Introduction

I am a boomer. Born in 1960, I was ushered into the modern era decades before the information age altered our lives forever. For me, the innovation of the personal computer and the Internet were the twin defining events of my generation.

One of the perks of being part of a prolific generation is that this means that there are vast numbers of other people with whom I have shared these same rites of passage. Unfortunately, life often passes too quickly for us to notice those shared experiences at all. The history books may record the sixties as a time of great upheaval – of massive change. But I don't recall it that way.

I have a friend who was born in the sixties as well – a fellow boomer. When he is asked what he recalls about those halcyon days, he responds by saying that he remembers taking a lot of naps. I know what he means. Most of my strongest memories of the sixties don't revolve around Nehru jackets, tie-dyed t-shirts, or summers of love.

No. One of my strongest memories is of Bozo.

The Clown.

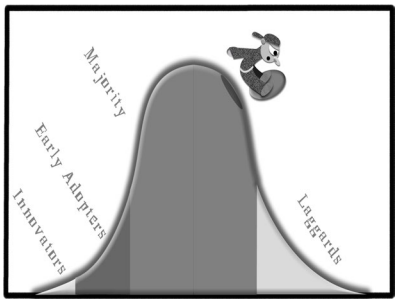
In small-town Iowa, years before *Sesame Street* or Mr. Rogers gently prodded us toward educational or social enlightenment, we had the blithe confection of Bozo the Clown through a show broadcast out of Chicago on television station WGN. While I had an aversion to Bozo himself (no offense, but if I have to have a clown I've always favored the tramp-clown variety such as Emmit Kelly), I have a fond memory for a portion of each his shows. Bozo would stride over to a television monitor on the stage to introduce a cartoon or some campy live-action segment in which kids cavorted in a Chicago park. What amazed me was that as Bozo introduced each segment, the television monitor next to him showed a closed-circuit image of Bozo standing next to the television monitor, which showed Bozo standing next to the television monitor …

On and on this image was replicated like a set of Russian nesting eggs with oversized shoes. Each successive image was smaller and less distinct than the one before. I thought it was a wonderful gimmick,

and I pondered the technology that allowed to it happened. It was really, really cool until I realized one day that it was simply a bunch of Bozos of diminishing size.

At that point, I had no further use for Bozo. I grew up.

As I matured, I became what is popularly referred to as an *early adopter* – one of those hardy souls who insist on trying out the latest and greatest technologies even if it kills us. As a child this meant that I was the first on my block to have a banana seat bike, the first to try those gosh-awful Space Sticks (breakfast bars that the Apollo astronauts supposedly ate, which were packed with an equal measure of vitamins and talcum powder – or so it seemed), and the first to wear a silk shirt with puffy sleeves as the disco era dawned (and, yes, I paid the price for that indiscretion.) In high school, this predilection for early advocacy meant one thing – computers!



As the first personal computers began being marketed to the masses, I realized that I had to be one of the first kids to have one of my own. I was ecstatic when a black-market transaction yielded me my first Texas Instruments TI80 personal computer. (If memory serves, I haggled it from a friend at high school for a mini-Moog synthesizer I had built from a kit. Like I said, I was an early adopter!)

When I brought the TI80 home, I had no idea what I was going to use it for. I only knew that it was *cool* and that it somehow reminded me of a less-threatening HAL from Stanley Kubrick's "2001." I recall teaching myself how to check its memory and eventually used it as a bulky, glorified calculator of sorts. Mostly, however, I used it for playing a clunky game called *Hammurabi*. I had been hoping that the infamous table tennis game *PONG* would have been loaded on my computer, but no such luck. I had *Hammurabi* instead.

The premise of the game was that you were the king of the ancient civilization of Sumeria with the responsibility of ensuring that your civilization thrived. Conceptually, it was like an ur-version of Sim City, only without graphics, sound, Sims, or cities! It would have been fun except that I had an unfortunate knack for annihilating my entire population through famine, pestilence, or simple neglect. After the glow of the TI80's novelty wore off, it collected dust on my desk, its little green cursor blinking continuously at me, as if begging me to find a purpose for its existence.

Later in the eighties, after I had upgraded to an IBM PC clone, I entered the next phase in my computer-owning life by signing up with CompuServe. Receiving a set of ominous-looking binders, I pored over those entirely undecipherable books in a fruitless effort to figure out how to set up my modem so I could get on line. Long before the convenience of "Plug and Play," this was "Plug and Tweak and Tweak and Tweak…" Eventually, I was able to establish a connection and was soon dialing out and logging on at a whomping 9600 Baud.

