

Chapter 17



OUTRAGEOUS OUTSIDERS



What's the Non-Obvious Trend?

Sometimes the most innovative ideas come from outside an industry and this trend describes the rise of outsiders and their increasing willingness to say or do the things we might describe as outrageous to capture attention and influence.

Having a mustache-themed party at the end of November with your best mates is exactly the sort of idea you would expect someone to have over a pint of beer in Melbourne.

For Adam Garone – this crazy idea he first had in 2003 led to more than a successful party that year. It also induced plenty of curious stares and entertaining comments on the new mustache he had committed to grow. The attention was so pronounced, when November came around the following year he wondered: “How do we make that more meaningful?”

That question led him to seek out a charitable cause to support as part of the “Movember” party – as they had come to call the event. He

found a willing participant in the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia, and it became an annual tradition. Year after year the tradition grew and in 2007 he brought the idea to the US – and it went viral.

The latest figures from 2016 indicate that the Movember Foundation, as it is now called, has raised over \$700 million dollars for men's health and has funded over 1,000 men's health projects. After more than a decade, Garone has been interviewed numerous times on the success of the campaign and has been vocal about his lack of knowledge when he first started. "We knew nothing about charity and that actually helped us," he once shared. "It's almost impossible when you're inside the box to think outside of it."

Garone is an example of an *Outrageous Outsider* – someone who brings new ideas and actions mainly because of his or her unfiltered view of a particular topic and we are seeing these types of outsiders emerge in just about every industry.

The Curiously Mainstream Outsider

Outsiders have been responsible for some of the biggest leaps in business and science over the past hundred years.

Albert Einstein was a patent clerk outside the closed academic circles of Physicists when he published his Special Theory of Relativity. Richard Branson was outside the airline industry when he launched Virgin Atlantic. James Dyson was an outsider to the cleaning industry when he invented his bag-less vacuum cleaner which transformed that industry.

The difference today comes from the way in which these outsiders are brought into the mainstream. Through the rise of fringe politics across the globe, outsiders are promoting minority viewpoints with authority. In the world of entrepreneurship, in many cases youth is being revered and celebrated far more than experience. Emerging research on "Generation Z" – the upcoming generation due to soon replace Millennials as our youngest workers and cultural influencers – indicates that they are heavily influenced by their love of quirkiness. (See Chapter 5 for more on this).

Welcome to the new world of the *Outrageous Outsider*, where being different and willing to say or do the things that others don't (or won't)

might be the ultimate competitive advantage.

Several years ago I wrote about a trend that described the steady shift in media toward a sort of *Curated Sensationalism*. The idea was that media was becoming so sensationalized that if every story wasn't "shocking" or likely to "change your life" then it would be far less likely to receive traffic.

Today a similar effect is taking shape across politics, business and entrepreneurship when it comes to the need to be somehow outrageous. Sometimes, this need can be a good thing as it brings attention to true innovators and visionary thinkers who might otherwise have toiled in obscurity. On the other side, it is also leading to elected leaders with questionable morals, "unicorn" valuations for tech companies are that destined to fail and a bias toward focusing on the outrageous at the expense of the outsider.

To illustrate, let's consider the most problematic of the *Outrageous Outsiders* – the ones emerging in global politics.

Outrageous Politicians

It is a great time to be an outsider if you happen to be running for office.

Across the world people are taking their frustration over establishment politics and using it to create surprising political victories, stunning cultural statements and unexpected movements. One of the most surprising of the past year was the 2016 "Brexit" vote which led the UK to declare its intention of leaving the European Union.

The move created significant cultural tension within the UK (and plenty of speculations about the financial markets in the region), but it was hardly the only big move towards outsiders in Europe. Across the continent, news stories have focused on the rise of previously fringe political groups and their new successes in moving Europe towards the far right.

In Switzerland the far-right Swiss People's Party won almost a third of votes in the national elections in 2015. The far-right party in Austria, whose motto is "Austria first," holds 40 of the 183 seats in the National Council. Poland's right-wing Law and Justice party won 39 percent of the national vote in the 2015 parliamentary elections to take power.

This shift in Europe prompted *Newsweek* magazine to host a podcast and panel discussion at the annual Wilderness Festival in Oxfordshire, England titled “Is Outsider Politics Here To Stay?” Just a month earlier, a concerned *New York Times* headline asked “How Far Is Europe Swinging To The Right?”

The question has relevance beyond Europe as well.

In the Philippines the ruthless former Mayor of Davao City Rodrigo Duterte won the Presidency on a platform that played heavily on his perceived reputation as an outsider who would shake up the country’s politics.

Despite numerous public gaffes including insulting the Pope, and making insensitive comments about women and rape, he won office in a race many across the world were watching with interest. His unrefined style raised many comparisons in the media to another *Outrageous Outsider* running for office at the time in the United States: Donald Trump.

