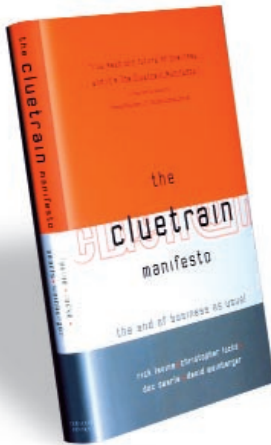


SOUNDVIEW Executive Book Summaries®



By Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls and David Weinberger

The End of Business as Usual

THE CLUETRAIN MANIFESTO

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

What if the real attraction of the Internet is not its cutting-edge bells and whistles, its graphic interface or any of the advanced technology that underlies its pipes and wires? What if, instead, the Web marketplace is not really based on click-throughs, cookies and credit cards, but on conversations between human beings, millions of them, all linked through a network that was created by many and is controlled by no one?

This is the central question of *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, a revolutionary new way of looking at working that makes hash of corporate assumptions about the nature of online business and challenges executives from Global 1000 companies to sign on or risk missing the boat.

Originally posted on a Web site (www.cluetrain.com), the provocative, sometimes irreverent Manifesto laid out 95 Theses that have caused quite a stir among the command-and-control operatives running Corporate America's response to e-business. Among the flashpoints of conversation are:

- ✓ How the Net connects people to each other, allowing them to have conversations and to comment on things in a forum that joins a wealth of knowledge from different resources;
- ✓ How individuals inside and outside corporations have reclaimed their voices, and how they are using those voices to begin to build a new world;
- ✓ How customers and workers alike use each new method of Internet-based communication to subvert the efforts of corporations to write their stories for them;
- ✓ How the Web has subverted corporate reliance on hierarchy to create a new, "hyperlinked" way of conducting business;

If you only have time for one clue this year, this should be it. Turn the page and get with the revolution ...



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THE CLUETRAIN MANIFESTO

by Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls and David Weinberger

— THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

A Global Conversation Has Begun

A powerful global conversation has begun. The Internet has given people the means by which to discover and invent new ways to share relevant knowledge with blinding speed. Markets are getting smarter — smarter, in fact, than most companies. These markets are, in effect, conversations between members who communicate in language that is natural, open, honest and sometimes irreverent. They communicate in an unmistakably genuine voice — a human voice.

Corporations, on the other hand, still communicate in mission statements, marketing brochures and the modern busy signal known as the hold message. They cannot convince people they are human with lip service about “listening to customers.” They will only sound human when they empower real human beings to speak on their behalf. Those employees exist, but they are often muted by corporate firewalls that keep them in and smart markets out.

It’s going to cause real pain to align the two and extinguish those firewalls, but the result will be a new kind of conversation — the most exciting conversation business has ever engaged in. ■

Why We Long for Something Different

Humans are incredibly resilient — we know it’s all temporary, yet we still roll with the punches, regroup and pick up the pieces when things go wrong. We understand life is just like that; this simple understanding is the seed of a profound wisdom, and also of a profound hunger, a longing for something entirely different from the reality reinforced by everyday experience. We long for more connection between what we do for a living and what we genuinely care about. We long for a release from anonymity, to be part of a world that makes sense rather than accept the accidental alienation imposed by market forces too large to grasp, or even contemplate. These forces don’t like us to be human; they tell us we can fill the holes in our lives with cars, CDs and steak knives. More stuff. Our role is to consume.

It is the conflict between our deeply felt desires and the reality created by today’s market forces that made

the Internet so fascinating and popular in the early 90s. It was a place where people could talk to other people without constraint, censorship or (most significantly) advertising. It was ignored, a fact that allowed it to grow and prosper. The Net worked by different rules than the rules of business; market penetration was never discussed because there was no market. The Net grew like a weed between the cracks in the monolithic empire of traditional commerce.

How Times Have Changed

These days, though, everyone sees the Internet as a big deal, thanks to those weird IPOs and the overnight billionaires they’ve spawned. But most companies with Net dollar signs in their eyes still miss the “something special” dimension that sets the Net apart from any other medium; in an effort to find benchmarks, they view the Net as just an extension of preceding mass media, primarily television. They use the same cryptic jargon, the same rhetoric — brand, market share, demographics, etc. And it works. If nobody was getting rich off this stuff, you wouldn’t hear about it.