But then came a new problem. Now that I was there online, I had nothing really to do. I wasn't going to fly anywhere so I didn't really need Sabre, and I had no real interest or trust in doing my checking or banking online yet. But at least I could play a nifty game called *Dracula's Castle* in all of its DOS-sy black- and-white textual glory. It was marvelous. It had zero graphics. Zero! Unthinkable nowadays.

The entire game was typed out on the screen in short phrases like "You are in a room.>_" This was followed by the blinking green cursor begging for a response. By entering in verbs and objective nouns, you could get more information. "Look" could garner you a "You see a window that is locked and a night table next to the bed.>_"

"Break window" could get you a "It won't break.>_" Most of the time, however, my verbs elicited a "Sorry, I don't understand that.>_"

I spent days addicted, trying to find exactly the right words to type that would enable me to go to the next level of the game, or at least get out of the virtual castle room I was in or whatever task the game had assigned me at the time. *Dracula's Castle* was definitely a lot of fun, but it failed to resonate within me

for long. It was awkward and clunky, and it frequently crashed. I was glad I tried it, but I failed to detect any vast improvement over my old *Hammurabi* game.

I still remember the day when the Internet finally made sense to me. It was the day I saw a car ad on TV that had an actual URL in it. As the commercial ended, a web address flashed across the bottom of the screen: www-dot-somethingorother-dot-com. I was thrilled! Early-adopter me couldn't wait to run to my computer and try the URL out. Now, remember, these were the early days of the Internet when connection speeds were less than optimal, but that didn't deter me in the slightest. I gleefully logged in and pulled up the auto maker's site. Told I would have to download a video player before I could play the movie, I gladly agreed. I clicked yes, yes, yes! Show me something! Anything.

As the player began to download, I was overjoyed. Wow, this is it! This is what the Internet is for: it has sales and marketing application! My own video player! Woo-hoo! As I greedily watched the screen, I was amazed that in a matter of mere minutes I had already downloaded a whopping 2 percent of the player. My joy gradually diminished as it sank in how long it would take the player to crawl across the modem connection. When at last the player had loaded, I loaded the video itself. It was equally excruciating. Ninety long minutes later, my enthusiasm entirely dampened, I sat stone-faced as the image finally finished loading. Bleary eyed, I pressed play and sat back hopefully, ready to be amazed.

Amazed I was.

There on my screen – after waiting through an hour and a half of anticipatory agony – in a tiny grainy box on my computer was the very same ad I had seen on TV.

I was devastated. Oh, sure, there was a certain gee-whiz appeal to seeing a TV commercial on my computer monitor, but it was so small and the resolution so poor that I quickly realized that philosophically it was equivalent of my childhood experience of seeing all those Bozos of diminishing size. My first glorious expectations about the utilitarian promise of the Internet was ruined. The technology was cool certainly, but ultimately it felt hollow. If this was all there was to it, the Internet amounted to little more than a reincarnation of the incredible shrinking Bozos.

Fortunately, that was *not* all there was. As we now know, the Internet quickly offered much more as speed and bandwidth increased. As a graphic designer in the WAGO Corporation's marketing department in 1985 I was handed the task of investigating this new technology called the Internet simply because no one else wanted to or truly understood its potential power.

Since I was quite good at *Dracula's Castle* and had even downloaded grainy car commercials on to my home computer, I had a level of expertise that equipped me well for the task.

I knew that WAGO, like myself, was a frequent early adopter of high- technology innovations and also like myself tempered this by being exceedingly pragmatic. We both liked cutting-edge technology, but only if it actually worked. When I began to investigate the possibilities of the Internet, I studied the various models for the web's potential uses. After an exhausting (if not exactly exhaustive) investigation, we chose to become involved (as did ISA) with IndustryNet early on and saw the potential of the Internet as a unique medium with almost limitless sales and service applications. (We shall examine IndustryNet again in a later chapter.)

A few short years later, we reassessed our interest in IndustryNet and in various other communities being offered to us. Like my old TI80 computer, IndustryNet and the Internet were bulky entities collecting virtual dust atop our desktops because we had not yet clearly defined their application. It was obvious to all that these new tools were powerful and meaningful, but we had no clear objectives nor plan in place for taking advantage of this still young medium.

