

**TAKE  
A DEEP  
BREATH**

*An opinion piece by  
Richard Medley,  
Brett Goldhawk,  
Gareth Turner,  
Isabel Lydall*

# TAKE A DEEP BREATH

The pause button.

Every business's strategic asset, but probably your most underused weapon.

A key to finding 'what if?' brand differentials, but too often sacrificed at the altar of pace.

A solution to the challenge moments you know you need, but kept mainly in the look-at-it later drawer.

Size of the business you run is irrelevant when it comes to the importance of time to think, plan and work through what can really set you apart from your challengers. It's a universal marketing problem and need, not just one for the few.

Smaller businesses need to make sure they are heading off on the right growth track.. Medium sized need to make sure short term wins are sustainable and not counterproductive to longer term strategy. Large operations can't risk complacency or mistake consistency for certain future success. Meaning live understanding and effective focus needs to be the constant for your business to be heard above the crowd and seen by the right people

Under the skin of what was hopefully a successful IFE event for many, is the reality that 'noise' was the chosen strategy for most to stand out. But if it's the wrong noise, copycat noise, or noise not borne from listening, the risk is adding to the overkill of brand messages consumers and business partners are exposed to every day.

Probably because that pause button hasn't been used when it comes to marketing strategy, and working through its key components.

Four speakers took to the IFE stage this year to share thinking on the killer components to making a brand successful, and what they share is a belief in the pause button as the circuit breaker of misplaced energy, and the value of external perspective that doesn't fall shy of sharing opinions, whether those viewpoints might be popular or otherwise.



## RICHARD MEDLEY

Founder, Turning the Page

*Richard has worked with global brands such as Tilda, Highland Spring and Diageo and feisty challengers, including ManiLife, NcNean, and Gin Mare. He has held MD roles across four different agencies, and as a board advisor he champions the art of storytelling at the core of any brand's ambitions.*

PUBLIC  
RELATIONS

“Strong storytelling is what makes brands memorable. And the best stories are usually about people in some way, not just a product. Focusing on the latter alone risks tipping into the functional instead of the ownable and the human, and that’s when the pause button needs a firm hit.

In lockdown, smart brands realised being what I categorise as ‘helpful, useful and generous’ was the winning formula in tough times. Less push/hard sell to people and more pull in and engage. So where has all that intelligence gone in equally challenging times? Why have brands stopped being human and switched off engagement mode?

Now is not the time to think that ‘fixed messages’ beat storytelling colour and the building of proper understanding of what you are about as a business. Be more open, be less corporate, bring empathy. And bring what feels relevant for the time that is not blind to reading the room of where the audience’s thoughts and worries are at. This means having opinions that can turn heads, rather than being vanilla. It means using storytellers that can be trusted by the customer. And it means joining things up so everyone internally in your business understands (and is part of) what you are saying externally. Big business or small, thinking about the alignment of communications and culture is one those ‘what if?’ differentials that get parked without the smart pause moments factored in.

You need to bring your audience along with you, because they aren’t sitting there waiting for you to talk unless you engage and give them reason to listen. I’ve yet to work with a brand that doesn’t have a human story to tell. It’s just a question of finding it, shaping it and helping it find a beginning, a middle and a cliff-hanger ‘end’ of what might happen next to keep audiences interested. For me that comes from being given room to listen to what is going on around the corners of the business to add board advisor level reality checks and recommendations that you might otherwise miss. And that needs regular review, positive challenge and more than just setting a strategy and watching it go.

The PR win for those brands that crack the code, whatever their size, lies in a focus on building understanding over just awareness. The latter is of course important in marketing, but PR is the discipline with the space and opportunity to add depth. It’s not just about amplification, but about sparking conversation that lies in real life discoveries and stories. And as a result, building trust and genuine stand out. All fed by the previously mentioned opinions, humanity, people focus and helpful attitude.

And who wouldn’t see that time spent using the pause button to listen more, think on those stretch opportunities and land trust with commercial results is worth it?”



