Hamid Ghanadan Talks about Persuading Scientists and Content Marketing

This transcript was lightly edited for clarity.

Chris: Hello everyone and welcome to the show. Today, I'm very happy to have as my guest Hamid Ghanadan. Hamid is the President of The Linus Group, a marketing agency focused on marketing to scientists which he founded 19 years ago. He is also the author of "Persuading Scientists: Marketing to the World's Most Skeptical Audience," which is uniquely focused on marketing scientific products and services. Hamid, welcome to the podcast.

Hamid: Hi, Chris. It's nice to be with you.

Chris: So today, of course, we're going to talk mostly about content marketing. Beginning with the end in mind, you mentioned something in your book about culture eating strategy and you gave an example of seeing Marcom teams running from project to project and mediating priorities. I just want to ask. The opportunity here for an individual is for Marcom to do what?

Hamid: Yeah. That's a great question. The last chapter of my book after we go through all the examples and case studies and frameworks really discusses this idea that marketing doesn't happen in the vacuum and marketing is part of the overall organization and organizational behavior sets in and decisions get sometimes mediated. So the question that you ask is a really interesting one.

From our perspective, we've worked with Marcom departments for a long time. I see Marcom really becoming, the word that you use actually is perfect, it's mediated. They become the mediators between different groups who have different agendas in mind. So product marketing really need to push a message out, sales requires something, and Marcom a lot of times becomes a translator. So in an individual level, what's a Marcom person to do? I believe that a Marcom person who takes on a framework and has a philosophy through which they drive all of the projects through is really becoming an ambassador, sort of an editorial ambassador for the content that's being generated and driven. So the tool that we used a lot is positioning.

Positioning is a fantastic distillation of strategy. It can really be used as a touchstone for Marcom to say, "Is what we're talking about and what we're developing on strategy and on the mark?" So for Marcom, the thing that I love talking to Marcom about is really to understand positioning and really to create a high bar for positioning within the organization and within the different constituents. Positioning is also something that sales can really get behind and understand. So again, another deliverable or another constituent that Marcom has to satisfy is sales, so to use that positioning as a common language between all these different groups, I think is really important.

Chris: Great. So you mentioned positioning. I don't think people can be reminded enough about how important this is. Can you describe some mistakes you've seen and what happens when companies don't get it right?

Hamid: Yeah. Positioning like I mentioned is really critical because it's the sum total or the distillation of the strategy. It requires a lot of bravery, because number one, it forces or it requires that the group or the team or the marketing department really, first and foremost, identify their target audience and segment their audience. That does take a lot of bravery. I got to give it to a lot of companies who move forward with really strong positioning and really strong segmentation, because it's always scary to say, "Okay, this is our market and everybody else is not our market so that we're not going to focus on them." Because what if you are limiting the potential of your growth?

But I've seen, time and time again, companies who do focus on a particular segment tend to grow faster and tend to dominate those segments. Those segments actually open the door to other segments for them rather than going with the more generalist approach. So that's the first aspect to positioning.

Then the second aspect to positioning, to me, which is really the pivotal point for all the marketing that gets done is to understand the customer's need. This I can't speak enough about. It's to go out there and really understand your customer and to distill the need that you're trying to solve. One mistake that we see or something that we always try to stay away from is, whether that need has been fabricated or retrofitted to the particular offering's benefits. So the need has to be real and it has had nothing to do with the thing that I'm marketing or the service that I'm offering. It actually has to live natively within the target audience. So that's a really key part.

Within The Linus Group, I review a lot of positioning statements or draft positioning statements before they go to our clients. I have a checklist and that's one of them. I really harp on that a lot. It's to say, "Have we identified a need that's native to the audience and has nothing to do with the product, because it's just too easy to retrofit or engineer a need that may or may not exist? I will tell you that any positioning exercise or any marketing or even content marketing that fails is because we haven't gotten the need right. So that's a really important part and it's just the sum total of the positioning statement. The rest of the positioning statement then gives way to describing the products, its benefits and then differentiating it from the competitive forces that are out there.

Another sort of "mistake" or something that we see is that the differentiator is not demonstrable. So people, a lot of times when writing positioning statements, have a hard time. And I do too. Having a hard time determining what is that single most valuable benefit that I want to describe and then what's the key piece of differentiator that I'm going to put in there. Another thing that I see a lot is that positioning ends up having too many proof points baked in there. Now, positioning statements are internal documents. They're not meant for public consumption.