Even though corporations try to place it in familiar boxes, the Net still has a radicalizing effect. In spite of the banner ads and promotional hype — it still has that “something special” that sets it apart from every other medium. That something special is what the Manifesto calls “voice.” The Net connects people to each other, allowing them to have conversations and comment on things in a forum that joins a wealth of knowledge from different resources. Workers and markets speak the same language.

Companies need to be involved in these conversations; they can’t innovate or build consensus without

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Why We Long for Something Different

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involvement. But many are still stuck in traditional, conservative, fearful mindsets, creating virtual barriers between themselves and the people they hope to reach.

So what needs to be done? Easy: Burn down business-as-usual. Open the windows and turn up the volume. ■

How to Escape The Managed Age

We don't know what the Web is for, but we've adopted it faster than any technology since fire. We put it on magazine covers and spend billions of dollars on an infrastructure for it. We want it to be important with a desperation that can frighten us when we look at it coldly.

The fervid desire for the Web bespeaks a longing so intense that it can only be understood as spiritual. A longing indicates that something is missing in our lives; what is missing is the sound of the human voice. The spiritual lure of the Web is the promise of the return of the voice.

Why We Manage Everything

The longing for the Web occurs in the midst of a profoundly managed age. We manage our businesses, our households, our children, our ecological environment and anything else we can throw a net over. There are tremendous advantages to believing one lives in a managed world:

- **Risk avoidance.** Nothing unexpected happens if you manage your world.
- **Smoothness.** Everything works in a managed environment simply because broken things are an embarrassment.
- **Fairness.** Life used to be unfair; now you're guaranteed your three-score and ten, and if something goes wrong, the managed system will compensate you.
- **Discretionary attention.** You can decide what interests you in a managed environment; heck, you can even have hobbies.

In spite of what many people think, businesses cannot truly be managed. They can be run, but they exist in a greater world far beyond the control of executives and shareholders. In a managed environment, a competitor would never lower their prices, a key supplier's factory would never burn down and your best employees would never get better offers. These things happen in businesses with stunning regularity.

How to Hate Your Job

A managed environment requires behavior from us as employees that we accept as inevitable although, of course, it is really mandatory only because it is mandated. We call it "professionalism," a canon that includes (but is not limited to):

- **dressing like other professionals,**
- **telling carefully calibrated jokes,**
- **refraining from swearing or mentioning God or sex, and**
- **"managing" home life so that it doesn't interfere with your job.**

Indeed, just about every concession we make to work in a well-run, secure, successful, predictable managed environment has to do with giving up our voice — the strongest, most direct expression of who we are. Managed businesses have taken our voices, and we struggle against it by creating an ironic distance between our company and ourselves. It is only the force of our regret at having lived in this bargain that explains the power of our longing for the Web.

The Home Page as Voice

There are many ways to look at what draws us to the Web — access to information, connection to other people, entrance to communities. None of these are wrong perspectives, but they all refer back to the promise of voice and the authentic self.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the profusion of home pages on the Web. A home page is a place in which we can express who we are and let the world in, to post pictures of our pets and let everyone know how we think the next episode of "The X Files" will end. But they also provide so much more — a place in which we can be who we are, where we can present ourselves to others in a public environment. It is a place where we can express ourselves, where our voices can sound again.

The Web has also infected business in a similar fashion, doing away with old tools and processes. The memo is dead; long live e-mail. The corporate newsletter is dead; long live intranets. Bland, safe relationships with customers are dead; long live customer support reps who are as willing to get angry with their companies as the angry customer is.

We embrace the Web not knowing what it is, but hoping it will burn the org chart, if not the organization, down to the ground. Released from gray-flannel handcuffs, we can reclaim our voices, and when the thrill of hearing ourselves speak again wears off, we will begin to build a new world. That is what the Web is for. ■

The Web Allows Quicker, Sharper Conversations

Every Web page has a person behind it. The Web's low cost of entry to publishers, both small and large, and the amount of unfiltered chat/newsgroup/e-mail text finding its way into search engines guarantees our daily browsing experience has a very strong flavor of individual authorship. Our heightened awareness of distinct, individual voices engenders the urge to talk back, to engage, to converse, and we now have the technology, the tools, to cater to these urges. Chat, free e-mail, home pages — all reinforce our desire, our right, to enter into discourse with others, to share our voices.

