge will be one of coordination and clarity. Leaders in these kinds of socialstructured organizations will have to be very clear where they are going but very flexible about how they get there. All partners will have to be committed. And the terms of engagement will need to be both flexible and robust.

Diasporas as Partners

In today's world, think of a diaspora as a network of trust. Modern diasporas are social networks with shared values that are amplified through the social networks and — increasingly — social media. People have always lived in the context of social networks. Now these networks are more varied, more visible and more electronically connected than in the past.

Partnering with members of diasporas is possible but tricky. Diasporas will amplify commercial innovation, scale and disruption — *if* their members become committed to a product or service. Companies will need to grow relationships based on trust in order to engage with diasporas.

The reason innovation happens faster within diasporas is because of shared values and great trust. Within diasporas, brand trust building happens quickly. If a brand or a company is perceived to be consistent with a diaspora's values, then it will have permission to experiment with new products and services, as long as it stays within the envelope of trust that has been granted. Networks of trust will shape how rights-of-way are perceived and accepted. ●

How Gameful Engagement Will Disrupt Experimenting to Learn

Think ahead 10 years — how will corporations experiment to learn about the business they want to create? In other words, how will you prototype your new business? The answer: you will game it.

In order to learn how to make money in new ways, you will need to get others gamefully engaged with your idea. How might you get people engaged? You make it fun. You make it meaningful. You lower risks by simulating rather than playing for real right away.

We expect that the word *game* will become more acceptable within business cultures, but it may take time. The key element is first-person immersive experiences rather than the usual third-person learning associated

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with lectures or training programs. Gameful engagement emphasizes the playful element but also the necessity for first-person engagement.

The next decade will be boiling with emotionally enhanced attention that will allow companies — indeed require companies — to rethink how they experiment to learn and ultimately how they do marketing, advertising and commercials. Corporations will need to engage in playful and authentic ways. Commercials and advertising as we know them will cease to exist and will be replaced with exchanges that are more personalized, playful and engaging. What corporations tell people will become less important than what people tell each other about corporations and their products.

Corporations will need to learn about new business opportunities by using game-like approaches to try them out in low-risk ways. They will need to engage with their customers — especially the digital natives — not just market to them. They will need to learn how to experiment to learn, in a spirit of gameful engagement. ●

How Cloud-Served Supercomputing Will Disrupt the Practice of Scaling

Like so many other emerging technologies in the past, the cloud has been oversold and —so far — has underdelivered. That, however, is about to change. The cloud is not just about outsourcing information technology functions and providing storage. Soon the cloud will function like a supercomputer, providing a virtual overlay on the physical world to allow us to do things we've never done before. This cloud-served supercomputer will allow us to scale and propagate in ways we have never before imagined.

Cloud-served supercomputing will be characterized by dramatically increased global connectivity, with parallel processing power that will be available to a much larger portion of the world's population. Expect powerful amplification of almost everything, with public demands for transparency and grating uncertainty about privacy. The cloud will amplify reciprocity *and* it will introduce new risks of criminal hacking.

Cloud-served supercomputing will be characterized by

- global and increasingly open access;
- multimedia and multilingual capabilities;
- increasingly mobile access;
- links to sensors that will be cheap, ubiquitous and often connected (some of which will be in our bodies);

- filters of the physical world, using a range of criteria and offered by a wild mix of players;
- flexibility in ways that we can only imagine now;
- lower costs for computing and communications.

From a consumer products standpoint, we are within a decade of cloud-based coordination that could, for example, facilitate self-organizing supply chains or bring insights from the most sophisticated business analytics engines to the local street-corner market in Delhi. Amplified by the cloud, people with initiative and energy to innovate can bring themselves up to speed — using the most powerful business tools in existence — no matter where they happen to live.