Trump is perhaps the ultimate example of a political outsider – someone who has actively disparaged politicians inside his own country, including many from his own party. Trump is a self-described “successful businessman” and has spoken on the campaign trail about everything from building a wall between the US and Mexico to making fun of women, minorities and even captured war veterans.

While he is not “Presidential” in the traditional sense of the word – his broadest appeal seems to be that he is unquestionably an outsider and not part of the same political machine that has run the federal government for the past several decades.

In an attempt to understand the widespread appeal of outsiders in politics, reporter Jeb Lund offered this insightful explanation in *The Guardian* which was originally written to apply to the UK but is equally relevant for other politicians:

This desire for outsiders to run our country is born of a very old, very familiar impatience with the people who are currently running it. It used to be that a politician was someone who ran for office; now that politics has made the word an epithet, everyone is running for office, but no one is a politician. They’ll be whatever you want them to be, as long as you elect them to office.

When politics is the enemy, the most outrageous of the outsiders has a chance to win ... whether they possess the intellect, demeanor or experience to govern effectively or not. Brands can apply some of the same thinking of politicians to their own media campaigns and advertising.

Kidpreneurs

If we were to study only politics, it might seem like the trend of the *Outrageous Outsider* is entirely negative, creating a world where dubiously qualified people win power for themselves and wield it in sometimes scary ways. The good news is – this trend goes far outside of politics and many of the other places where you see this embrace of outsiders end up with entirely different results.

The best example of *this* upside is considering how children are increasingly being consulted, encouraged and celebrated in business and entrepreneurship. In one prominent example, the wildly popular reality series *Shark Tank* routinely features “kidpreneurs” on the program. Kids are also encouraged at a growing range of entrepreneurship competitions and programs sponsored by schools, large brands like Google, and a recent competition sponsored and judged by billionaire Warren Buffett.

When it comes to creating new business ideas or thinking about old problems with a fresh mind, children offer an intrinsic outsider’s perspective – often developing solutions unfiltered by the biases that come from experience and adulthood. This perspective is increasingly valued by companies even if these children don’t start their own business, but instead provide advice for an existing one.

Board of Kidvisors

Target is one example of a retailer that has aggressively turned to kids as advisors in remaking their business strategy around selling kids clothes. Just a few years ago the category defining brand consumers had once dubbed “Tar-zhay” for its focus on providing chic designer goods at discount prices was losing its competitive edge. In 2013 an ill-advised expansion into Canada and an attack from hackers that compromised

the information of an estimated 70 million customers drove Target to a horrible holiday sales season and its worst corporate performance in over a decade.

The following year, the brand brought in new CEO Brian Cornell to reinvigorate the brand. He immediately decided to take a loss and close the operation in Canada – and soon after gave the greenlight to several bold initiatives internally, including replacing the already successful children’s clothing business currently sold under the brand names Cherokee and Circo with a new brand that would be called Cat & Jack. It was a bold decision, but one that the team launching the new brand decided to tackle in an unexpected way.

Rather than simply asking kids in a focus group what they wanted or seeking design ideas by shopping in competitor’s stores – the team decided to go deeper. Kids were not only invited in to help create the brand, they were also involved in the marketing campaign, sometimes even being allowed to write and direct ads online and in social media.

One of the most interesting examples is this idea of involving children who have traditionally been “outsiders” to the process of developing products made for them may seem unusual – but it is one that more and more companies are using, including one iconic brand who recently engaged kids to research and test what would eventually become their most controversial product launch ever.

Why Girls Play Differently Than Boys

When LEGO started researching how boys and girls play, they uncovered some unpopular results. In a world that likes to talk about “gender fluidity” and how boys and girls should be treated the same, when you actually watch boys and girls play it turns out that their preferences are predictably different.

For example, when both boys and girls were asked to build a castle – most boys raced through building in order to use the figures, horses and catapults to have a battle. The girls were more focused on the structure of the castle and unimpressed with what they found inside.

When asked about the findings, LEGO spokesman Michael McNally

described the surprising results this way:

We embarked on four years of global research with 4,500 girls and their moms. Some of the things we heard were really surprising and challenging in ways that weren't really comfortable for us as a brand. [The girls] all looked around inside the castle and they said, 'Well, there's nothing inside.' ... If you think about most of the Lego models that people consider to be meant for boys, there's not a whole lot going on in there. But [the girls had] this idea of, 'There's nothing inside to do.'

The experiments led LEGO to launch their LEGO Friends line targeted at girls. Unfortunately the move was almost immediately criticized by the media and critics – “Why Do Girls Need Special Legos?” one piece on NPR asked. The question seems like a logical one, until you look at the actual consumer response.

LEGO Friends has been a huge hit. Thanks to the new line, analysts estimate LEGO now sells many multiples more LEGOs to girls than it did about ten years ago when the number hovered at a disappointing 10% of all sales. (LEGO has not provided exact sales data publicly)

The brand bet big on the ability of kids to think like outsiders and introduce unexpected ideas. Then they maintained enough trust in this process to *follow* the advice of the outsiders.