The language that's used in positioning is really to focus the team internally and get the team to agree on our way forward. It's not necessarily going to show up in your ad copy or in your brochure, but I still see that, again, another part of bravery that's

required from marketing's perspective is to determine and say, "This is our over-arching benefit. This benefit overrides and over-arches all the other features and smaller benefits that we have. Most importantly, it serves that need that we identified that's native to the audience." So those are just a couple of points that we look at when we're reviewing positioning.

Chris: Right. You said something interesting in there, and this is a question I always have. It's that the most important benefit, in cases that I have seen, isn't always the biggest differentiator.

Hamid: Correct.

Chris: And the most important.

Hamid: Yeah, absolutely.

Chris: So how do you make those work together? Because you might have a differentiator that isn't even part of your product. It's part of your overall service offering.

Hamid: Yeah.

Chris: But the benefit of your product, it's not the product. It's how you get it or some other aspect.

Hamid: You got it. I mean, you're on to something really huge right there. The major benefit usually has nothing to do with the technical features or the technical benefits of the product. It's usually, "What is the true human benefit to the audience?" It usually goes to serve that need. Usually, that need is a fairly emotional one. It's interesting. The way that we get to the root cause of the need is we keep asking. We come up with the need, "Okay, maybe they need more sensitivity." Why do they need more sensitivity? Because they need to be able to differentiate, because maybe samples are getting more complex and they need to be able to measure something in a lower and lower concentration. Okay. Why is that happening? Why is it important to them?

You just keep asking that why question until you hit something that's really core to that person's career or to that person's vision or to that person's aspirations. That's when you know you really have a fundamental and foundational need. Then the

benefit has to be equally as foundational or fundamental in order to be able to serve that need. Then the differentiator, it actually allows to differentiate it to either be a lockout spec, or exactly as you just said, the way the customer experiences it or some other way that you've differentiated yourself from the market. That's where you can have more leeway to describe maybe a lockout specification within the differentiator. The benefit has to be much more foundational and fundamental to what the audience is feeling and what the audience is needing.

Chris: Great. So once we have a solid positioning, that gets distilled to the value proposition.

Hamid: Yeah.

Chris: You have a unique way of saying how a value prop is used in content marketing for scientists. Can you talk about that for a little bit?

Hamid: Yeah, sure. So the value proposition is a distillation. I mean, the part about value proposition that we need to focus on is the word value. Because whatever it is that we're offering has to be of value. Some sort of a value, either monetary value or different value to the audience. So that distillation really has to be focused on what is the audience getting out of it.

So we usually say that the formula that we use for value proposition is offering X solves the problem Y in Z unique way. So what are X, Y and Z? You know, you don't have to really use the same terminology but that's essentially the key aspects of it. This can even come into play if you're branding expertise, if you're branding services, if you're branding a product. Whatever it is, the value proposition has to be a statement of value. This is what you're going to get out of transacting with us or acquiring this product or acquiring this service.

Chris: Right. Then in your book, you talked about using the value prop toward a scientist as a hypothesis, which you are trying to get them to test or agree.

Hamid: Right, right. So once you have the value proposition, the traditional way of going to market is to just go out and blast that value proposition everywhere, tight? So put it in ads, put it in your outbound, put it in your e-mails, go tout it at a trade shows, and push that value proposition out as many times as possible. That's built on this traditional legacy of repetition that turns into preference.

Chris: Great.

Hamid: Now let's talk about that a little bit.

The whole idea of repetition in an advertising agency is like, plop, plop, fizz, fizz, or any of those slogans that were just buried into our brain ever since we were children. That doesn't necessarily work in business-to-business contexts. Because even if I just repeat it over and over again, in a business-to-business or in a business-to-scientist context, they themselves need to situate that value proposition. You can talk about the statement of value. But if the scientist doesn't yet recognize that they need the thing that you're talking about, they will ignore it, they will filter it out and they have a very acute way of filtering information that they deem to be biased or not important to them.

So we need to stay away from that filter as long as possible. The way to do that is to first activate their curiosity. So just by putting a value proposition out there doesn't activate anybody's curiosity because it's so transparent that you're trying to sell them something. You need to actually invite them in and predispose them. You need to condition their mind in order to be able to accept that value proposition. So the value proposition is actually delivered very late in the marketing game. What's delivered up front is something provocative that allows them to open their mind and be curious about learning more. This is usually some sort of information or content or an assertion that is about them. It's not about you or your product.

