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The little brand that could, and the big brands that shouldn't

Hugh MacLeod, of the *Gaping Void* blog (www.gapingvoid.com), wrote of the 'global microbrand'. It's a concept I am familiar with, though I did not use that term back in 2001 when I was asked to present a paper on online branding in Seoul. However, Hugh's use of the term and his timing are poignant, particularly in the age of blogs. He wrote in October 2005:

> [A global microbrand is a] small, tiny brand, that "sells" all over the world.
>
> The Global Microbrand is nothing new; they've existed for a while, long before the internet was invented. Imagine a well-known author or painter, selling his work all over the world. Or a small whisky distillery in Scotland. Or a small cheese maker in rural France, whose produce is exported to Paris, London, Tokyo etc. Ditto with a violin maker in Italy. A classical guitar maker in Spain. Or a small English firm making $50,000 shotguns.
>
> With the internet, of course, a global microbrand is easier to create than ever before. A commercial sign maker in New England. Or a sheet metal entrepreneur in the U.K.
>
> And with the advent of blogs this was no longer just limited to people who

made products. We saw that any service professional with a bit of talent and something to say could spread their message far and wide beyond their immediate client base and local market, without needing a high-profile name or the goodwill of the mainstream media. People like Jennifer Rice, Johnnie Moore and Evelyn Rodriguez come to mind.

But it's not just limited to cottage industries. The great Tom Peters talks about "Brand You", a personal brand that transcends your organisation or job description. The grand-daddy of this space is probably Robert Scoble, who may work full-time for Microsoft, but whose brand is much, much larger than any job description they could give him; that's worth far more than anything they're ever likely to pay him.

Once I created my own fledgling global microbrand (i.e. via this weblog) I started helping other people do the same. A bespoke Savile Row tailor. A Master Jeweler. A small vinyard [*sic*] in South Africa. It was something I really wanted to know about. It was professionally the most compelling idea I had ever come come across. I was hooked.

Around the same time, my Medinge Group think-tank colleague Stanley Moss and I decided that the next paper we should tackle should be on online branding. In March, I went ahead and wrote it myself—not because I didn't want to collaborate, but I had so many thoughts that I needed to get them out, in a semi-academic way. It was really the sequel to my 2001 Seoul paper, updated in the age of *Snakes on a Plane* and blog memes—phrases and word-bits that seem to travel across blogs and gaining huge popularity among mainstream audiences.

I had to revisit the ideas about what branding is, and it may be useful here to repeat them. Branding, as I define it, is:

> the methods in which the organization communicates, symbolizes and differentiates itself to all of its audiences.

The word *branding* has altered in meaning, even amongst the experts such as Wally Olins, when I asked him about it in 2000. Traditionally, the 'brand' was part of 'identity', which may be defined as:

> the explicit management of all the ways in which the organization presents itself through experiences and perceptions to all of its audiences.

The brand was merely the part of this management that was directed at a consumer, or an audience member, external to the organization.

However, perhaps through media coverage and Naomi Klein's seminal *No Logo,* which questioned the ethics behind branding, the word brand entered the vernacular. At the same time, the branding model evolved somewhat: Wally began touting the brand as an 'attitude' that described the organization, and branding consultants became a little more obsessed with the message being sent to consumers, perhaps in the wake of *No Logo*. We—as in the Medinge Group—wrote *Beyond Branding* as almost a response to *No Logo*, confirming that while Klein's concerns were legitimate, the methods of branding could be used to do good. One reviewer called us a bunch of 'recovering marketers'.

It, therefore, became important to make sure that the vision of the organization took into account the message it would send to consumers as one of its earliest steps, and to make sure what was being communicated inside the organization was identical to what was being communicated outside. The word *brand* began taking on the meaning once given to identity.

This coincided with another development: the "mainstreaming" of the online world. With consumer input now being sought readily for things such as product development (e.g. online surveys became common and were thought of as a means through which the most current data about the market-place could be sought), and consumers themselves becoming powerful advocates for brands (spreading good news via emails, or indeed, bad news), there was less of a distinction between the marketing departments of organizations and the customers themselves.

Therefore, the branding model began looking quite different. Once, organizations could depend on training their staff to tow the official line, expressing the brand in the way dictated by head office. But consumers could not be managed in the same way. They needed to be incorporated into brand-communication decisions, either by (a) inspiring staff members and getting them to work so closely to consumers on the hope of "infectious enthusiasm", or (b) turning those consumers themselves into a de facto marketing department.

