

Business of Story Podcast with Zain Raj - "Creating Brand Rituals through Story"

Park: Now, there's a story out there and it may even be a myth, I'm not quite sure about a shampoo manufacturer whose sales have flattened out and he was trying to figure out how he could pump them up again and then he came across that brilliant idea. On the back of the labels on the shampoo bottles it said, "lather, rinse" and he just added the word "repeat" and now it has become brand ritual lore. Lather, Rinse, Repeat and then he doubled his sales just simply by creating a new ritual with in the shower.

Welcome to The Business of Story where today we are going to cover brand rituals like, think about, "Plop, plop, fizz, fizz oh what a relief it is." What product comes to mind? Alka-Seltzer. Even though I may be dating myself a bit. How about when it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight? FedEx. What about the physical ritual about turning open an Oreo cookie and pulling out that delicious white filling with your teeth? We've all done that but there's a real ritual around that use with that particular product. How about Red Bull? It gives you wings well every time you pop the cap of one of those, you through down a bunch of sugar and caffeine and you certainly grow wings, or at least it seems like it. What about putting a lime in a corona? Is that a ritual or is that a garnish? Well that bags the question, what exactly is a brand ritual?

So on today on The Business of Story, we are welcoming, Zain Raj, Chairman and CEO of Shapiro + Raj and author of the number one best selling marketing book, "Brand Rituals: How Successful Brands Bond with Customers for Life." Welcome Zain.

Welcome, Zain.

Zain: I'm glad to be here, Park. How are things?

Park: Things are fantastic. We are very honored to have you with us today. You know, I've been a big fan of your book. I read it several years ago when it first came out. You and I have become fast friends online. God bless technology. But one of the things that I love so much about "Brand Rituals" is how concrete you share tips with the readers on how to make your brand truly a ritualistic property event within consumers' lives. So, today, we're really happy to have you here to share with us how do brands go about that.

Now, before we jump into that, you and I were just catching up before the show began and you have got a ton of things going. So, why don't you let our listeners in a little bit about your history and the other interesting things you have going on and then we'll jump into brand rituals.

Zain: Sounds good. Having spent 30 years in the business of solving problems for companies, for marketers, for brands, and having spent a lot of time evolving from the world of advertising to the world of marketing services, I was one of the first guys who had a few other colleagues by programming it in a C++ kind of a thing.

I've done a lot of different things. I've built a lot of companies along the way. But I think the most satisfying part of things that I've been a part of, has been building methodologies and capabilities and approaches that have allowed brands and companies and therefore clients of mine to succeed as the world has evolved.

So, "Brand Rituals," thank you for being kind. Yeah, it did become a marketing and sales bestseller on Amazon. It was my first point of view, which defined the fact that as our world has shifted; the way brands increase and enhance themselves in value is by becoming bonded with their core customers, where the brand becomes a highly important ritualized part of their lives.

And even the Oreo examples and all of those examples are appropriate; those are just tactile expressions of the importance a brand plays in people's lives. The real thing that happens with brands is how they make the customer feel and how they connect by connecting the values that the customer has with the values that are consistent with the brand as well as delivering a specific value. But as you said, we'll talk about that later.

Over the last year, I've been continuing to write. My next book, which is titled Marketing for Tomorrow, Not Yesterday: Surviving and Thriving in the Insight Economy, is scheduled to be released sometime mid-September. As we both know, it's the right time for any book to come out, the fall.

I've got another book, I think, which will surprise people who read stuff I write in February. It is about the world and the economy we live in. But it is about secrets and how to build great, successful teams. And then I've got the Brand Rituals 2.0, a much more definitive version with a lot more specific action items and processes that I am going to offer up to people that they can use themselves as they go down the journey of selling rituals.

In today's open source environment, I don't want to be the one holding on to all the IP on that. I want to share it with friends, colleagues, clients and the world at large to use it because I believe, I think, as we go open source with the principles of building brands today and tomorrow, I think we all get smarter and I think we all get more successful. So, that's what's coming down the pike. I hope that helps.

Park: No, that's great. And you are kind of the professor of brand ritual. So, could you tell us, what is a brand ritual?

Zain: Yeah. I think a brand ritual at a very, very simple aspect is a fundamental relationship that is so bonded and so connected and so compelling between a customer and the brand of choice, that if that brand is not available for them, if they can't experience that brand when they need it at that point of time, their world basically becomes dislocated, right?