## BRETT GOLDHAWK

Founder, DesignHawk

*A brand consultant with 25 years'+ experience in building household brands in the food and drinks sectors, including famous supermarket brands such as Patak's, New York Bakery Co, Askey's, Old Speckled Hen, and Mary Berry. As founder of DesignHawk he is unwavering in his commitment to ensuring consumers notice and engage with your brand where it matters most... at point of sale.*

BRAND  
STRATEGY

“Helping your brand convert more sales is really the only metric that matters for your brand. And where better to convert more sales than the hustle and bustle of the supermarket — not an Ad break during your favourite soap opera, or on the side of a bus running 20 minutes late — but the very place where people are prepared to put you in their basket.

In simple terms, converting more sales is about being available in the places people are shopping for your product, in a format that is desirable and at a price that is motivating, with a whole bunch of additional promotional activity that screams ‘look at me, put me in your trolley and take me home’.

But let’s not forget the crown jewel in sales conversion, a marketing tool weirdly and often underinvested – your packaging design – the very thing that’ll give you shelf pop and findability and a sure-fire way to differentiate your business from those around you. To me, standing out matters. Not in a difference for difference’s sake but in a way that makes you unique and stand out and gives you the best opportunity to get in the kitchen cupboard, fridge, or the cheeky snack drawer of people’s homes.

If you haven’t done so recently (and you know you haven’t) now is the time to hit the pause button. And really work out if your marketing budget is upside down. Maybe more budget should be put towards packaging design and shopper marketing and less so on advertising everywhere and anywhere. Focus less about what’s big and shiny and instead take a deep dive into your brand and what in-store promotional mechanics have historically worked best for you, how you can enhance your shelf ‘findability’ and have a visit to the broom cupboard to unpackage those shopper marketing kits that lost out to the advertising and digital spend in last year’s budget.

Because when you remove all the hyperbole of marketing, the very definition of brand has always meant to be . . . ‘better than’. Because if you’re not ‘better than’ on any kind of consumer metric (price, format, functionality, specialness and so on) then you really don’t belong in the marketing race anyway. And where better to communicate why you are better than at point of sale where consumers resolutely notice and engage with your brand.”



## GARETH TURNER

Founder, Big Black Door

*Gareth has over 25 years experience in global food and drinks, and he's headed up the marketing for all kinds of household name brands including John Smith's, Bulmers, Lurpak, Arla and Weetabix. Since leaving Weetabix, he has worked with challenger brands like The Sauce Shop, Mighty Drinks and Spoon Cereals to bring structure to their marketing and get their efforts pointed in the right direction as part of his 'Big Black Door' consultancy. And that starts with taking time to pause and understand the problem.*

MAR  
KETING

A wise man once told me, “Measure twice, cut once.”

This is as applicable to a brand’s marketing strategy as it is to building a kitchen cupboard. This means investing the right amount of time upfront to make your marketing efficient and effective. Ensuring that every penny spent and every minute of effort is pulling your brand in the right direction. That time is not inertia or a distraction from your day-to-day tasks; it’s about improving your chances of success with the right plan. It encompasses a deep understanding of your business, your brand, your ambitions, your target audience, and their needs.

### Understanding Your Market and Audience

The first step in developing a solid brand strategy is understanding your market and audience. This involves extensive research to really understand your target customers, what they need, and how they behave. For a global business with many brands (like Arla), this might mean segmenting the market and tailoring brand strategies to fit each one. For a scaling brand like Spoon Cereals, the focus might be on deeply understanding a niche segment. This step ensures that your marketing efforts are not just a shot in the dark but are golden bullets, aimed precisely at the people most likely to engage with your brand.

### Crafting a Compelling Message

This isn’t just about what you say, but how you say it, where you say it, and to whom. A clear, compelling brand message can set you apart from the competition and create a strong emotional connection with your audience. Investing time upfront to develop a strong brand message involves understanding what makes your brand unique and how you can effectively and efficiently communicate that in a way that is motivating to your audience. It’s about finding the right voice and tone that will resonate with your target audience and sticking to it consistently across all marketing channels.

### Developing Channel-Agnostic Tactics

Your audience interacts with brands across multiple channels — from social media and email to in-store experiences, customer service interactions, radio and TV adverts. A successful marketing strategy is channel-agnostic and finds the right places to talk with your audience in the moments where they are most receptive.