So you go out there and you challenge the status quo of what they believe their world is somehow. In some small way, you nudge them into sitting up and paying attention, and then you drive them into providing educational information so that they can formulate that hypothesis. If you're really good, the educational information that you're providing will drive them to a hypothesis that's the same as your value proposition. Once you get there, you've now earn the right to articulate your value proposition because they're fully expecting to hear it anyway. They've already made up their mind about it anyway. So it becomes a much more powerful way of engaging a scientist in the natural way that they make decisions and in the natural way that they think rather than just bombarding them with value proposition statement or what we call persuasive statements. That's just too early in the game.

Chris: Right. I don't disagree with any of that. I'm curious to know, because again, bravery comes into this. How many companies are brave enough at the top of their funnel or even have the capacity sometimes, to create that provocative content? So I guess what I'm looking for is companies who have not had your guidance specifically, and are an example of putting out that kind of high-level, provocative, top of funnel content.

Hamid: Sure. That's a great question. We look at businesses that are outside of the life sciences and we actually work with businesses that are outside the life sciences; so pharma, medical devices, diagnostic companies, and then within the life sciences tools and services research. That's the full scope of our agency's work. In some of these other arenas like in medical devices, they are in fact doing just that. They're looking into thought leadership in order to drive their brand value and allowing their audiences to come in and engage in the conversation. Then once they have that constituency that they're really nurturing with their philosophies, with their ideas, with their thought leadership, then they have earned the right to deliver the value proposition of the product. So that's happening. It's also happening in our space, to be honest with you, even whether companies that worked with us or not. I'll tell you why that is.

Many people are arriving at this idea that they need this kind of a framework from a multiplicity of directions. Number one, the traditional marketing modalities are failing lots of companies. In fact, they are even less productive than before. So people are seeing this because now there's an ability to capture data. Email blasts are not as effective as they were six months ago and even less effective than they were year ago. They're seeing this decline and they're recognizing that technology alone doesn't solve that problem. So I recall, I think about three years ago, when we saw this big fervor around marketing automation which is a class of software tools that allows you to deliver a longer term dialogue with your customers based on what they're interested in and how they behave.

It's wonderful and it sounds very Utopian from the marketing perspective. But many companies have come back to us and said, "We implemented marketing automation and our results haven't really improved." So then we looked at the content. I think about it from the perspective of if marketing automation software is like machinery, then the content is the fuel. So imagine if you just bought a

fighter jet and you're putting the same fuel in it as I put into my Honda Civic, for example. I mean, that regular unleaded is not going to make a fighter jet fly. So we really looked at and then we start to unpack the content. So that necessity is also coming into play.

A third necessity that's coming into play is the social arena. So within either general social media sites like Facebook and Twitter and LinkedIn, they're seeing these companies. These marketers are seeing that they need a different way of showing up in order to get engagement and in order to create engagement around their brand or around their company or around their communities. Obviously, no one gets engaged around a value proposition. They need to be entertained or they need to be provoked in order to engage, and so they're coming out from that perspective too.

So you asked specifically about companies that are doing this. Outside of our industry actually in the tech sector, I can give you several examples of companies that are doing this extremely well. IBM pivoted their entire brand from being a supplier of IT equipment to becoming a strategic consulting firm using exactly the same model.

Another company that's doing this very well is in the financial sector, BlackRock. If you even look at their print ads, they're putting things in magazines like Harvard Business Review that are extremely provocative. They really push the reader to think about a reality that maybe they're not thinking about. It's really truly engaging. Sometimes it's a little scary but it's highly effective in capturing the attention. Really, it sets the mind of the viewer down their path of being preconditioned to ultimately receiving those value propositions. It's so powerful.

Chris: Fantastic. Yes, and now I'm coming back to something you said. I have another interview coming up in a couple weeks with a writer. He writes a lot for pharma. Since you mentioned medical devices, this crossed my mind. I'd like to get your thoughts on it, the fact that the writing that they have to do in pharma and medical is so regulated. Actually, one, it helps them build a messaging structure better, but it also makes it easier for them and maybe even more advantageous strategically to make that provocative top of the funnel content because there don't

have to be any claims in there. Is that a fair way to look at it? So they can gather attention without talking about their product at all.

Hamid: Yes. So that's an interesting point. About 50% of the marketing that we do is on the regulated side of regulatory and the other 50% is not. So we actually have had tremendous experience on both sides of that fence, and it's really, really interesting to see how regulation plays, not only into what you can talk about and where you can talk about it, but also the psychology of the team internally within companies. We've worked with companies where the claims that we're making, even at the top of the funnel, that provocation or leadership content as we call it, that they are fully based on a claim but they are totally and completely indexed and based on the literature.