There are good examples of each. The former group is typified by companies in Nicholas Ind's *Living the Brand,* notably Patagonia. The sportswear company has staff that use its products, while consumers are prepared to talk up its goods. The latter group includes many of the networking services on the web, including LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com). Arguably, the initial growth of Yahoo! (first built while its founders were still at Stanford University), Google (which uses its user base to spread news of its new products), and Flickr (which is being found by web users frequenting blogs and similar services) could be credited to the second method.

Size does not matter in this internet world. One need not have huge capital to get noticed—Flickr itself was a perfect example of a small firm that has now become huge, because of a clever product offering: not only could you share photos, you could tag them. That little addition was genius. In March, when I wrote my new paper, Flickr had 158,000,000 hits on Google, while a search for "US Supreme Court" resulted in 37,400,000 hits. That had grown to 218,000,000 while the latter has fallen to 31,100,000 in early September.

Most people discovered Google, for instance, through referrals. (At the time of my 2001 paper, Google was not the household name it is today.) Blogger.com, the service that enables web users to maintain public online journals (web logs, or blogs), spread through its logo appearing on the blogs it hosted on the internet. Yet other brands remain online, and have done so for years, without influencing the public.

It may be easy to say that Amazon.com, for example, was so revolutionary that by being first-in-sector, it gained mainstream media coverage. That may be so, but there are other ventures that were firsts in their sector that never received that coverage—*Fashionbrat*, for example, was New Zealand's first online fashion magazine (from 1996), but has become forgotten beyond this author's own coverage. Even some of the first fashion magazines on the internet in Australia (*Marie Claire, Fashion Australia*) and the United States (*Fashion Internet*) never captured huge public attention and do not survive today. Something else must be at work.

I argued it was the way the successful brands worked, through a process of vision, research, exposition and image. It's the usual argument I would follow, after formally studying branding as part of my master's degree in the 1990s. Much of the success probably came from allowing something to take its own path, with CEOs willing to be open-minded about corporate directions. This "freedom" from a formal business or marketing plan is characteristic of successful online brands.

Flickr, after all, began not as a big photo-sharing service but an online game. Co-founder Stewart Butterfield, suffering from food poisoning, had a dream about a multi-player game 'built around sharing photographs.' The original Flickr site actually centred on instant messaging with some digital photography support. Early members were gamers and bloggers, with an interest in photography. Butterfield made use of Flickr's loose vision to emphasize the strength that was emerging from its user base: users who were conversing but setting the tone using digital photography in their instant-messaging.

That same looseness meant a certain level of experimentation, rather than formal research. Flickr noticed where its strengths were by letting users find their own feet and interests.

Flickr does partner with others to spread the word. But rather than through formal alliances, it does this by bringing its users into the fray. Users become the editors for sorting the photographs. In effect, organization and user are on the same side—an expression of the *One* principle espoused by Stefan Engeseth in his book of that name. Companies and people should never work on separate sides, he theorizes, but are in cohoots on everything from product development to marketing communications.

Flickr's strongest advocates were its users, and Yahoo!'s own interest came from an email from a 'Flickr fanatic in Bangalore, India'. That eventually led to a $30 million deal whereby Yahoo! acquired the fledgling internet company.

Flickr rose to 90th in Alexa, the internet ranking service, by March. It can be said to have a strong image, if measured in brand equity terms: it has ever-rising brand awareness, it is positively considered by its users, there is a great deal of loyalty to the service, and its perceived quality is high. The value of its proprietary brand assets—its trademark and intellectual property—may be considered to be high, given what Yahoo! had paid for the company.

While you see Yahoo! logos on Flickr, they are few in number. Similarly, Google rates mere mentions in Blogger. As the public has tired of the global macrobrands—if I may use that to contrast Hugh's term—these corporations have decided to not look too big. After all, Google upset people in 2006 by censoring results for Google.cn, the Red Chinese edition of its web site (to be discussed later), and by sending letters to media asking them not to use *Google* as a verb. It cast some doubt on the idea that Google's corporate motto was 'Do no evil,' as it steadily resembled a regular American corporation with each passing week and each new controversy.

Contrast that with when Yahoo! bought Egroups some years back—it promptly became Yahoo! Groups. Google acquisitions in earlier times became absorbed into Google (e.g. Google Groups). Yet people weren't necessarily happy with the idea that any one firm was dominating the internet: Firefox, the web browser, trades on the idea that rival Microsoft's Internet Explorer is too dominant.