What it gives a brand is a high degree of insulation where nobody else can connect. I don't have to anymore talk about my experiences with Starbucks. Almost everybody, depending on how I look that morning, are able to figure out whether I have been able to stop at Starbucks, whether I've been able to double cup my venti, whether I've been able to get my four brown sugars, that I got my Pike with enough half and half in it and I was able to align the logos with the sleeve and whether I was able to finish it before I got to the meeting. And it's fascinating. The people will come up and go, "Oh, can somebody please go get this guy his Starbucks? Otherwise we're going to have a rough morning."

Park: Stat.

Zain: That's a brand ritual.

Park: They may have an unfair advantage because they have basically legalized an addiction that they get to market there with caffeine and so forth.

Zain: That's exactly right. That's because of what they've done. They've managed to find a way. Because it's not just a coffee. It's not the fact that I like Pike Place because between you and me, actually at home, I brew Starbucks at home as well. I actually brew the Columbian, but I think fundamentally what they've done is legalize the whole context of creating a custom, personal experience. My experience in that environment is so uniquely mine that it cannot be anybody else's and by making it so uniquely mine and giving me that ability to feel the sense of being grounded, to feel the sense of being connected, to feel the sense of, "Yes, I have moved to the next stage of my day by doing this and I've done it the way I do it and nobody else does," is the kind of thing that a ritual needs to do.

So, the fact to me--and this is one of those things that I've had some very interesting discussions with people--the lime going into the Corona is not necessarily the most powerful aspect of the Corona ritual. The more powerful aspect of what makes Corona a brand ritual to their core customers is the fact that every time you drink that, you get the sense of the freedom of being on a beach on vacation with your feet in the warm sand and relaxing. And the fact that you put a lime in, is one aspect of it.

I don't know if you've seen, but the people who have actually perfected the ritual for it, it's not just lime. There's a pinch of salt that has to go in before the lime gets pushed in. And the lime has to be a certain wedge. It can't just be any different way. And then you put a thumb on it. You shake that. And then you put it in your mouth so that the first spray of Corona actually refreshes you all the way. That is a new Corona ritual, my friend.

Park: So, you've got the visceral connection to the product that way. Plus, they do a really good job of storytelling to get you to transport yourself, supposedly, when you grab that Corona and in your mind's eye, picture yourself sitting on the beach and carving your toes into the warm sand like you said.

Zain: Exactly.

Park: So, story plays a big part of creating that ritual.

Zain: I think storytelling or the way I describe it, creating a narrative, absolutely is one of the most absolute integral parts of a ritual becoming established and a ritual becoming entrenched and a ritual becoming personal, right? Think about it. Nothing brings emotion into a context of an experience unless there is a narrative around it. Why is this important? When is it important? What would I need to know for it to be really important and how does it evolve over time?

That's the reason why I talk about my Starbucks story. There is a narrative around why Starbucks is so important in my life and nothing else will do. It's a narrative that's not only me, but people around me are also familiar with that it makes things very easy.

I'll give you another example. I'll actually in a meeting here have an early morning. There are days where I may have a later breakfast. This lady kind of looked at me when she saw the fact that I got a sandwich and she goes, "Oh boy, is that the number two from McDonalds?" And this lady is one of the people who works for our company. She had come to see me for something. Even that has become some sort of a ritual for people to actually recognize it.

But stories and narratives are the starting point of understanding the value of a ritual. So, think about, as you introduced me, you kind of talked about we've become fast friends on the internet, there was a narrative that you had to set to communicate our relationship.

When we build a bond with a brand, which is the final stage of a ritual, that bond is built when a customer, not a consumer, not a prospect, but a customer who's been consuming your product or service, which is a brand, for a period of time fundamentally aligns with the values of the brand because the values mirror their values or are consistent with their values and they believe that they're getting the right set of value aspects from the brand as well.

So, whatever money I'm paying you or whatever time I spend going to look for you, you are reciprocating back with equal amount of value and your values also align. Once you have those, then how those become relevant requires a story to be created because nothing makes things real for people other than a story.

So, the story that goes... I talk to people about my passion for Ping golf clubs, right? Do you play golf, Park?

Park: Yes. I do.

Zain: Obviously you should, right? Living on the West Coast, why wouldn't you?

Park: In Phoenix, Arizona, one of the golf capitals anywhere, right?

Zain: Exactly. Guys like me in Chicago, we only get four and a half months of golf. So, we are even more fanatical.

Park: Exactly.

Zain: But the interesting thing about being fanatical is every year I see a lot of people that go and change their clubs out. So, one year, they may be playing TaylorMade because TaylorMade has got this new innovation. The next year they've got Ping. When I started playing golf seven years ago, I bought Adams. I was loyal to them for a couple of years and then I discovered Ping.