So here's the interesting thing. You can't just make something up to provoke a market. Whether it's regulated or not, you need to have that claim completely substantiated. I think that that rigor, actually, if you apply the same rigor as what regulatory requires in the non-regulated areas, then that becomes the fodder for your educational content as well. It's that rigor that you put into substantiating your claim. But quite honestly, the level of how provocative a leadership message is really doesn't have to do with regulatory. I mean, we've put some very provocative statements out there in regulated environments. But because they've been completely substantiated through evidence, then they're totally fine.

So I actually think that it's a bit of red herring to think that in a regulated environments, you can't be provocative. You can. You need to do your homework and make sure that the claims that you're putting out there are substantiated, but it's the same thing in non-regulated space. You still need to do that, because here's what's going to happen. In a non-regulated space, you're going to put out a leadership message that provokes the market. If you don't have the goods to back it up, then you're going to fall down on the educational part of their decision-making cycle. Then it's a little bit of a sensationalism that comes through in that situation. That's not a position that you want to be in.

I've also seen several companies try to be very provocative upfront, not deliver the goods, and their brand reputation gets ruined really quickly. Especially in high growth areas like sequencing or genomics, I've seen companies fall into that trap

where they've made big claims, haven't been able to substantiate it and it takes years for them to recover from that.

Chris: That's really interesting and helpful. I'm going to shift gears a little bit now. We could talk about building campaigns but that's all laid out really well in the book in some detail. Honestly, the book is really a manual for getting campaigns done. So I want to shift gears and talk about other things that might be helpful around content marketing. What kind of obstacles do you run into with clients that they are trying to get started with content marketing, and how do you overcome those?

Hamid: Yeah. I have this conversation a lot. I or we go and present to companies and really deliver this as a foundation. I say this in the book and I say this every time I give a talk. The framework that we present around content marketing... First of all, I just want to clarify something. Content marketing is becoming marketing. I mean, there's not really that much of a difference between the two anymore. So for companies to get started, content marketing can seem really daunting at the beginning because you have to consider that you have to all of the sudden generate all this additional content, but that's actually a mistake.

First of all, most companies don't give themselves enough credit for how much information they produce anyway. Think about the advertisements, the information that goes into application notes, the information that gets into brochures and all the sales decks and all of the collaborations and the posters that they present and the webinars that they produce and the videos that they produce, all of that is content. I mean, if you really sit back and think about it, even a small company is generating a tremendous amount of content anyway.

The whole point is to actually bring some editorial guidance around that content and give it a vector so that all the content becomes, every single piece of content becomes, yet another instance of delivering that value proposition. Not delivering the value proposition straight through, but becomes another instance of demonstrating it or getting audiences moving along their decision cycle. So that's one of the things that people need to overcome. The obstacle is the shell shock that they get about the amount of content that they need to produce.

Chris, I know that's the kind of work that you do. I think that's what you're doing with them, is just telling them that it's not necessarily that they have to do a lot more, it's just that they have to think differently. So honestly, any kind of change is hard in any kind of institution. The thing to do is to start to build small habits. So when I work with companies, I was at a company not too long ago were they be love the concept and love the idea, and they ask, "How can we make massive organizational change?" This is a large company. "How can we make massive organizational change around doing marketing differently?"

So we have to work with them to identify small habits that they can make throughout the time. First, to infuse the language in the philosophy, and then to start to plan around it, and then to start to just shift the things that they are doing on a natural basis to be a little bit different in a time frame. That's what going to make change. First of all, that's what's going to make change that's effective and that's going to make change that's lasting. So it's not like tomorrow you're going to wake up and say, "Oh, okay we're going to be a content marketing organization." You can do that by outsourcing it, but you can't make that change internally very, very quickly.

Chris: Right. Yeah, that make's total sense. Exactly what you said is getting people to think a little bit differently about how they have to make content, what they need, and how that content fits together. A problem that I had experienced when I worked directly in the industry was, I had bucket loads of content. But when I put it all together and said, 'How can I make campaign out of this?' every piece was made with seemingly a different purpose, even though they are going to the same market. So there was no continuity of the story of what we were trying to do. All I want to do for people is help them think, "If we're going to make things, let's make things that tell a story from A to Z," rather than, "Oh, we need that because someone had a problem and that would answer that question," and so on.

Hamid: You got it.

Chris: That's it. It's all about goals and planning. Did you come across any misperceptions about content marketing?

Hamid: Yeah. I'll tell you a couple of misperceptions. We at The Linus Group really have a fairly open aperture for what we mean by content. Content can live

anywhere. But when we say content marketing, people think that we're just limiting it to technical content. So a lot of the misperceptions are, "Okay, we're going to do content marketing, so let's go out there and carpet bomb the industry with technical content." You see this on Twitter feeds where they're basically regurgitating technical information that comes out, or just focusing on webinars that are just technical.