The best way to think about the cloud will be as a very large and sometimes unpredictable amplifier. Whatever you do, for good or for evil, will be amplified by the cloud. Your reciprocity advantage will be empowered and amplified through the cloud. ●

PART III: HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR OWN RECIPROCITY ADVANTAGE

The hardest part of thinking about the future is figuring out what to do next — given the external future forces. While not completely predictable, the reality is that to innovate you must choose where you want to go but then be flexible about how to get there.

How to Uncover Your Right-of-Way

Finding your right-of-way will require a deep understanding of your business — beyond day-to-day operations. Rethinking your business will open your management team's eyes to new possibilities. The first stage has three parts:

Right-of-Way Step 1: Agree on Your Core Business. What industry are you in? What is responsible for two-thirds of your total company's profits or sales? Typically one or two product lines and one or two channels or geographies are your core. The core is where you will find your right-of-way for extending into new businesses. Keep making your core business better and better.

Right-of-Way Step 2: Reinvent Your Business as a Service. If the first business is drilling holes, the second business is selling anything that makes a hole — even if it requires no drill. We refer to the second industry as a service because it involves hiring you to do the same job you do today but doesn't necessarily use your assets. Once you

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have defined your core industry, step back and ask, “What do people hire us to do?” Forget how you do what you do. Rather, focus on the end result, or the benefit. See the hole — not the drill.

It is not optional to get into these service businesses. If there is a business that does what you do a great deal faster or more cheaply, it will eventually be the dominant way of doing business. Rather, you need to make multiple investments in emerging industries that do what you do in radically different ways.

Right-of-Way Step 3: Redefine Your Business as an Experience. Once you have defined your core business and your service industry, ask yourself, “If my business were an experience, what industry would I be in?” Only rarely does a new medium replace an old one. Rather, the new medium tends to disrupt the way we use existing media — and those media blend with each other. Kodak sold cheap cameras at Disneyland because the quality of the picture from your expensive Nikon camera was irrelevant if you forgot to bring it. The goal of new-experience businesses is to augment the sales by getting people to pay for things they are not currently buying.

Once you’ve uncovered your underutilized right-of-way, the next step will be searching for a partner that will enable you to accomplish what you cannot do alone. ●

How to Find the Best Partners for You

Partnerships are hard. Don’t form one unless you have to do so in order to do what you want to do. To find and grow your reciprocity advantage, you have to find a partner with whom you can create a new business — a business that you could not create alone.

Partnerships are very different from transactional relationships. If you work for a large corporation, chances are that your company was formed as a partnership. More often than not, it was two people — Hewlett and Packard, Procter and Gamble. These kinds of deep partnerships are not just transactions. They brought together people with complementary skills to create a new business. Because each partner brought specific proficiencies to the relationship, neither one could be easily substituted.

If you are to discover your reciprocity advantage and succeed in creating new reciprocity-based companies, you will bring one half of the equation to your new business. Your first challenge, however, is to understand that you aren’t just looking for another person or corporation

who can give you something — you need to find your missing half.

What Right-of-Way Should You Share?

You must know your right-of-way *before* you seek a partner because that will help you understand what kind of partner you need. A core question to ask yourself is this: “If I share my right-of-way away for free, will it hurt my existing business?”

The concept of free is a hard one for many financial managers to grasp. Most times the answer to the question above is that it would hurt your business to share things you own. The reciprocity advantage involves sharing assets in intelligent ways *now* that will result in new growth over time. ●

How to Learn by Experimenting with Many Open Iterations

When designing experiments, big dreams matter. The experiments need to be fast and cheap, but the prize needs to be worth your trouble.

You must embrace creating new businesses in order to find your reciprocity advantage. But a sticking point for taking action is the belief that new businesses are very risky. New businesses do have a high failure rate, but that doesn’t mean they are risky. The problem is that companies treat new business like current business. When you move away from the core, you need to behave differently. New strategies are required for managing risk so the pain of failure is reduced. Starting new businesses requires becoming a great risk manager.

Most startups fail because they can afford to make only a few bets before they run out of cash. But big companies can afford to make thousands of bets to learn their way to success. Yet, big companies usually don’t succeed either. Why? Many big companies place too much money on each bet. They need to find ways to construct and manage incredibly small bets.