Similarly, coComment (www.cocomment.com) has taken on a life of its own. Backed by Swiss Telecom, it is independent of it, especially brand-wise—and without any geographical indicators to show its national origins, it has become a worldwide service.

The idea is simple enough: a service that allows people to track the comments they have made on blogs and forums. If others have added to those threads, the user is able to see.

I had never expected to blog, much less become coComment's most prolific user. But quite early in the service's life, that is what I became, the first to surpass 1,000, then 2,000, then 3,000 comments on blogs. It indicated that I was spending too much time on the blogosphere.

But it wasn't me alone: thousands were signing up to coCo, as it became known among the *initiés*, and turning it into one of the powerful Web 2·0 presences and another global microbrand. Never mind it was still a relatively small team running things in Genève.

Thus, the global microbrand is not just a phenomenon of the mid-2000s, but something that was bound to emerge as a backlash to natural internet growth and mergers and acquisitions. No matter how big some of these folks get, they will try to look small, because big is seen as bad. Six Apart has plenty of services on the web for bloggers, but each has its own brand; it is something that Google and Yahoo! have learned they must follow. Ebay, too, has left Skype alone: it did not become EbayPhone. Former big companies have set such a bad example, especially when it comes to customer service, and in computing, where outsourcing was heavily criticized in the mid-2000s, small is beautiful.

The idea that big is bad was furthered no less than by Google, when it launched Google.cn at the beginning of the year. Yahoo! did its share, too, when Reporters without Borders alleged it provided the Chinese Politburo with data on journalist Li Zhi, who got either years for subversion. But Yahoo! lost the two-guys-in-a-garage image a long time ago, abandoning it in favour of being a regular, undifferentiated American firm. The fact this all came up around the same time did not ease fears about Google's decision.

In January, I got news that the US Congress would investigate whether Google's actions in Red China were legal. Reporters without Borders testified along with some of the big US technology firms in hearings that began February 16.

Testimony for the hearings from Lucie Morillon, the Washington representative for Reporters without Borders, included the following statements:

> Moreover, by harassing and tracking down cyberdissidents, the cyberpolice are forcing Internet users to resort to self-censorship. About 50 of them are currently in jail in China for expressing themselves freely on the Web by calling for free elections or promoting democracy. …
>
> We believe that these practices [Google's censorship, among the actions of Yahoo!, Cisco Systems, Microsoft, Fortinet and Secure Computing] violate international law and the right to freedom of expression as defined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was proclaimed by the United Nations when it was founded and which is meant to apply to everyone—business corporations included.
>
> Furthermore, such ethical failings on the part of American companies damage the image of the United States abroad. …
>
> The Internet is used in China to channel and influence public opinion, especially in support of nationalistic sentiments (see the "CRS report for Congress" of November 22, 2005). As the state media, it is also used to promote Communist Party propaganda and to undermine the countries' "enemies." Some Chinese media fuel anti-Americanism. Xinhua, the state news agency, distorts facts, blasts China's enemies (especially the United States and Japan), and supports the world's worst regimes through its treatment of international news. In addition to greater political openness and freedom of expressionfor the Chinese people, many assert that uncensored information in China would have significant international impact. …

> The future for online freedom of expression in China does not look good: China purchases the latest censorship technology from Western companies and has more resources than counter-censorship efforts in the United States.

I never heard much beyond that: the only news I located on the Reporters without Borders site was that Google.com, the uncensored edition, was blocked in Red China in the days leading up to the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre—an event that is still not officially talked about there.

The hypocrisy with Google is, on one hand, refusing to cooperate with the US Government when records were requested; while kowtowing to an unelected government on the other side of the Pacific Ocean with its wishes.

At CenSearchip (homer.informatics.indiana.edu/censearchip/), one can compare the search results given in Red China, and those in the United States. Checking for *Tiananmen Square*, for example, yields 37,200 results for Google China and 3,200,000 for regular Google. Sharon Hughes, who runs the *Changing World Views* blog (changingworldviews.blogspot.com), found that regular Google turned up 168,000 references to Jesus Christ in the images' section, versus 10 in Red China. These are just *images* of Christ we are talking about.

Remember that religion is, contrary to common belief, officially recognized in Red China, according to its own constitution. But it seems the normally soulless Politburo is concerned about someone whom a spirit-less Communist would consider died 2,000 years ago.