Again, going back to the analogy of an engine, what happens in that situation where you fall into that trap of the technical content, you're thinking that your putting a lot of educational content out there. So again, going back to that concept of the engine, you've got the engine now and you've got the fuel. You've got one foot on the gas but you're not in gear. You don't have a vector. You're not moving forward. You're just sitting there revving idly. That becomes the problem with equating technical content with content marketing.

Chris: Right. Any place where you see companies fall down in the process where some educational preparation might help them out in advance?

Hamid: Yeah. Again, just continuing on with that is, let's say that a company thinks or has adopted or has even committed to doing a more content-centric marketing effort. Typically, what we see is that they are re-purposing a lot of educational content and just putting it out there. The thing that companies need to do is to come up with leadership content which is at the front end of the funnel, which is that provocative content that really makes the company stand out. Interestingly, it's the best demonstration of the company's brand. That leadership content is philosophically the same as brand. You're just acting it instead of saying it or showing it.

I think actions really speaks so much louder than words. We have like three or four touchstones here at The Linus Group, like axioms that we live by, philosophies that we live by. One of them is, "Your brand isn't what you say. Your brand is what you do. So show, don't tell. Demonstrate, don't tout." How can we invite our customers into an experience of a brand rather than having us going out and saying it? I think that's a really critical part of content marketing. Because otherwise, it just becomes just more noise, just more educational noise. Again, an engine sitting on the racetrack idling.

We're burning a lot of gas but idling. That's the biggest mistake that I see with marketing in general or content marketing specifically.

Chris: I think customers, or scientists, don't want to read educational things all day long. I mean, every person, scientist or not, wants to be entertained a little bit or wants to be challenged. So companies could think of themselves more like publishers and ask, "What can we put around our educational content that will actually draw an audience to us?"

Hamid: Totally.

Chris: Any trends that you see about how people are doing things differently? Or new ways of doing content that weren't in your book when you wrote it?

Hamid: Sure. I mean, when I wrote my book. Well, you have to remember that when I wrote my book, it was a year before it actually even got published.

Chris: Right.

Hamid: So right at that time is when it was this dawn of being able to have this personal connections with audiences. The trend that I actually see isn't necessarily on how companies are doing marketing. The trend that I see is in how scientists and other technical audience are consuming information. That's changed so dramatically and so fundamentally in the last four years since I wrote my book. It really begs the question of how we're going to move forward. I'll just piggyback right off to that where we were just talking about before.

What you just said was really critical. Scientist don't want to just read educational content all day. Take that one step further. The number of peer review publications in the biomedical space alone grows at 5% content annual growth rate, which means that in the last 20 years it's doubled. If that same trajectory of growth continues, a typical scientist working in any typical niche that they were working in is already overwhelmed on day one with how much peer reviewed content they have to keep track of. So do you think that they're going to have any place in their mind to give attention to your Twitter feed, for example? Just staying abreast of the scientific publications is enough of a full time job.

So this idea of content marketing really just bombarding them with more and more interesting or useful facts or factoids, it's just going to shut them down even further from this content barrage that's been created. I read a statistic somewhere. I can't really substantiate but it was so overwhelmingly shocking. That's amazing, they said something like "The overall content on the Internet doubles something like every 72 hours." I mean, think about that.

Chris: Well, yeah.

Hamid: Right? I mean, most of the pictures of my kitty or what I ate for dinner or whatever, it is on Facebook. But still, the amount of content that we're generating is so phenomenal that we need to now put enough backbone on that content, enough vector on that content so that our race car isn't just sitting on the track idling. It is to be moving at a hundreds of miles an hour. That's the piece that requires a company to really be brave and to assert leadership in the marketplace.

I really think that that's the trend. So the way to do that, the other trend that I'll talk about just very quickly is there is something real to this whole storytelling thing. You mentioned the word early on in our conversation and I really want to stress just how important that is, Chris, that the information that gets passed through is so much more viscerally felt when it's done through a story. You can pack a story with the right kinds of emotion and you can actually nudge people the right way in order to influence the way that they're maybe tending to behave. It is so powerful. So we focus a lot on storytelling with respect to content as well. But again, it's another instance of show, don't tell, and it's really powerful.