Voice is how we can tell the difference between people, committees and bots. An e-mail written by one person bears the tool marks of their thought processes, whether it's employee-to-employee, customer-to-customer or employee-to-customer; in every case, the interaction is person-to-person.

The message here is not new and isn't particularly complex. People talk to each other. In open, straightforward conversations. Inside and outside organizations. The inside and outside conversations are connecting. We have no choice but to participate in them.

Technology Carries the Voice

If there is any newness in the message, it's in how Web technology has changed the balance of the conversational equation — it puts a sharper, more urgent point on the importance of the conversation. These dialogues are moving faster, touching more people, and bridging greater distances than ever before. The main conversational modalities that carry our voices are:

E-mail. Electronic mail is the wedge cracking open

Silence is Fatal

Online markets will talk about companies whether the companies like it or not — they can't stop customers from speaking up, and can't stop employees from talking to customers. Their only choice is to start encouraging and empowering employees to talk to customers and act on what they hear.

"Customer loyalty" is not a commodity a company owns. Where it exists at all (and these cases are rare), loyalty to a company is based on respect. That respect, in turn, is based on how the company has conducted itself in conversations with the market. If companies don't engage people inside and outside their organizations in conversation, someone else will.

You have one option: Start talking.

the rock of corporate communication; while most corporations scan e-mails for viruses and the like, the words that comprise the e-mail slip through corporate defenses like wraiths. People exchange mundane, day-to-day business messages, sure, but also ideas, kudos, complaints, jokes and other missives management might rather you didn't voice. The inexpedient comes with the expedient; we have no choice but to work with it.

E-mail is a medium that is informal, honest, yet open to misrepresentations if you choose words and phrases carelessly. In spite of this fact, most people don't find person-to-person e-mail daunting; indeed, the ease and directness of e-mail is forging new connections and conversations throughout virtually every business. Type-click-deliver.

Mailing Lists. Mailing lists, which allow you to send messages to a large number of people at once, can grow from small, focused forums to large, unwieldy free-for-alls. It takes time to wade through all the traffic on a busy list, sifting value from chaff, knowledge from data. The commitment required to understand the content and context of a list before you post it is part of the conversational ante required of this aspect of the Internet.

Newsgroups. Newsgroups are similar to mailing lists, except messages get collected on special computers on the Internet configured as "news servers." They can be moderated or unmoderated, just like mailing lists. They also record the conversational thread structure of their messages, unlike e-mail, so you can see who is talking to whom and why.

Every month, millions of conversations across the globe are enabled by newsgroups. Whereas e-mail conversations are typically between people who know one another, newsgroup exchanges are often between strangers. It is a medium that encourages discourse and can create a kind of community among participants. People write in their own voices because they want to talk, to help, to contribute to the dialogue. They listen to the voices of other participants and decide whom to trust; most of the time, you can come to pretty accurate conclusions about who's on the mark and who is full of hot air.

Chat. Chat gets a bad rap; Web canard says all chat sessions degenerate into conversations about sex within five minutes. That isn't so. Because it is immediate (taking place in real time), chat can enable conversation that feels more genuine, substantial and more human than any other Net channel.

One of the more interesting uses of a chat service has been to provide real-time customer support for Web sites without resorting to expensive telephone call centers. One excellent example is Liveperson.com, which

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The Web Allows Quicker, Sharper Conversations

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sells a service using a pop-up chat, client-connected to a 24-hour-per-day, seven-day-per-week call center to provide on-the-spot support to Web customers. Each support rep handles up to four chat sessions simultaneously, providing immediate, high-touch attention to customers without phone costs to the customer or the vendor.

Web Pages. Web pages let us look into other people's lives in an intimate way, allowing us to see people as they really are, close up. For example, a how-to article on software installation by Glenn Fleishmann includes a link to the author's personal home page, which told the story of how he fought Hodgkin's disease and won.

