

# TOM

## On Sashimi and Yogurt

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“The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes of mind.” — *William James*

The thought of eating cold, raw, dead fish used to disgust me. But now I eagerly head to a sushi bar at least once a week and gobble down morsels of hamachi, saba, sake, and kotate-gai. Being insatiably curious as to how people like me make decisions like that, I started thinking about precisely when and why I had altered my attitude of mind, and subsequently my life, in favor of cold, raw, dead fish. Had I seen an ad? Did I read an article or watch a cooking show? Did I bump into a Sashimi Facebook page or attend an event at Sashimi Stadium? Then I remembered: I hadn't altered my life by altering my attitude at all. What happened was precisely the opposite.

Around five years ago, after presenting to a group in Hawaii, I joined the host and participants for an early evening pupu party where ice cold beverages and a wonderful array of dishes were served: local favorites like guacamole and papaya-mango salsa, ahi seaweed salad with cucumber namasu, seared shrimp on a stick with hot wasabi cocktail sauce, and pineapple ice cream in chocolate cups. There was also a chilled seafood bar and a passionate and skilled sushi chef. And it was during this alteration of my life that I experienced the clean flavors and beautiful presentations of Japanese sashimi, which forever changed my attitude and behavior. So was I marketed to? You bet I was!

### **Changes in Attitudes**

Marketing is all about changing attitudes. And people's attitudes are changed in two primary ways: through their active participation (behavior-induced) and through persuasion, where others use semantic and symbolic means to convince them to change. For whatever reason, little “m” marketing seems to be stuck on the latter, which, in my opinion, accounts for its relatively low success rate and lowly corporate status. Persuasion was a perfectly fine marketing approach thirty years ago when people were predisposed to believe marketers' claims, both overt and subtle ones, and when their messages were welcomed and consciously assimilated. But not so much today. The marketplace has changed.

In the early 80s, when things were a lot simpler for marketers, the average American was targeted by around 500 daily commercial messages. Today that number is closer to 5,000! And people have changed with this changing marketplace reality; they're much more marketing-savvy (and weary) and extremely distrustful.

That's why people increasingly employ message blocking technologies and use Google as a message validation machine: "I wonder what others think of this new *whatever*?" "What have the outcomes been for people like me?" "What other alternatives are available." And so on. But there is something that they trust even more than Google. Something in which their confidence has never waned, especially when faced with an overwhelming amount of choice and information.

### **From Seven Cows to Number Three**

Back in those simpler marketing times, Gary Hirshberg and Samuel Kaymen were churning out organic yogurt at their failing New Hampshire farm. As an upstart brand losing tons of money, it was critical for Stonyfield Farm to quickly make people aware of, and change their attitude towards, its organic products and values-based organization. And even though people were predisposed to messaging and persuasive appeals, the tiny company was forced, by limited resources, to focus on a more uncommon marketing approach. They went to where people who shared Stonyfield's values congregated, like Earth Day events and environmental rallies, and handed out cups of yogurt.

Luckily for them, that behavioral approach was all they could afford at the time. Stonyfield has since grown in size, reputation and credibility to become the number three yogurt brand in America. As Hirshberg explained in a 2002 interview with *Reveries Magazine*, "People came away knowing not only that this was great yogurt, but also that Stonyfield is a company that truly cares." And those people came to know, understand and believe, just like I came to know the wonderful experience of eating cold, raw, dead fish; through their personal experiences with the passionate people and exceptional products behind the brand. They came to know it from that one unbiased source that they know they can always rely upon: themselves.

Sure, it's a hell of a lot easier to make marketing decisions based upon what influences *you*—layouts, copy, media measurement, creative execution, etc.—but that's not what's important. What really matters is what looks and feels good to *them*. And in an age of hype, spin, and desperation, what looks good to them is increasingly a personally relevant experience that they can wrap their minds and hearts around. An experience that reveals the vision and intention behind the brand. An experience that conveys look, feel, and, especially, meaning in a no spin, passionate way. An experience that allows people to alter their own attitudes of mind, without a hint of external persuasion. And when that happens, they'll happily alter their lives (and hopefully, yours as well).

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Tom Asacker writes, teaches, and speaks about radically new practices and ideas for success in chaotic times. He is an independent brand adviser and author of critically acclaimed books including *A Clear Eye for Branding* and *Sandbox Wisdom*, and his latest, *A Little Less Conversation*. Visit [www.acleareye.com](http://www.acleareye.com) to learn more.