Chris: Yeah. I think maybe as marketers in the scientific space, we think of storytelling as lightweight or maybe it's a trend. But in the same way, since you mentioned emotion and there's scientific evidence that individuals who have brain injuries that impair their emotions have trouble making decisions, there's also a science around storytelling, right? If I understand it right, one of the things is when you read a story, you put yourself into it. You identify with somebody in that story. That's why it resonates, so you are experiencing what they experience. What better way to reach your customer than to create an experience around them with a story.

Hamid: You bet. Okay, so let's actually unpack the idea of storytelling. There's so much neuroscience being built around storytelling right now. But think about this

in this way. The human brain has evolved with stories at its core. I mean, from millions of years, how information has been passed from generations to generation, from father to son or from mother to child or from generations to generations, from tribe to tribe, from countries to countries, it's all been done through parable. Think of the most ancient stories that you know. I don't know if you're religious, and it doesn't matter whether you're religious or not.

The way that information get passed all through parable, through story. It's because it's so powerful, it allows us to situate ourselves within, exactly as you said. Within the characters in that story, who do I identify with? What am I learning from this? It cuts right through the neo-frontal cortex and it goes deep inside the limbic brain which is really where decisions get made anyway. So it's a really fantastic tool that we can use in order to get a point across that just bypasses all of that hyper-vigilant neo-frontal cortex that just wants information to chew on but doesn't make any decision based on it. Again, another parallel of a race car sitting on a track idling is the neo-frontal cortex and its ability to just chew through information but not really make a decision or move a particular system forward.

Chris: Right. When you talk about the history and evolution of humans and storytelling it brought to mind, if you condense all of time in the universe down to a year and then humans show up in the last few seconds. So in the analogy of storytelling, if we compress the evolution of humans into a year, most communication would have been verbal storytelling until the last few seconds. I mean, writing or the ability to be writing - pretty darn new.

Hamid: Right.

Chris: Regardless of how much you see it every day on our Facebook stream, writing is a new invention.

Hamid: Yeah, absolutely.

Chris: Our brains haven't fully adapted to that.

Hamid: You're totally right, Chris. I think part of what's even more interesting is that even with all that writing and all that Facebook and everything, what we remember are the movies that we see or the TV shows that we watched. We don't really remember the posts that people make. Have you ever thought why we keep

scrolling to the past on Facebook and on Twitter? What are we looking for? Why do we keep scrolling? Is it just to pass the time?

Chris: No. You're looking for something that moves you. That's what I'm doing. I'm looking at what's interesting. Not that one, not that one, there's one. You're always hoping, that's why you check back.

Hamid: Exactly.

Chris: You go, "Is there anything new?"

Hamid: Right. You know, even taking that further. I have friends and relatives and some client contacts on my Facebook, on my personal Facebook page. But what I'm doing is I'm actually building a story about them through time too. You know, "Oh, so and so is visiting their grandchild in Ohio. I wonder how their story of their live is changing because there is now this grandchild." We're building these narratives around the people that are around us and they're giving us all the ingredients, and brands can do exactly the same thing. We can give our audiences all the ingredients to build a narrative around our brand in which they are essential character. That is fantastic. That is so powerful.

Chris: Nice. Yeah. I can't say enough about storytelling. I don't have anything to add to that, but I really love what you said there about essentially writing a brand biography and including all your friends.

Hamid: Yeah.

Chris: Now, I'm going to shift back a little bit to the book and talk about creative. You had a nice example in there. I'd love to get your view on the creative part because that's something I don't really think about at all. You gave an example of an ad with a cheetah in it. Of course, the intent of the ad is... I didn't see which one it is, but of course you're trying to imply speed.

Hamid: Yeah.

Chris: But you describe three creative approaches that just don't get the job done. So tell me what those are and what are your approaches to creating advertising or messaging that works well.

Hamid: Sure. So the three types of ads that we have seen, and let's actually talk about creative generally, not just ads, right?

Chris: Sure. Yeah.

Hamid: So basically, what is the intention of creative? What is it meant to do in communications? It is supposed to open the door to that emotionality of the message. Because otherwise, if people acted in a completely rational way, then you all you would have to do is give them data and they would make the right assertion. If that were the case, if the world truly went around that way, then you wouldn't have scientists fighting over what the data mean all the time. Those fights are happening every single day within the contexts of science. So there's clearly human gut intuition or shooting to believe something even when the data are in front of you. That's really moving the science forward. It's actually serving science to have these arguments and these disagreements and these factions because you're generating multiple instance of what could be true, and then ultimately the truth will prevail.

The same thing happens in advertising or in any kind of communication. The liberty that we have as science marketers is to really bring that emotionality in with the conversation that we are trying to have with our audiences. So the one kind of creative that doesn't work is just straight up feature-benefit, very robot-like delivery of the value proposition. It doesn't gets anybody's attention, people don't care.