Ironically, for the last six years, I have been playing Pings. It doesn't mean I don't keep upgrading to the next generation of Pings, but I'll play Pings. So, people look at me and go, "What's wrong with you? These TaylorMades are so much better." My son, who's a varsity-level golfer, used to do the same thing. He's like, "Dad, come on, get with the program." And I'm like, "No."

I played with the Pings, with my first set of Pings, after I got them custom fit and I bought them. It was the first time I actually had a birdie on that round. I actually had two pars on that round and I actually had a hole in one on that round. Wow.

Park: So, now, were you lucky or good or was it the clubs?

Zain: No. I think I was lucky, good and the clubs. There's something called beginner's luck on everything. It doesn't matter what you do, the first time when you do anything. Now, golf, as you know, you do get beginner's luck occasionally because there is a god up there that just focuses on golfers and realizes that, "What do I need to do to bring him back the next time so I can create a lot of pain for him? But before I can give him pain, he has to learn the pleasure." No, but it was amazing, right?

The first time in my life, I played with my custom fit gloves. Obviously I've used them on the range and stuff to practice. But it was fascinating. That round was a round of my dreams until I got to the tenth hole. Then I had a bogey. I had a triple. I destroyed the entire good feeling of the first nine. But the first nine, the way my ball was going 20 yards further, they were going in the direction I was hitting them, they felt really great and it's been fascinating. I've tried other clubs. It doesn't really matter.

Now, you would think I'm a Ping fanatic, yes, I am. I'm a big Ping customer, except for my driver. You know? But it doesn't matter. That driver, for some reason, I hold it in my hands and I hit my drives and they always are on the fairway.

Park: But you bought it too and you live the Ping the story and that first round with your Ping clubs where you had all that wonderful round and then not so good on the back nine underscores that whole concept about so many people think, God giveth and taketh away. Well, I think the golf gods actually taketh and giveth away. It's really hard to get much out of them.

I think this is a great point within the conversation, Zain, where I need to stop for a minute and thank our wonderful sponsors for this program that brings you and other great minds to The Business of Story. So, we'll be right back after this message.

Park: Well, welcome back to The Business of Story and today's guest, Zain Raj, a fabulous marketer and author of *Brand Rituals: How Successful Brands Bond with Customers for Life*. I came across Zain's work several years as we were creating our ten-step story cycle process. As you may know by now if you've been a listener for a while, our process is actually based off of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey.

Although he had seven steps in his marvelous mono myth about how stories unfold, we boiled those down to ten steps that marketers can use to craft and tell their compelling stories that sell. They begin with the backstory--Where have you been? Who's your hero, which is always about your customer? What's at stake? What is it that they want? What is the inciting incident? What's the tension in the marketplace that really makes you relevant in their mind's eye? Of course, what are the obstacles and antagonists they are up against to adopt and embrace and bond with your product as well as what are the obstacles you are up against as the brand?

And then we get into enter the mentor part. This is where the brand persona really lives, the brand essence. Then we move into the next chapters of the journey, which is

about customer engagement, celebrating the successes, the initial successes, which starts building that brand, bond ritual.

Our last two chapters--and Zain, you've talked a lot about this, is the moral of the story. When it gets right down to it, what is the moral of the story? The moral is what are the values and ethics that we stand for as a company, as a brand and how do we connect with the shared values of our audiences, making sure that that is implicit and explicitly clear in the stories we tell about our brands?

And then our final chapter--and this is where your book really had an enormous impact on me, Zain--it's called To Be Continued, or building rituals around your brand. What is different about our story cycle than Joseph Campbell's hero's journey? His is a one-and-done thing. You have a hero in an ordinary world. He propels himself into an extraordinary world, learns a lot in the process, returns to their ordinary world with what is called the boon to help themselves and those around them lead better lives essentially.

What we believe with the story cycle and all brand marketers very much in step with what you do with brands and brand rituals, is that it needs to be a virtuous cycle. Once you've gone through the story cycle one time, you now have this bond with your customer. How can you grow that bond through the very rituals that you have studied and you share in your books and your upcoming Brand Rituals 2.0?

So, my question to you, Zain, what exactly is a brand ritual?

Zain: Well, Park, a brand ritual is fundamentally a relationship, and a quality of a relationship, that a brand has with its most core and most loyal customers. This is a relationship, which has got a high degree of insulation. It's also a relationship where, in that customer's life, nothing else but that specific brand will do. Because what the brand does, it fulfills a set of needs that are not only the rational or the emotional needs that most brands attempt to build their relationships around, but fulfill the more subconscious needs that are built around the attachment. Where the values of the customer are so closely aligned with the values of the brand, and therefore what the brand does for the customer is fulfilled, that were very absolutely human need that they have, of having a bond with products, services, people, and things that absolutely make their lives what they are.