Writing Options on Your Future

The tool you need for managing high risk is an option. An option is a specific right to buy something of value at a predetermined price at a particular time in the future for a specific cost today. Options are placed to make your money go further when there are larger unknowns. The key options concepts include 1) You pay a very small percentage of the cost. So, you can invest in many possible projects. 2) Options expire. They don’t have a life of their

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own, unlike stale development projects that never seem to die. 3) The risk is limited to the initial investment. Every 60 days you can walk away or reinvest.

The common error is to create a big team and spend a million dollars and one year on one idea. An options approach takes that budget and cuts it into small chunks. As with the uncertain stock market, many small bets to find the winner are better than one single investment. The solution to starting new reciprocity businesses is using options thinking and rapid prototyping. Make to learn, not make to sell. ●

How to Scale Your Reciprocity Advantage

Scalable reciprocity will require designing for scalability from the beginning. Reciprocity is good, but massively scalable reciprocity is growth that reshapes industries.

You will know your reciprocity advantage is ready to scale when your service or product meets three criteria — it's desirable, viable and ownable. Failing to meet all three criteria will severely limit or even doom your reciprocity advantage.

Start with something that has two out of the three criteria: you know people desire it, and you know the viable business model — you just need to make it ownable. Two out of three is easy. When you have all three, you will be ready to scale rapidly.

When you know your product is desirable, you know you have a viable financial model, and you know how to sustain the business long enough to get a return, you have created a low-risk, high-potential business. When that happens, scale it!

The main reason new businesses fail is that they scale before having all the needed answers. A second reason is that they fail to go all in when they have a clear path to success. When your reciprocity advantage meets all three criteria, you have a winning idea. Speed is on your side. Run!

Knowing When to Quit

Not everything will work. You will need agility to read and react quickly to whatever happens. How do you know if it is time to go home? Only two things correlate with success for a disruptive new business idea: passion and keeping commitments. If after trying something for a period of time, you or your team loses passion for it, stop doing it. An iterative, team-led milestone process is the

best way to get a breakthrough. Be disciplined. Luck is part of what it will take to be successful, but discipline will help you be lucky more often. ●

When the Future Is Reciprocity

Interestingly, most of the world religions teach the value of giving, but now neuroscience and the psychology of happiness are teaching us the same principals — backed up by data. A new appreciation for the value of giving will fuel new models for reciprocity advantage.

There are many things you can do right now that will make the future of reciprocity both possible and practical. Uncover your reciprocity right-of-way. Partner to do what you can't do alone. Experiment to learn. Amplify to create scale. Create your own reciprocity advantage.

This model will work at the corporate level, but you can also use it on yourself to create your own personal reciprocity advantage.

The world of transactions — buying and selling stuff — will continue to exist, but it will become increasingly difficult to make money in this space alone. The core of any business will continue to be removing unnecessary costs and meeting the needs of existing customers. But companies will need new avenues of growth. To drive growth, you will need to focus on increasing value for your customers, value that will grow overall market size. Master your transactional business, but grow it by creating your own reciprocity advantage.

Your reciprocity advantage will create new opportunities for high-margin businesses that can complement your core business.

All businesses — and all individuals — have an opportunity to find a reciprocity advantage. Reciprocity and advantage, long thought of separately, will be increasingly synergistic. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The Reciprocity Advantage* you'll also like:

1. ***Get There Early* by Bob Johansen.** Johansen and the Institute for the Future provide their insights into the next decade and show readers how they, too, can begin to navigate the road to the future.
2. ***Finding Allies, Building Alliances* by Michael Leavitt, Rich McKeown.** The authors present a guide for anyone tasked with fostering and maintaining an effective, productive and collaborative venture.
3. ***The Wide Lens* by Ron Adner.** Adner shows that many companies fail because they focus too intensely on their own innovations and then neglect the innovation ecosystems on which their success depends.