I began to realize that unless we truly understood how our customers used Internet technology in this post-modern age, we would soon be joining the costly failures of some of our confederates in the industry such as Allen-Bradley's SourceAlliance which frightfully demonstrated that even the best companies could make costly missteps in these ventures. (We will discuss the promise and the reality of SourceAlliance later as one of our case studies.)

During this same period, in my civilian life I was researching a book I was writing on the legendary Disney innovator, Ub Iwerks (*The Hand Behind the Mouse: An Intimate Biography of Ub Iwerks*, with Leslie Iwerks, Hyperion 2001) Iwerks was an amazing man, both an artistic and a technical

genius who was personally responsible for designing Mickey Mouse; adding color, sound, and three-dimensionality to cartoons; and basically revolutionizing live-action films with his inventions, innovations, and sheer brilliance. Without Ub Iwerks, we would not have the joy of seeing an animated Donald Duck dancing with a live-action Aurora Miranda (*The Three Caballeros*), Hayley Mills singing with herself (*The Parent Trap*), or *The Birds* terrorizing Tippi Hedren in Alfred Hitchcock's masterwork. Without Ub Iwerks, we could not experience the thrill of the Haunted Mansion, Pirates of the Caribbean, or Circlevision either. In other words, Iwerks was the kind of genius who appealed to my innate passion for innovation and creative engineering.

During the course of this research, I immersed myself in all things Disney. In the late 90s, I stumbled upon a discussion of how Disney saw its entertainment marketplace evolving. In the context of discussing their new – at the time – Disney Quest conception, the company's executives hinted that Disney would need to re-focus on two distinct and seemingly disparate concepts if it wanted to capitalize on major trends and maintain market dominance.)

The first trend that Disney saw was that consumers long to have adventures – grand experiences that elicit distinct emotional responses from within. The other concept was that if consumers are not out having grand experiences, they would just as soon be cloistered away in the comfort of their own home. I will go into what this means in particular for Disney in one of my case studies later in this book, but for now I will simply state that Disney's theme park and their Buena Vista Home Entertainment divisions are the direct outgrowth of these trends.

Back in 1991, futurist Faith Popcorn identified both of these trends as among the "17 Trends That Drive Your Business and Your Life" in her classic and highly influential book, *The Popcorn Report*. While many of these trends have since fallen by the wayside or simply run their course (Popcorn defined a trend as having a ten-year life span), Cocooning and Fantasy Adventures have stood the test of time and have actually strengthened over the years.

These two concepts, which both Disney and Popcorn saw, identified trends seemingly in opposition to each other yet which, in fact, fit together with the grace of the Yin/Yang symbols on a

Chinese coin. Like Orcs and Elves in the *Lord of the Rings* or the light and dark sides in the *Star Wars* saga, Cocooning and Fantasy Adventures are fissiparous in that they offer a balance between two opposing concepts. By exploring the relevance of each to our lives and consumer habits and then by looking at how they relate to each other, we can find the harmony between the two concepts that enables them to dovetail into a fully realized view of the industrial marketplace as we know and love it.

Bungee Jumping and Cocoons--two contrasting thoughts. I have chosen Bungee Jumping in place of what Faith Popcorn calls the "Fantasy Adventure" because it captures our present culture's predilection for embracing all things extreme. The Cocoons represent our willingness to nest within our homes with no need or desire to come out and mingle with the wicked world. One thought is extroverted and "out there"; the other is as introverted and isolationist as they come. Both have become commonplace and emblematic.

In the following pages, I will investigate how these dual ideas play out in our society, discuss a few illustrative case studies, and then examine how both these concepts specifically illuminate our industrial marketplace, and especially our ecommerce activities. I will end by synthesizing these two ideas into a Unified Theory of Bungee Jumping and Cocoons as we look toward the future.

But that's the end. The punchline. Let us begin now at the beginning with a headlong leap into the abyss – *the bungee jump*.

Chapter 1 - Bungee Jumping in the Consumer World

Before we delve into "Bungee Jumping and Cocoons" in the Industrial World in the second half of this book, I will first lay the groundwork to the concepts as they apply to our daily lives in the consumer-oriented world of modern America. In this chapter, we will discuss the "Bungee Jump" in particular – the modern proclivity for seeking fulfillment through extreme experience.

It's absolutely insane! The very thought of climbing to incredible heights, tethering ourselves to objects of seeming permanence, and hurtling our bodies into the abyss of open space with nothing below us