The fact that Web pages are conversations hasn't sunk in because they look like publications. But they are indeed conversations — expressions of individual voice looking for a response. Even with corporate Web pages, there is a very strong desire to have a human feel — to speak to the audience in some genuine way. This cries out for communication that is less formal, less professional, less anonymous, and more for the people doing the reading than the people doing the writing. ■

Markets: The Return of the Conversation

As we've seen so far, the Internet is about the human voice, about conversations. What does this mean to companies and organizations? In the following section of the summary, we'll look at the effect of the Internet on the structure and operations of businesses. We begin by looking at how the Internet is transforming the notion of markets and marketing.

The Importance of Talk

Markets are nothing more than conversations. All forms of media — from magazines to CNN — are forms of market conversations. If your company does not take part in the conversation — if you've been working in secret all this time — no one will ever know about you. You'll be ignored, missing in action, rather than involved and entrenched. Your only hope is to talk. Starting now.

First Things Last

The first markets were filled with people, not abstractions of statistical aggregates. Buyers and sellers looked each other in the eye, met and connected. In the twentieth century, the rise of mass communications media enhanced industry's ability to address larger and larger markets, with increasingly larger rewards, which had to

Linux: Slaying Microsoft with Conversation

These days, nearly a third of the world's Web servers are powered by Linux, the dark-horse challenger to Microsoft's software hegemony. Linux was created by Linus Torvalds, who distributed both the finished product and (more importantly) its source code freely over the Internet. Anyone with software engineering tools and technical chops can modify it, add to it and craft it into precisely the tool they need. And many have — thousands of undirected renegade hackers have turned Linux into a real threat to the world's largest, most powerful high-tech corporation. How did they do it?

By conversation. Indeed, Linux, like the Internet, is a powerful demonstration of market conversation at work, without the straitjacket of command-and-control management. It shows that whole markets can rise rapidly out of conversations that are independent of business, government, education and other institutions.

be protected. Layers of bureaucracy were built in markets — more hierarchy, more command and control. The product of all this mass marketing was the message, delivered in as many forms as there were media, and in as many different guises as there were marketers to invent them.

One problem: There's no demand for messages. The customer doesn't want to hear from business, thank you very much. The message that gets broadcast to you and the rest of the world has nothing to do with you in particular. That's the awful truth about marketing: It broadcasts messages to people who don't want to listen. Every advertisement, press release and stunt engineered by a marketing department goes out to a public that doesn't ask to hear it. The conversation of early markets has been replaced with silence.

The End of the Silence

The long silence — the industrial interruption of market conversation — is coming to an end. On the Internet, marketers are getting more connected and more powerfully vocal every day. The Internet is a place — a real place where people can go to learn, to talk to each other and to do business together. It's a bazaar where buyers and sellers meet and connect. It is a conversation, at last and again.

The Internet itself is an example of an industry built by pure conversation. No one controlled it; no one

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directed the effort. The people who incrementally built the Internet — literally, one bit at a time — participated solely out of enthusiasm, an enthusiasm driven by a shared and growing vision of what this strange thing they were building might ultimately become.

What would have happened had the task of building the Internet been sourced out to the leaders of the communications business, companies like Microsoft, AOL, Novell or AT&T? It never would have happened, certainly not as the Net exists now. Each of those companies would have looked for a way to control the Net and make it their property, if they had even taken the job to begin with. Microsoft was famously late to the Internet game in part because Bill Gates thought there was no money to be made. ■

New Messages for Marketing

If markets are conversations (they are) and there's no market for messages (there's not), what's marketing-as-usual to do? What happens to the top two ingredients in the typical marketing arsenal: PR and advertising?

Good question.

Public relations not only fails to comprehend the nature of stories; it also imagines that “positive” stories can be “created” with press releases, press conferences and other staged events. The best PR reps, however, recognize that they are actually the company's best conversationalists; their craft is to discern stories the market wants to hear and help journalists write stories that tell the truth. Some companies have even created sites that give journalists comprehensive, unfiltered information about the industry.

As for advertising, ads may still have a hypnotic, subliminal effect on us, but we now have the world's largest support group encouraging us to acknowledge there is a power greater than ourselves, and it's not some banner ad or a cola company jingle. It's the conversation that is the Web; no number of ads will undo the words of the market.