At the *if:book* blog (www.futureofthebook.org/blog), it was submitted that the internet is not so much a global network, but a virtual representation of the planet's nation states. It shatters some of the optimism in which the World Wide Web was founded, but it is a force that globalists—or those who support the idea of the web uniting all people as neighbours—need to be aware of:

As Jack Goldsmith and Timothy Wu explain in an excellent article in *Legal Affairs* (adapted from their forthcoming book *Who Controls the Internet?: Illusions of a Borderless World*), China, far from being the boxed-in exception to an otherwise borderless net, is actually just the uglier side of a global reality. The net has been mapped out geographically into "a collection of nation-state networks," each with its own politics, social mores, and consumer appetites. …

The case of Google, while by no means unique, serves well to illustrate how threadbare the illusion of the borderless world has become. The company's famous credo, "don't be evil," just doesn't hold up in the messy, complicated real world. "Choose the lesser evil" might be more appropriate.

As Ben Vershbow concluded at *if:book*:

Part of us desperately wanted to believe Google's silly slogans because they said something about the utopian promise of the net. But the net is part of the world, and the world is not so simple.

I am not so sure I agree, as regular people want the world to be simple, and there's evidence to suggest that with the web, more regular people are getting their way.

And if Google is no longer about "doing no evil", it may have then "jumped the shark". People might now move on to the next brand that helps them unite with the rest of the planet: the desire to network across borders, I believe, is a human trait, not just one of computer geeks. It's something I'll return to in a later chapter.

IT WAS A BAD YEAR FOR THE GOOGLE BRAND, despite it appearing in the top 10 in various polls. The most recent one, at the time of writing, was Interbrand's annual table on the Best Global Brands (published in *Business Week*), where Google was up 46 per cent. I did wonder about the metholodogy of the Interbrand model.

When Google sent legal letters to media informing them that the trade mark should not be used as a verb, there was more outrage. Google was, indeed, losing its differentiation, looking more like another big, mean American firm.

My warning: this was the first step to the brand becoming generic, and we should be careful to always capitalize it in writing.

Naturally, in speech, we now commonly use the word as meaning, 'to search for something using the Google search engine', and that that is part of everyday life in the opening decade of this century. No one can stop that.

I traced Google's coming of age—or loss of trade mark value—when Jennifer Lopez referred to it as a verb in *Maid in Manhattan* in 2002, and I imagine some intellectual property lawyers have been alert since then.

We can be informed of what Google considers correct usage—but with lawyers involved, that can often build resentment. Worse than losing your trade mark value and rights is all your brand equity, when you become just another corporation that doesn't live your brand. Get us on side, and we will help. Offend us, and we will not. Interbrand might rank Google up there, but I'm betting on a fall for the brand in 2007.

Gone is the company that had fun. At its first post-IPO investors' meeting, Google was so informal its chef wound up explaining the food on the menu—a move heavily criticized by the Wall Street establishment. Now, it presents the formal stuff, which is fine for that audience, but it doesn't gel with the brand when the rest of us hear about it.

When I see *New York Times* headlines saying Google is worried about its share price, then read the article and discover it's doing things to raise its revenues, then it sure reads like money first, culture last. In that newspaper in March, after its second analysts' day:

> Jordan Rohan, an analyst with RBC Capital Markets, said that Google's presentations were more polished and professional this year and that executives addressed the questions most in the minds of investors.
>
> "The company appears to have matured significantly since its first analyst day a year ago," Mr. Rohan said.

"Investors have been successful," Mr. Rohan said, "in communicating with the management they can't be this funky renegade company."

What it suggests to me: Google is a short-term buy, just like any other American company on Wall Street, that will spawn fewer innovations because its focus is no longer on the strong things that made it great to begin with. Interesting message to send, considering the next generation of investors are as cynical about finance's traditional messages just as much as advertising hype.

Long-term visions, not short-term pandering, built America.

In January, written probably before the Google.cn débâcle, Time Warner's *Business 2·0* published four scenarios for Google's future: Google is the media, Google is the internet, Google is dead and, in 2105, Google is God. The last one brings up interesting thoughts: the recording of all human consciousness, stored in servers. It's the realm of science fiction now, but it's not the first time someone has mentioned this. Somehow, I am not sure if Google will remain on top for it to become Godgle.

Hence, I doubt if I would enter the Red Chinese market with my products. There is some call for it, and we have had partner firms investigate the possibility for at least one of my businesses, but my heart is never in it. So would I cooperate with authorities of an unelected totalitarian dictatorship whose diplomats publicly insult me to disclose the names and other private information of my customers? Not on your life. If I were going in, I would check out the company closely, and convince myself that it had few governmental connections beyond the basic regulation that has to be done.