Hip-Hop Musicals

On Broadway in New York, the vast majority of musical shows are formulaic classics – Cats, Phantom of the Opera, The Lion King, Aladdin, Blue Man Group and others. The shows have been around for years and are what people expect. Even the new shows follow the same formula – big theatrical scenes with singing and dancing.

Then there is Hamilton.

The “hip-hop musical” inspired by a book about the life of American founding father Alexander Hamilton premiered in 2015 and has since set all kinds of records. The show has sold over \$1 billion in tickets, earned

creator Lin-Manuel Miranda a Pulitzer and 11 Tonys and had the most successful Broadway opening in history. As a result of the popularity, the show will be on tour throughout 2017 and 2018 to sold out audiences.

The show, which is performed entirely in rap brought hip-hop music into the mainstream for a rare moment and established Miranda as a creative force in the world of musical theater. The story of Alexander Hamilton, an outsider in his own time who emigrated from the Caribbean island of St. Croix to make his fortune in America, mirrors that of Miranda who left his native Puerto Rico to attend a New York school for the gifted and talented.

In both cases the outsider stories resonate with audiences. There is something mesmerizing about seeing a stranger out of his or her depth come into a foreign world to shine a spotlight on the things that we never thought to notice before and make transformative contributions to their countries or organizations.

Sometimes those outsiders also give us the chance to be inspired by people who seem nothing like us ... until we look a bit more deeply.

Extreme Inclusiveness

If you have ever heard people with disabilities described as “differently abled,” it might seem like an exercise in political correctness run wild. Whether you like the term or not, it symbolizes the shift toward inclusiveness where those previously cast as outsiders are not only increasingly accepted, but sometimes even celebrated for their differences and their ability to lead us toward more understanding of one another.

Winnie Harlow is a powerful example.

She is a former America's Next Top Model contestant who has starred in campaigns for Desigual and Diesel while also becoming the face of a skin condition called vitiligo which causes white patches to appear on the skin. Rather than be defined by her disease, she is a role model for young girls. Last year she told an audience at the Dove Self Esteem Summit, “I don't actually think I'm ugly - I think I'm beautiful ... now I've learnt to just listen to myself.”

This message of self-esteem and being comfortable in your own skin is one commonly used today by other brands as well.

Haircare brand Beauty & Pin-Ups recently featured former Special Olympics athlete Katie Mead as its new face. She happens to have Down Syndrome.

Starbucks worked with the Society of Interpreters for the Deaf (SID) in Malaysia to hire 10 deaf baristas in the Bangsar district to help “create a culture of empowerment and to bring new perspectives to the workplace, which ultimately makes us a better company.”

Designer handbag company Ethel + Frank launched their latest brand campaign by featuring models over 80 years old with the unexpected tagline “We Think Old Is Pretty Rad.” Sesame Street this past year added a character named Julia who has autism to help educate children and adults about dealing with autistic kids.

Each of these campaigns and initiatives brings outsiders in to shift traditional assumptions and illustrate that we can appreciate one another as we are – even if age, genetics, weight or disability come between us.

Why It Matters:

In the past, being an outsider has always offered an uneasy compromise between being a badge of honor and a recipe for loneliness. Outsiders, by definition were beyond the norm and often outcast from normal social situations. Today, outsiders are embraced for their differences. The more outrageous the better. Sometimes this leads us to idolize people who are unworthy of the attention – which is clearly on display when it comes to global politics. The more hopeful side of this trend, though, is that different viewpoints are being embraced in a way that they have traditionally not been before. Kids are respected as entrepreneurs and advisors. A Hip Hop artist can be celebrated for his artistic talent on Broadway. And brands will turn to models with skin conditions or genetic diseases because of their inner rather than outer beauty. Welcome to the world of the *Outrageous Outsider*, where we look up to and even revere those who are bold enough to look at the world differently. The more we celebrate them and their differences, the more we can create a culture that gets

beyond simply tolerating those different from us and helps us see the significant beauty in the differences.

How To Use This Trend:

- ✓ **Consider the outsider perspective** - Outsiders, because they force us to question our long-held beliefs, are easy to dismiss. Even the loud ones may not break through if your guard is up all the time. Instead, consider reading media you disagree with or engaging in conversations with someone who believes something you don't. These are the ways to truly bring outside thinking into an organization.
- ✓ **Be strategically outrageous** - While this trend clearly has a downside, the skill of being "strategically outrageous" can actually help you to earn attention for your organizations best ideas and make a statement when you need to. With this trend, it is easy to focus on the "Outsider" part but the greater everyday element of it might come more from your ability to be outrageous as a brand.
- ✓ **Invite outsiders in** - When bringing a team together for an offsite, we often invite outsiders from disparate industries to add new ways to thinking to current processes. The tactic of getting inspiration from those outside your company or industry is one that you can use in many situations to help inspire new ideas or innovation.