The other one is hyperbole. Again, scientists are highly sensitive to hyperbole. By that, I mean using words that you can't really quantify like quality, highest quality. What does that mean? Or the same or just simply better. What does that mean? So hyperbole doesn't really work. Unparalleled is my favorite hyperbole word that I just cringe every time I see or hear it.

Chris: Do you want to know mine?

Hamid: What?

Chris: The most demanding application.

Hamid: Oh, my God. Yeah, there you go. Yeah, absolutely. That's hyperbole. Just completely hyperbolic, and so that also tends to fall flat. Then the third is, so you mentioned the cheetah example, just facile metaphors. Flexibility, so you show a Swiss-army knife. Or customization, you show a lot of different ice cream flavors. Speed, cheetah. Those are pretty facile. What happens in the minds of the audience is they actually get it, they get the joke. They understand that cheetah has to do with speed. But they dismiss it and it brings the brand value down as being not sophisticated enough to tell a better story. That's what happens in that situation. Actually, even though the message get across, they don't internalize it.

So the way we think about it is, again, circling right back to what we were talking about before is you write a brand narrative and you write your audience as the central characters right in there. So metaphor or borrowed interest actually works and it works really, really well. But you tell a story around why this borrowed interest is actually of critical importance to what the scientist is thinking about.

So we recently launched the campaign where we equated a particular scientific technique to a particular art. We essentially admit it that this is borrowed interest, but we said, "This is why this is borrowed interest and it's important." That engages the audience a lot more and they want to know where the mind seeks patterns. So they want to know where there's similarity or where there is a difference. So you're engaging them in much more of a strong way than basically just delivering the cheetah ad and saying, "Here, it's fast. Believe us, it's fast." That just falls flat.

Chris: Right. Yeah, there's just no emotion in there if it's obvious but it doesn't touch you like, "Okay sure, what else?"

Hamid: Exactly.

Chris: All right. The last thing I want to talk about is metrics. You mentioned that you think the best measure of campaign performance, and I'm sure everybody struggles with this, is the sum value of opportunities created. Talk a little bit about why you think that.

Hamid: Sure, absolutely. The reason why we choose opportunity as a starting place of what we believe marketing responsibility is. So first of all, in many

organizations, there's a sales function as well. Many organizations have sales people who really carry the quota at the end of the day. The question is, the holy grail of marketing is how many of those sales we directly generated on behalf of the company and how many that we indirectly move forward on behalf of the company. So those have to be accounted for. Both of those have to be accounted for, and you can account for them. I know companies in our space that do this very, very well where they say, "Because of our activities, we generated $50 million in sales but we also influenced another $150 million in sales through these particular touch points."

Any kind of metrics approach can only happen if you're working from a framework. So you need to develop that framework upfront and early in your strategy. You need to put numbers behind it upfront and early in your strategy, and then you benchmark your performance based on those numbers. You can see then where you are exceeding and where you're falling short, and then you put more or less effort in all of those aspects of the funnel in order to drive the ultimate end goal. The reason why we decide opportunity as being the to key measure for marketing or we pause at that opportunity is to be able to give marketing enough leeway to generate what is completely in its domain and not be responsible for something that's outside of its domain, i.e. sales, but also take an active role in being part of the revenue conversation.

So opportunity to us is really the good stopping point for where marketing stops taking the lead and then sales starts taking the lead in taking those opportunities to close. But marketing still has a responsibility in there. So it's a matter of who takes the lead and who supports. So up to opportunity sales still has responsibility as well. For example, many sales people go to trade shows. They're educating, they're provoking, they're educating, they're bringing people in, they're nurturing them. Those are all marketing functions. In that situation, I would posit that the sales person is acting as a channel for marketing. But once that opportunity is ripe and nurtured and ready to go, then sales takes the leading role and marketing then takes the supporting role by providing all the right content and really supporting sales and enabling sales to win.

I always say that marketing has two roles when it comes to sales. You got to get the rep to the door and you have to arm the rep to win. That's it. That's my rallying

cry for marketing when it comes to sales enablement. Get the rep to the door, arm them to win. I say this in many organizations and it seems to crystallize really how marketing is supposed to act vis-a-vis sales and opportunity really becomes that pivot point. So now, opportunity needs to be defined for every single company. It's a conversation between marketing and sales, "What does an opportunity mean? What does it look like?" Because otherwise, what you get is this age old discussion where marketing generates hundreds of leads and sales thinks they're all garbage. That's just waste. That conversation really needs to end.