The more I think about it, the more I dislike these decisions to compromise your brand and your very essence for the sake of market entry.

The argument advanced by Google with Google.cn was that cooperating with the legal institutions of one nation was better than not providing your service to its nationals. It is also better for people to go to Google than to Baidu (which Google has invested in, and which also censors) or a state-controlled, Chinese-owned service. I believed this initially, buoyed by Google's goodwill. I even supported it, till I thought about it: what damage does that do to the brand when China is democratic because, history tells us, this is likely to happen? Would you like to be branded a collaborator?

Hypothetically, I would rather have the support of *all* my existing customers, who create enough of a groundswell that future free Chinese will opt for my service. They will be free, I am sure. Let them crave for our products now—in Google's case it had a reputation for justice. When freedom rings, be there for the people. Watch the queues like Moskva's McDonald's did when it first opened.

Red China's institutions are not legal, per se. The government is not elected. It fails the most basic requirement of membership in the United Nations—that the nation state be self-determined.

It might mean I will miss out on some dollars. But while I run this firm, I will have a clear conscience.

I HAD TO TAKE Norton Antivirus off my laptop years ago because it consumed so many resources. I have had horror stories dealing with McAfee because it failed to stick to its knitting and extended its brand into areas it had little core expertise in—and its technical support suff ered. It was not going to be the next Microsoft and never should have started on its acquisitions' path.

I know the world is getting crueller when it comes to computing, with more trojans, viruses and other potentially damaging things out there. But if there's a nice, compact program out there, I may well prefer that than any "all-in-one" suite that these companies are flogging. I would expect it to have a compact development team behind it that would answer my questions should things go wrong. That is another reason the open-source movement has gained so much momentum: there is usually a small development team who is passionate about its brand.

Microsoft, meanwhile, has not quite learned that, even if you hear the words *Bill Gates* a lot more often in connection with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The founder of Microsoft has taken more of a back seat in 2006, but the corporate branding ideas remain similar. Microsoft is old America: big is beautiful.

Microsoft launched its Windows Live OneCare mid-year, a security program, to build on its new branding scheme, promoting the Windows Live sub-brand. Connected to the next Windows, the branding might just all fit into place. But how good would the program be? McAfee may have faltered by not sticking to its knitting, but there were plenty of open-source anti-virus people out there.

Microsoft's product will survive initially because it has Bill's money behind it. And, I would guess that the people who will maintain Windows Live and its component services and products are the same folks who have been creating Windows security patches over the years, and they have been pretty good.

The difference is now their efforts are centralized and branded, and could give them a rallying-point and a source of pride. One would hope that the usual patches will still be offered to those not willing to fork out the c. $50 a year.

But ultimately, OneCare's success will depend on the user experience, including its tech support, and Microsoft has a lot to live up to. It has made some headway in being more consumer-friendly in appearance, but does that come with a restructured reality within the firm? And is it the time to be part of a monolithic brand? I would say 2006 and 2007 aren't the right times.

YOU DON'T have to be in the computing world to see this happening. In late August, Paramount Pictures announced it would end its working relationship with Tom Cruise's Cruise–Wagner Productions, with the chief of parent company Viacom, Sumner Redstone, referring to Cruise's off-screen behaviour as a cause for concern. Cruise jumped on a couch on *Oprah* during an interview, and professed his love for Katie Holmes, and had been fairly consistent in his promotion of Scientology during 2006.

Hollywood's trend toward smaller stars is no surprise: it has been bubbling under the surface for some time. A particularly good column in *The Australian* by Chris Ayres cited the end of an era beginning with the departure of now-Governor Schwarzenegger; Arnold Schwarzenegger, the actor, has always been slightly ahead of his time when it came to career planning. Three years on, his choice to turn to politics seems prudent—just as once upon a time, he decided to enter the movie business. And to think we ridiculed him, when he has been interested in politics for an awfully long time. The financial writing had been on the wall for some time.

Budgets were one reason in the high-profile dumping by Paramount of Tom Cruise. Movies were making less money and stars are demanding more of the cake. The eight-figure pay cheques of some were never going to be sustainable.

Tied in with the shift has been everything from *No Logo*, the criticism of monolithic brands, and the desire of the moviegoing audience for decent story-telling, not over-the-top special effects. *The Lord of the Rings* was the height of this; but at least Peter Jackson combined storytelling with his visual effects, and Jackson proved that big actor names doth not an Oscar winner make.

