



Dancing on the Wings of ICARUS

I have always loved the story of Icarus. To refresh your memory of this great Greek myth, it starts with Icarus' father, Daedalus. A legendary architect and engineer, Daedalus worked in the service of good ol' King Minos on the island of Crete. Daedalus was the designer of the Labyrinth of the Minotaur that kept the half bull-half man imprisoned. Unfortunately for the king—and himself—Daedalus also helped Theseus decipher the maze, kill the Minotaur, and run away with King Minos' daughter.

Realizing a mad king was a bad deal, Daedalus had to figure out a way to get himself and his son Icarus out of Dodge (off the island). He knew that King Minos "controlled the land and sea." This left only one escape route, an option never dreamed of by anyone, an option of opportunity: the sky. In order to take advantage of this unique escape "niche," Daedalus had to think differently. He studied the birds, using his engineering skills to bend the gift of flight to meet his needs, and thus created wings of feather and wax. The tools he built brought the ability to take advantage of the niche of the sky.

He took Icarus aside and taught him how to fly...with only two rules:

- Don't fly too close to the sea. The dampness from the ocean will weigh down the wings. How amazing it is that the ancient Greeks were fully aware of the properties of loft!
- Don't fly too close to the sun. Its beauty is enticing, but its heat will melt the wax that holds the wings together.

ONLY TWO SIMPLE RULES; yet, Icarus in his joy of flight could not resist the lure of the sun. The rest is history, or at least



mythical. His wax wings melt and Icarus plunges to his death in the sea.

The story teaches two cornerstones in the CREATIVE VENTURES lexicon:

- There are no niches without leverage available. As the sky appears to Daedalus, the client niches should appear to you.
- Ideas can be "bent" to match the unique characteristics of any market. Daedalus bends his design to match the flight of birds. Trends that create value are occurring at a staggering rate, many from cutting edge ideas. With just a little modification, or BENDING, many trends will benefit your business.

Companies are always seeking to (1) find new niches or (2) leverage existing niches to create additional market share.

Frito Lay dominates the chip aisle, but would love to find a way to get into the cracker aisle. Nabisco dominates the cracker aisle, but would love to find a way to get into the chip aisle. Each is looking for penetration into a similar, but new

niche. Each is dedicating resources to make that happen. Both companies know that most opportunities are created by making something happen. It just takes the right strategic idea.

Starbucks has done a great job with leverage. They have taken their very loyal market from coffee, to tea, to iced dessert drinks. They have created custom mixed music CD's. They have acted as a producer for short films and videos. They are now launching a strong push into the book niche with a program to promote best-selling author Mitch Albom's new book *For One More Day*. They are starting a new nationwide reading group when they host their first BOOK BREAK at twenty-five Starbucks across America. Albom will make appearances at those stores, where his book will be available for purchase. How great is this? A latte, a pastry and a reason for conversation with fellow readers!

Here is a simple exercise. List all of your current markets. Each is really a niche that

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your business services. You have to “see” in this exercise, so use a flip chart or whiteboard to draw pictures. Now, take a look at where these niches have touch points. If you are a tennis club and you have a fitness center, look at where the fitness programs touch the tennis players. Do your junior players work on their fitness as well as their shot making skills? Can you leverage their parents to get involved in fitness as well as playing tennis? These are touch points and touch points mean potential leverage. Think of it as a “mapping” exercise. It will give you and your team some directional thinking.

Now look at the idea of BENDING. Bending involves being aware of successful trends that are occurring in the broader business world. These trends have incredible value, value that crosses what many consider to be unconnected businesses. Trends in food and beverage have value in technology. Trends in health care have value in retail. All you have to do is know how to BEND.

Danny Meyer’s Union Square Hospitality Group, which operates 5 of the top restaurants in New York City, is on the cutting edge of customer service, and his ideas (found in his new book *Setting The Table*) are shaping a new approach to the way customer relationships are developed and nurtured.

Meyer believes the concept that service is a technical skill, while hospitality is the emotional connection that creates a loyal customer. Hospitality easily can be BENT to fit any industry, because at the core of any business is the connection between the provider and the customer. Find methods to connect on an emotional level and you create relationships. Relationships build success.

In short, a restaurant concept can fit a computer sales force when BENT just right. Everyone from BMW to Nikon, from Apple Computers to Viking Kitchen Appliances has BENT education to meet opportunity. Teach people to use your products, and you marry them to long-term brand commitment.

BENDING is a method of critical thinking about opportunity positioning. It is available to everyone who is paying attention and is a critical strategic initiative for our clients.

Singer-songwriter Vance Gilbert has a

very different look at the story of wings of feather and wax in his song *Icarus at Night*. In Gilbert’s beautiful song, Icarus survives his crash into the sea and returns to his flying, but only at night. At night he can feel safe; he can fly without anyone thinking him foolish for trying something that almost killed him.

**I only go out at night.
That’s when no one else
can see me being foolish
And wishing for just
ONE MORE CHANCE
To do it all again.**

All new ideas are filled with risk, and a new niche that does not pan out does not mean you stop looking and remain only within your existing walls. Those walls will never allow you to reach your potential. Trying an idea from another industry that does not work doesn’t mean you stop exploring ideas. Don’t end up like a night-bound Icarus. ☺☺

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