

# BUILDING THE FUTURE TOGETHER



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**EACH YEAR, MARKETERS** from around the world make significant investments in launching new brands, products and services, sometimes even launching them in new categories. Each year, there are far more examples of launch failures than successes. And of the ones that succeed in and around launch, there are even fewer examples of those successes being sustained or bettered over time. Increasingly, the difference between marketing failure and long-lasting success has less to do with the superior quality of one product or service over another, though poor quality can be a factor, and more to do with a marketer's ability to inspire others to participate in writing their future.

This shift from a goods and services based economy, where a brand's output mattered most, to a participation-based economy, where the input of the audience matters most, demands that marketers become more outward facing and collaborative in their approach. Versus thinking only about what a brand is building or the story it wants to tell, they also have to think about what they are building together and the story their audience wants to pass along. Enduring successes are no longer the result of legacy authors independently writing their story the way they want it remembered. They are the result of what legacy assemblers are actively taking away and passionately carrying on.

To help marketers succeed in this modern context—including helping them to launch, sustain and grow through participating in the participation economy—our strategy team created the Legacy Lab. Beginning in 2012, this multigenerational, cross-cultural, ongoing study examines the different aspects of legacy for people consuming in today’s modern world: authoring lasting legacies that matter, assembling legacies that stay vital and creating artifacts that give the past a present and future. Currently, our learning reflects the input of more than 900 social media followers, in addition to more than 400 survey respondents and 60 one-on-one interviews, from more than 20 countries.

Whereas it is common practice for marketers to have embraced the notion that brands need their influencers to help launch further, our study revealed that when it comes to launching brands with lasting legacies, there is more than one assembler type that needs to be considered. In fact, there are three unique types: capturers, continuers and interpreters. Capturers save and share stories. They perpetuate branded content. Continuers extend and elevate stories. They actively contribute to creating a brand’s content. And interpreters reinvent and rewrite stories. They expand and help express brands in new ways. What follows is how these three types are now manifesting.

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## ASSEMBLER TYPES



USC Shoah  
Foundation

### 1 Legacy Capturers

With the goal of launching an idea farther, to move from being noticed to remembered and loved for generations to come, marketers must first engage with capturers. This type of assembler plays a key role in preserving a brand’s story and meaning—so that the roots of the original idea remain strong. Capturers can be internal and external. So, if a brand’s founder(s) represent the person(s) authoring a brand’s story, then all the makers and marketers who are a part of carrying that story forward represent its capturers. And the consumers who have been drawn to a brand, and want to carry its origin forward—sharing with friends, family, community—also represent its capturers.

In 1994, Steven Spielberg founded and launched the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation. Shoah is a non-profit founded to record testimony of survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust. In its first five years, the Foundation archived 52,000 interviews, in 56 countries, in 32 languages. The team that comprised Shoah, staff and supporters, were its legacy capturers. In 2005, when the University of Southern California agreed to oversee the Foundation and agreed to protect the archive in perpetuity, they became vital capturers of its legacy. And all those external to the Foundation who consume, teach and/or share the video testimonies are also legacy capturers.

Of all the assembler types, capturers are the ones most marketers intuitively consider in building their brand. That said, they commonly make the mistake of believing that just because they built it, capturers will come. In the new economy, legacy capturers need to be properly recruited, educated, recognized, rewarded and cared for. Legacy authors need to tell and retell their story to keep it alive. Authors need to provide content and tools for capturers to share. And origin stories need to be told in meaningful ways, so capturers are not just hearing history but learning about it and loving it. Capturers need to find themselves in origin stories so they can participate in them.



## 2 Legacy Continuers

With the goal of making a lasting mark, marketers must also connect with continuing assemblers. This type of assembler plays a key role in championing and furthering a brand's ambition to grow vital, sustainable roots. They include any person(s) who contributes a new page or chapter to the legacy story already in progress. Like capturers, continuers can be found internally and externally. Though, more times than not, continuers come from within. They include C-level leaders with the vision, authority and resources not to let a brand's legacy grow old. They include project teams and individuals with the entrepreneurial spirit, drive and talent to see the future and to realize it.

In 2012, Google launched Project Re: Brief. Google had a history of digital innovation. The brand observed that digital ads, placed in its space, were mostly created in traditional ways. As a result, the Google team took on the challenge of taking some very famous television ads from the '60s and '70s and innovating them to show what was now possible. For Coca-Cola's "Hilltop" ad, Google utilized digital technology to turn a wish to buy the world a Coke into a reality. People on opposite sides of the world could now buy and connect over a Coke like they wanted to but never could before. Continuers at Google added to the brand's legacy not by repeating the past but by building on it.

Of the assembler types, continuers are the ones marketers typically see as highly influential and, while not in abundant supply, as still within reach. On a continuum, marketers should expect to connect with a higher volume of capturers and fewer, albeit more critical to ongoing relevance, continuers. From our study, we learned that marketers sometimes make the mistake of confusing continuing and dismantling. When it comes to lasting legacy, the most valuable continuers are the ones who can distill the pieces worth building on, bringing the best of the past forward. In contrast to capturers who need content and tools, continuers need only to be empowered to create legacy.



## 3 Legacy Interpreters

With the goal of being not just a legacy brand in a category, but also a legendary brand in culture, marketers must work to create relationships with interpreters. This type of assembler plays a key role in adopting and reimagining a brand's defining contribution in new ways, in new spaces and for new audiences. Connecting with interpreters is about more than planting and nurturing roots. It is about growing the branches of an idea to have farther reach. Versus capturers and continuers, interpreters are almost always external to an organization. They include makers and marketers who implicitly or explicitly borrow from a brand's legacy to help write their own legacy.

In 2000, The Ritz-Carlton launched the Leadership Center. After becoming the first service brand to win two Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Awards, handed out by the President of the United States, The Ritz-Carlton created a university to teach its service approach. The Ritz-Carlton way, the "gold standard" for service excellence, has been taught to marketers in industries like finance, automotive, healthcare, retail and technology. Some famous brands, like Apple, talk openly about how their modern service innovations, like the Genius Bar, were inspired by The Ritz-Carlton. In turn, when others (re)interpret The Ritz-Carlton way, the brand's legend and legacy grow larger.

Of the assembler types, interpreters are the ones marketers see as aspirational but also out of reach and/or too costly to pursue as partners in legacy building. One common mistake that we observe is that some marketers feel the need to wait passively, to persist long enough for others to recognize their contributions before interpreting their brand. Another mistake is that some feel the need to buy versus earn their way into partnerships and associations at a gross expense. In actuality, what vital legacy brands need is to contribute something truly unique to the world and to provide special access to their rare contributions. Inspiration is the cost of their participation.

The world is filled with ideas that, while launched, have not traveled as far as they could or should have. As stated at the outset, the barrier to success is often less about the quality of a product or service and more about the inability of a legacy author to connect with an audience,

the inability of an author to create deep and ongoing participation. In the new economy, the most vital legacy brands are actively engaging capturers, continuers and interpreters in helping them to tell their stories. They are providing them with the content, tools, authority

and inspiration required to not just comprehend the past but to also participate in the present and help to assemble the future. ■

*Mark Miller is the Chief Strategy Officer at Team One, an ad agency with global expertise and proprietary research in premium categories and aspirational consumers.*