The Hyperlinked Organization

As we've just seen, the Internet has brought conversations back into the heart of marketing. The Internet has had an equally profound effect on the structure and process of organizations — how they are built and how they operate. In essence, the Internet is replacing the traditional hierarchical organizations with the “hyper-

linked” organization — that is, an organization in which everyone is connected to each other.

Easy Access

Without anyone asking for it, the Web has given the people inside an organization easy access to one another in a rich variety of ways:

- They can send e-mail to one person, a steady group, an entire sales force or the board of directors.
- They can post creative, informative pages that express their interests, correct the mistakes of released documentation or point to the industry analyst's report the company doesn't want anyone to read.
- They can find every piece of information about the company and its competitors.
- They can play backgammon online or blow up their colleagues in a ruthless game of Quake.

They can do these things and much more, not because of a management theory or a best-selling business book, but because the Web reaches everyone with a computer and a telephone line at their desk.

A gulf of expectations opens between those who are connected and those who think an office with a door is a sign of success. These expectations guide a company's perception — the company thinks it's doing one thing while accomplishing the direct opposite with its connected employees. Companies can no longer, for example, pump up morale-starved staffers with feel-good meetings and newsletters, because employees can communicate the truth with one another through e-mail. No longer is the organizational chart a map of who to go to to get things done; it is an expression of a power structure — a map to avoid.

Indeed, modern business has almost universally chosen to build hierarchies as an expression of togetherness. The top, however, is always narrower than the bottom. Power flows from top to bottom, and there are fewer and fewer people as you move up the food chain.

Hyperlinks, however, subvert hierarchy, challenging business assumptions by allowing people to piece things together in different ways, to form newer, flatter connections, thus doing away with the concept of hierarchies in business. Hyperlinks do this in two distinct and important ways:

- **Doing away with individualism.** Hierarchies are predicated on the individual as the fundamental unit of life. The Web, however, is not predicated on individuals; it's a web — it's about connections. Hyperlinks are the connections

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The Hyperlinked Organization

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made by real individuals based on what they care about and what they know, the paths that emerge because that's where their feet are walking, as opposed to the highways built according to a centralized plan. Hyperlinks have no symmetry, no plan — they're messy. They can disappear or multiply and nothing else has to change.

- **Bringing down the pyramid.** Business hierarchies are power structures only because they are fundamentally based on fear. Org charts are pyramids, much like those found in Egypt — only today's business pharaohs build their pyramidal organizations out of the fear of human fallibility. Within the pyramid, we have defined roles and responsibilities. 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, a set of conversations going on. The org chart pyramid is being replaced by these hyperlinks; the pharaohs' structures were built on shifting sands. ■

How New Organizations Reflect the Web

What does a hyperlinked organization look like? To answer that question, take a look at what the Web itself is like. You can slice it into several basic themes:

Hyperlinked and decentralized. There is no central authority on the Web; it consists of hundreds of millions of pages, hyperlinked together by the author of each individual page. There are many small pieces that loosely join themselves as they see fit.

Organizations become hyperlinked when they decentralize their teams, committees, task forces and individual reps. Official structure is set aside in favor of networks of trusted colleagues, relationships with a shifting context of links of varying importance and quality. They are self-asserting, not requiring anyone's authority to be put in place. They are the antithesis of the old command-and-control methods of getting things done.

In hyper time. Internet time is, famously, seven times the velocity of "normal" time; you can move at your own pace, take a quick look at a site and come back later without having to find another parking space or go to the end of the line. Control of time is in your hands.

Hyperlinked organizations and groups are driven by their do-it-ourselves zeal to accomplish tasks now. Schedules are driven locally, not centrally, created by

local groups and individuals, in accordance with their assessment of what is realistic. Traditional deadlines are replaced by a team's motivation to turn out a product or help a customer, to do right by their customers and co-workers. Managing them means simply asking them.

Directly accessible. The Net provide what feels like direct access to everyone else on the Net and to every piece of information ever posted. There's nothing standing between you and the rest of the world of people and pages.