### Ensuring Efficiency and Effectiveness

Investing time in the planning phase of your marketing strategy ensures efficiency and effectiveness in execution. When you measure twice and cut once, you reduce the risk of costly mistakes. Finding out that your advertising isn’t working when it’s already made and on air is an expensive piece of market research.”





## ISABEL LYDALL

Founder, Curious to Clear

*Isabel Lydall has spent many years leading brand marketing and consumer insight for some of the UK's favourite brands including Jammie Dodgers, Maryland and Aptamil, before setting up consumer insight collective, Curious to Clear. A model that has seen her work with brands such as Capsicana, Divine Chocolate, Simply Roasted and Little Dish, to help them research their customers, define their strategy and test their future plans.*

RESEARCH  
INSIGHT

“The most successful brands look lucky from the outside. As if magically they’ve hit on a product, message and brand that goes viral.

But when you scratch the surface, it’s not luck at all.

A compelling insight and consumer truth puts rocket fuel behind a brand. Because when you get a great insight, it doesn’t just work for consumers – it works for everyone who comes into contact with it. It brings a buzz to the whole organisation – which is then infectious to retail buyers, stakeholders, investors . . . everyone.

The brand sells itself, because everyone instinctively ‘gets’ it – think Perfect Ted, think Bold Bean. And it’s not limited to indie brands, it can inject new energy into even the biggest FMCG teams . . .

And this is where hitting the pause button and building in the research commitment comes in. Founders and marketers often think of research as a ‘dry’ topic . . . but done right, it’s anything but. It’s being curious about people and seeing opportunities in the tiny details of what they think, feel and do . . . and then being able to zoom out and see the big picture of how that can be put to work for the brand.

Research and insight is also incredibly practical. Yes, successful brands know exactly what their target audience needs and values – but they also match that with finding creative and commercially practical ways to give it to them.

When marketers see how people really use and shop a category – and how they respond to ideas – they are often surprised by what they find, the opportunities they see, and how quickly they can act on that. Decisions become easier because they’re not going around in circles worrying about product market fit, stakeholder conflicts, or spending precious marketing money on the wrong thing. Because they are doing things they know will work.

So if you have big decisions to make on your brand and need some evidence to help you sleep at night – or sales aren’t quite flying, or your marketing isn’t quite landing – or you need some inspiration that everyone can get behind – pausing and spending time with your shoppers and consumers are a great place to start.”

# POSITIVE CIRCUIT BREAKS DON'T HAPPEN ENOUGH

Because business as usual gets in the way. Thinking time is hard to shape and carve out. Collective agencies drive forward a direction for you. And brilliant as data can be, it can also be used to justify decisions in the wrong way, or in the wrong order.

Not everything is broken, and yes business life moves fast, but if you don't stop to look around you once in a while, you could miss it. And the philosopher Ferris Bueller can't be wrong on that.

Five key drivers of thinking will provide the make or break difference:

- Pause buttons need to be hard wired into your strategy at every part of the marketing mix
- Listening without a predetermined view has to be the open minded default
- Finding what is ownable needs time and focus
- Clarity on how you will win and stand out has to be understood across your business
- Having advisors and sounding boards whose insights and recommendations are not 100% focused on marketing budgets and how to spend them, but to what is strategically marketing and communications right, can be the deeper differential.

The four contributors here may be able to help you press (and then release) the right pause buttons one on one.

But also as part of a collective and fully bespoke workshop team, based on four brains that share a belief in what is the winning mentality, but with opinions that aren't tied to a corporate agency bottom line. Ex senior clients and ex large agency leaders, now current insight champions and current challengers.

And the partner to the pause button, is the play button...



**RICHARD MEDLEY**

[www.turningthepage.co.uk](http://www.turningthepage.co.uk)  
[richard@turningthepage.](mailto:richard@turningthepage.)



**BRETT GOLDHAWK**

[www.design-hawk.com](http://www.design-hawk.com)  
[brett@design-hawk.com](mailto:brett@design-hawk.com)



**ISABEL LYDALL**

[www.curiousstoclear.com](http://www.curiousstoclear.com)  
[isabel@curiousstoclear.com](mailto:isabel@curiousstoclear.com)



**GARETH TURNER**

[www.bigblackdoor.com](http://www.bigblackdoor.com)  
[gareth@bigblackdoor.com](mailto:gareth@bigblackdoor.com)