Chris: Yeah. So I really like that. I mean, it seems like a nice balancing point. It seems like a place to have that conversation around what an opportunity is and stop arguing about leads. I like your way of describing how in the early parts of the funnel, sales has a role but marketing leads, and then later parts, sales leads marketing supports. I really like that. One thing we didn't talk about today, and I just use this as a wrap around the whole conversation. But what really helps me when I look into your book, one phrase stood out. That was marketing's role. Because we commonly think of marketing like "Get the word out. Let people know what we have" whatever that is. But really, to think about marketing, their job is shaping the market. So it's not telling people who were looking for something, what you have. It's getting more people to think that what you have might work.

Hamid: Yeah.

Chris: I just really like that. So that was like the key takeaway for me, it's the role of shaping the market. So, it's not a telling. It's creating an environment.

Hamid: Totally.

Chris: So I really like that.

Hamid: Yeah, I know. Absolutely. I mean, you actually said it much more eloquently than I ever have. So that's precisely it. It's that marketing needs to generate. Marketing's responsibility is to create a market. Just because people are out there doing, I don't know, electrophoresis, doesn't mean that you have an electrophoresis offering that you already have a market. You still have that burden of generating or creating your market. The other piece is, marketing, a lot of times, sometimes products aren't awesome when they're first coming out of R&D or

whatever. Marketing's job is to find a segment of audiences for whom this product, in its current manifestation, is awesome.

Chris: Yeah.

Hamid: Because otherwise marketing is just waiting for R&D to develop the perfect product, which may or may not ever happen.

Chris: Yeah. I think in most cases, it doesn't. Right?

Hamid: Sure. It's too much pressure on R&D, and it's honestly too much pressure on R&D. But there are some sub-segment of people out there for whom this particular product in its current specification or manifestation is awesome. Our job is to go and find them and generate that market, that environment that you just talked about.

Chris: Right. The other way I'd like to say is instead of lead generation, we're trying to do need generation.

Hamid: Oh, I love that. I love it. You're dead-on there.

Chris: Well, I have really enjoyed this conversation. I want to end with just one more question. Because honestly, we've known each other for maybe eight or nine years now.

Hamid: Yeah.

Chris: I want to know about the other side of Hamid Ghanadan. What do you do for fun?

Hamid: Well, I try to balance everything out. For me, life is a balance. I like to do things with my hand. I like to spend time with my family. I like to take care of my body. I like to take care of my brain. I'm trying to be involved with my community which is more of a spiritual community. But just generally speaking, I think just a variety of things is really good for us. It's interesting. We're all very busy today, right? Everyone's really, really busy today. It's almost as if that becomes a badge of honor, like, "I'm too busy. I'm so busy." Right? But I've also heard this in executive quarters where they look at the person who's too busy as someone who is

ineffective in managing their life. So I really took that as an alarm bell and thought, "Okay, how do I define my life in general?"

So what I like to do for fun, for example, is I like to bake bread because it's a form of biochemistry, but it's also something that you do with your hands. It's delicious and it brings your family together because, "Dad baked bread." So everyone sits around on a Sunday morning and dives into this beautiful, hopefully beautiful, hopefully delicious loaf of bread and slaps butter on it or Nutella or whatever. That to me is really a central part what brings me a lot of joy. It's also something that I do with my hands so it's like this act of creating something and that is just joy. It has nothing to do with marketing. It has nothing to do with Facebook. It has nothing to do with anything.

Chris: Yeah.

Hamid: It brings us all together. Hopefully, it's healthy for you too.

Chris: Well, if you start talking about food, you'll always get my attention. I'm going to wrap up this podcast by just thanking you for demonstrating brilliantly the power of storytelling with your closing little anecdote there. Because I'm sitting down the table busting open that steamy hot bread right now.

Hamid: Absolutely. You see, you're invited to my table. We're doing this together now. You are a character in my story.

Chris: Yes.

Hamid: For real, Chris, you are always invited anytime.

Chris: Well, thank you. The same goes for you.

Hamid: Thanks, Chris. It's great to talk to you.

Chris: Thank you very much, Hamid Ghanadan.

Hamid: Take care.

The Next Golden Age of Audio

There is no better way to grow an engaged audience of loyal brand advocates than through a podcast. But getting started might seem a bit daunting. I know how you feel. There's a lot to learn.

The good news is you don't have to do it alone. I've been creating podcasts and <u>audio stories</u> since 2014 and I'm ready to help you set up for recording and handle all of the editing and post production. It's easy.

1. [Schedule a call.](#)

2. We'll develop a clear strategy.

3. Start growing your audience.