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It's people, not projects, which make Scott Berg proud. Recognized as a visionary thought leader and media guru, Berg adapted a stick-to-your-gut philosophy after taking a wrong turn on the career highway. His forward-thinking abilities keep him ahead of the curve, and his capacity to reinvent make others appear asleep at the wheel. Berg is both a voracious reader and a noise-making drummer whose core competencies will make your head spin.

Before spearheading HP's global digital strategy and global media, Berg oversaw Compaq Computer's worldwide direct and database marketing, as well as executed a number of advertising programs for Texas Commerce Bank. Berg carries worldwide notoriety for his professional excellence and received an impressive number of professional honors, including the Ad Age Media Mavens Award in 2005, and is a contributing author to *Kellogg on Advertising and Media*.

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Q How much of your success is accidental?

I don't believe in accidental success. As you go through your career, you make choices that lead you to where you are today. Some of those are the right choices, some I have made are the wrong choices. But I don't believe I've accidentally gotten here. I take a very serious look at where my career is at any given point in time, and the skill sets that I have and those that I don't have. How I can fill those in has led me to the choices I have made.

Q When did the course of your career become clear?

As soon as I got involved with database and direct marketing, I knew what I wanted to do. For me, orientation toward numbers and customers, and being able to communicate to them in the proper fashion is the thread that is consistent in my career. As long as I stayed on that path, I've been fine.

Q Which accomplishment are you most proud of?

To be able to work with and manage some of the most incredible people on the planet. What I get the biggest kick out of is when I push them to do something else and they go on to bigger and better things. I've got people that work for our competitors now. And I've got people that are directors of marketing for major companies. It's those things that make me the proudest. They make me feel like I've accomplished something. When I look back at my career, I think of the people and not the projects or campaigns.

Q What was your biggest setback?

Name the day. Every day I'm dealing with a setback of some sort. I did make a career move once that was the wrong one for me. I took a completely different direction, outside of marketing. Personally and professionally, it was very difficult and I can honestly say it was the worst year of my life. I exceeded all the requirements of the job, but I was absolutely miserable doing it. But, it taught me a big lesson – stick to your gut.

Q What key position most qualified you to be where you are now?

The head of direct and database marketing at Compaq. It taught me a disciplined approach. It taught me the numbers and how to market to customers in a completely different way. It set the basis for my understanding of how technology impacts the customer.

Q Do you see behavior patterns in the numbers?

I am at a point now where I can predict how much revenue we are going to bring in for every dollar that we spend. It's incredible insight that can help you with a number of things. One, it gives you credibility across the company. Two, it helps you predict your goals and your ability to meet those goals. And three, it's all about sales. As much as people talk about social marketing and PR, at the end of the day, it's all about selling stuff by utilizing different tactics and selling to your customer's needs.

Q Do you see your current position ever becoming obsolete?

If I'm still in this job in five years, I would be very disappointed in myself. I hope my job becomes obsolete and I hope that I have to reinvent myself. Today, that's where I think the challenge of marketing for most professionals lies – how to reinvent yourself every 12-18 months, which is the life cycle for most jobs. If you don't reinvent yourself, you're going to be on the short end of the stick and far behind everybody else.

Q What is your best advice to students today?

Between the ages of 22 and 30, you better learn as much as you possibly can. Get as much education and learn as much about technology as you can, then apply it. If you do that all before the age of 30, you'll be so valuable in the marketplace that your price will rise far above anybody else.

Q What are the future challenges in your marketplace?

Change is occurring so fast that the biggest challenge all of us face is the unknown. The biggest challenges today are staying relevant to the customer, meeting the customer's needs and being able to continually drive sales at a lower cost.

Q Where do you see traditional marketing in three years?

I don't even know what the definition of traditional marketing is anymore. What we have seen over the last three to five years has been a substantial change in the media mix. The print industry is going down. The reason for that is the results haven't been there. Moving forward, I think you'll see more of the newspaper and print publications folding or reducing the amount of print. More will go to the Internet. I think search will become the killer application of the future.

Q How can social media be used effectively?

Companies need to look at social marketing from a couple fronts: One, it's not a fad; and two, how much revenue is generated off social marketing. We've opened up our website to online communities where customers can help themselves to third-party information. You end up with lower costs and a more informed consumer base. Answers to questions are being dealt with in a quicker way. It is probably our biggest area of growth. We see it from a cost-reduction and revenue-enhancement perspective.

Q Is your job becoming more numbers-focused?

The language of business is numbers. For so long, Marketing didn't speak that language. It has been about branding and brand appeal. That's the reason I think most marketing failed. In my opinion, everything that surrounds marketing needs to be numbers-driven. If you can't measure it, why are you doing it? It should either decrease costs or increase revenue. It has to be one of those two things.

Q Which media do you primarily use to get your information?

I'm a voracious reader. I get most of my information from two sources. One source is through RSS feeds from the Internet. Second, I read magazines. I like to consume as much content as possible. I spend a good two hours a day reading.

Q Which professionals do you most admire?

The people that I most admire are the guys that put together a 'rag-tag' campaign, and go to market with it and are highly successful. I also admire those that have been my teachers and my leaders. Those are the kind of people that I looked up to and still look up to today, because they took a chance on me when they really had no idea what they were getting into.

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Q What talent would you most like to have?

Patience.

Q Where does the inspiration for your best ideas occur?

From our employees. You know, there are a lot of great ideas at all levels of any company, especially a global company with 300,000 people. The ideas are massive everywhere, but it's going out and finding them.

Q What book are you reading now?

The Reagan Diaries by Ronald Reagan.

Q What book would you recommend to students?

All of the books by The Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University. They have one of the best marketing programs in the U.S. and their books are written by some of the top people in the field. For instance, *Kellogg on Marketing* by Alice Tybout, *Kellogg on Advertising and Media* by Bobby J. Calder and *Kellogg on Strategy* by David Dranove and Sonia Marciano.

Q What do you do in your spare time?

I don't have a lot of it, but I would say spending it with my family, sport shooting and playing the drums. I'm striving to be a drummer.

Q What helps you handle stress?

I don't have a problem with stress. I feed off of it. I think most times people crater under stress, for me, it's the challenge of doing the job.

Q What is your favorite interview question?

How do you choose your socks in the morning?

Berg