Hyperlinked organizations replace old mindsets of hoarding information with new, wide-open policies that encourage collaboration over intranets, moving individual tasks to group tasks and bringing in people because they have necessary skills and shared interests, not because they are in the chain of command.

Full of rich data. The currency of the Web isn't green bar printouts of facts and statistics; it's pages — extraordinarily complex ways of presenting information. They typically tell you as much about their authors as their subjects — a big change from the pre-Web information environment that aimed at generating faceless data.

The various means of communication on the Web (most pointedly e-mail) allows the hyperlinked organization to manage context-rich information in a variety of ways. Linked staff, management and customers can tell stories, create valuable narratives and explore the many ways to translate ideas using each participant's distinctive voice.

Broken. Because the Web is a large, complex network that is controlled by no one, it will always be, in the words of its visionary inventor, Tim Berners-Lee, "a little bit broken."

While old school management aimed at predictability and tried to get there via control, human fallibility and the decentralized nature of the hyperlinked organization will dictate that companies will always be slightly "broken." They will, however, work within the knowledge of that imperfection and embrace errors as opportunities to improve.

Borderless. Because traditional networks were concerned as much with security as with access, it was usually made clear where your stuff ended and other people's stuff began. The Web, conversely, was designed so you can include a link to a page without having to get the author's permission; it's often hard to tell exactly where the boundaries are.

Hyperlinked organizations have never met a wall they liked. Intranets and extranets allow companies to share previously unrevealed processes with customers, and to solicit ideas and suggestions from them. They also

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How New Organizations Reflect the Web

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allow internal communication to flow easier, replacing stuffy closed room meetings with e-mail discussion groups and group intranet sites. When the hurdles to membership in such activities lower, the boundaries blur. ■

Will Corporations Survive?

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 corporations survive at all? Not if they're unable to speak for themselves. Not if they're dumbfounded by the changes taking place around them.

But maybe — and it's a big maybe — companies can get out of their own way and become much looser associations of free individuals. Perhaps they can cut "their" people enough slack to act and sound like people, not robots.

No Crystal Ball

In the end, there is no single set of cogent recommendations, no crystal ball we can use to help business plot its future course, no magic-bullet cure for Corporate Linguistic Deficit Disorder. There is, however, a vision of what life could be like if we ever make it through the current transition.

Imagine a world where everyone was constantly learning, a world where what you wondered was more interesting than who 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.

Yeah. Imagine that. ■

A Sampling of the 95 Theses

The themes in this book were first explored in a list of 95 theses put on the Web site www.cluetrain.com. Here is a sampling of those theses.

1. Markets are conversations.
2. Markets consist of human beings, not demographic sectors.
3. Conversations among human beings sound human. They are conducted in a human voice.
4. Whether delivering information, opinions, perspectives, dissenting arguments or humorous asides, the human voice is typically open, natural, uncontrived.
- ...
15. In just a few more years, the current homogenized "voice" of business — the sound of mission statements and brochures — will seem as contrived and artificial as the language of the 18th century French court.
16. Already, companies that speak in the language of the pitch, the dog-and-pony show, are no longer speaking to anyone.
- ...
33. Learning to speak with a human voice is not a parlor trick. It can't be "picked up" at some tony conference.
34. To speak with a human voice, companies must share the concerns of their communities.
35. But first, they must belong to a community.
36. Companies must ask themselves where their corporate cultures end.
37. If their cultures end before the community begins, they will have no market.
- ...
53. There are two conversations going on. One inside the company. One with the market.
54. In most cases, neither conversation is going very well. Almost invariably, the cause of failure can be traced to obsolete notions of command and control.
55. As policy, these notions are poisonous. As tools, they are broken. Command and control are met with hostility by intranetworked knowledge workers and generate distrust in internetworked markets.
- ...
74. We are immune to advertising. Just forget it.
75. If you want us to talk to you, tell us something. Make it something interesting for a change.
76. We've got some ideas for you too: some new tools we need, some better service. Stuff we'd be willing to pay for. Got a minute?
- ...
94. To traditional corporations, networked conversations may appear confused, may sound confusing. But we are organizing faster than they are. We have better tools, more new ideas, no rules to slow us down.
95. We are waking up and linking to each other. We are watching. But we are not waiting.