My friend David Patin put it well when we were chatting in Paris, before *The Fellowship of the Ring,* the first of the *Lord of the Rings*' trilogy, was released: 'Jackson picks actors whom you have seen, but you are not quite sure where. That draws you in.' (Hennes & Mauritz, the Swedish ready-to-wear label, could be argued as doing the same, with Kylie Minogue, Hélèna Christensen and Bridget Fonda, during times when their stars were slipping a tad.) Naomi Watts, Jackson's heroine in *King Kong,* fell into the same category, though admittedly the remakes of *The Ring* films in which she starred prior were higher-profile.

There was only so much visual stimulation that people were prepared to take—and a phoney cartoonish James Bond surfing a pressure wave in *Die Another Day* in 2002 was a step too far. At least the Harry Potter movies, thanks to their bases in J. K. Rowling's books, have a great storyline.

But this has also been an issue of personal branding. Any personal brand has to tie in with the mood of the times, the *Zeitgeist*; it cannot stay still. There, too, there has been a shift; if in commerce, organizational brands now need to appear homely, smaller and unified with the audience, then distancing yourself from everyday people is not a good strategy to take. And Mr Cruise did just that—sure, jump on couches—but to criticize actress Brooke Shields for her use of Paxil for post-partum depression, or to go on just a tad too much about Scientology, are steps that planted a divide between Cruise and audience. That audience ultimately included Redstone. (A similar criticism may be levelled at Mel Gibson with his anti-Semitic rants when booked for driving under the influence a few weeks before Cruise's dumping.)

These can be contrasted to the low-rent name of *Snakes on a Plane*, Samuel L. Jackson's own personable approach to the movie's promotion, and the first major movie that seems to have studio and blogosphere combined.

Survivors may include Bruce Willis, with his genius of appearing like the everyman, unless word of his contract perks gets out more. But somehow I doubt we will see the mega-stars team together to form a latter-day United Artists, away from the studio system. That would only serve to distance themselves more, unless, tied to its formation, they talk about studio pressure, and how the new firm will serve audiences first. There is always sympathy for the underdog. (Which is why second-tier celebrities could succeed with a latter-day United Artists.)

Thus, the next stage will likely be toward stronger stories with an almost clean acting state, as Hollywood builds up a bunch of actors that we will, in five to ten years' time, call our stars. Think of where Gene

Hackman was in *The French Connection*. Or, perhaps we should be casting our eyes to other movie-making centres, from Bollywood to Miramar, Wellington.

Thanks to Peter Jackson, a man who ignored various government and industry bodies telling him to go to heck, Miramar has been turned into a world-class movie production centre. By doing that, among other actions taken by various other film-makers, film is as big an industry as forestry in New Zealand now, in a country where earnings of NZ$2·6 billion is a lot for a four million population. This country owes him.

After all, New Zealand had its own academy awards, at which *The World's Fastest Indian* (of which Sir Anthony Hopkins was its star without taking home an impossibly fat pay cheque—an example to other actors, I bet), *No. 2* and *River Queen* scooped prizes. The irony here is that this ceremony was once networked when we had some cringeworthy productions; now that we make world-class stuff, it is a footnote on the late-night news. But that alone is a sign that New Zealanders are not in to worshipping stars; the movie business Down Under is in the business of making movies. Liv Tyler and her co-stars hardly got hassled by star-struck Kiwis when making *The Lord of the Rings*; Wellington is probably more humanizing than Hollywood.

We might not have Hollywood's promotional budgets, but we can increasingly rely on grass roots' campaigns to get the word out. That may be the future of movies, with clips of the best, downloaded the most, via the likes of YouTube. Give away your video production diaries, rather than sell them on DVD. Use that to attract further financing, breaking that stage up into a round of initial funding and a second round of more money. And, team up with us—regular folks—to build your audience. We'll buy in to the experience, but only if you let us.

The following week, Peter Jackson's announcement that he would produce a remake of *The Dam Busters* was particularly well timed. It would be helmed by first-time director Christian Rivers—again, not a big name.

One can bet that the new *Dambusters* will have names that are big, but not Tom Cruise-big; and that Jackson, once more, will remind us that he was the single man that changed the face of the New Zealand economy.

The word *can't*, so beloved of the New Zealand Government, is a load of bollocks. More so in an age where the monolithic brand is collapsing. The politicians, the public bodies, the civil servants, the institutions and the establishment all failed against one man's dream and vision: these are the times we live in, where individuals can make a difference.