Park: Well, what is the difference, then, between a habit using a brand and actually creating a brand ritual around it?

Zain: Well, it's very simple, right? So I think what most people go through over time as they build their relationships with the brand is they go through three stages. The Stage 1 is, what is a habit? A Stage 2 is, what is a routine? And then Stage 3 is when you get to a ritual. And if you're a brand, that's when you become a brand ritual.

A habit is a very simple thing. It's something that you do habitually where, you know, you're programmed to kind of operate the same way. In the world of brands, let's use coffee as an example, given the fact that if I don't have my first couple of cups of coffee every morning, and have the right one, my day doesn't really start, and it doesn't go anywhere, right?

Park: Right.

Zain: But we take the world of coffee. If you are . . . have a habit of drinking coffee, it doesn't matter what brand of coffee it is. What . . . you know, if you're brewing it at home, you picked up, you know, either Maxwell House, or Folgers, or some such brand from the grocery store, whatever was on deal, and you're making yourself coffee on your coffee machine at home.

But on a routine, it's mostly where a few brands might fulfill your needs, but you are not very picky which one it is. And that's what happened when a lot of people, when they drive down, they'll either stop at a McDonald's, or they'll stop at a Dunkin Donuts, or maybe a Caribou Coffee. Whatever shows up on the right-hand side of the road, they will stop off there and grab a cup of coffee, because coffee is important to them, and they want a specific . . . not a specific brand, but they want options of certain brands that they're willing to look at.

When you get to a ritual, it's like what happens with me. I cannot, I will not, and I choose not, to drink any other brand of coffee than a Starbucks. And for me, Starbucks becomes the brand, because when I go to a Starbucks store, it creates an experience that, for me, is the right, most welcoming experience, but it also creates an experience I can customize for myself.

So I drink my coffee in a very specific way. I drink . . . I have to have a double cup. It's a venti. It has to be the right place. And it has to have room for some half and half, and I have to have my three packets of brown sugar. I have to align the sleeve with the cap so that everything kind of looks perfectly similar.

Just going through that one simple act every morning, it doesn't matter what part of the world I'm in. I normally pick my hotels based on their location from a Starbucks. And on my way, when I drive to work, or when I drive to the airport, or when I drive to the train station, I have my Starbucks along the way, which is where I stop. And that's the same way I use, drink my coffee.

That, to me, is a ritual, because I have a brand now that allows me to actually fulfill my need, but allows me to do it within the context of the values that it holds.

Let me give you another example . . .

Park: Please.

Zain: . . . of why values are important when you build a ritual, right? That's people. When you meet different people, you can become an acquaintance, you can become a colleague. But the deeper relationship that happens when you find that you share the same values.

I'll give you an example. A dry cleaner which has become part of my ritual, right? I go to a dry cleaners. I've got options of four within the two strip malls right across the street from each other, and both of those malls five minutes from my house. I go to the one with the most expensive out of the three, but the reason why I go there is because everything that they do in terms of their laundry is ecologically sustainable, right?

They don't use plastics. They use the laundry detergents and softeners that are absolutely green. They actually give you your close in a green, cloth covering, which

you recycle with them every week. And literally it's 60% more expensive for me than the dry cleaner six shop fronts down, but I'd rather go there, because the values that I have of let's go everything in our power to protect our environment. And oh, by the way, I know my clothes are getting the best in terms of the quality.

And that's the distinction between a brand ritual or a routine or a habit, because there's so many people who will go to any dry cleaner, right? And as soon as they find another dry cleaner that can dry clean cheaper than their dry cleaner, they'll go out there, because for them, everybody is . . . any one of those brands are things that they can change.

In this case, for me, Starbucks is a brand that has been part of my ritual for over the last 15 years. And, you know, people ask me constantly, "Is it going to change? Are you going to find somebody else?" And I go, "Frankly, I'm not looking for somebody else." I've been married 26 years. I guess I can continue drinking coffee at least for that long, you know? So I've got about another good 10 years on me.

Park: I think it's interesting what you said, when you shop at Starbucks, that you actually get your coffee, and then you align the sipper with the seam in the cup. Did I understand that correct?

Zain: No, not with the seam. Because if you align it with the seam, it's going to drip on your collar, right?

Park: Okay.

Zain: So what you do is you make sure the seam is on the opposite site.

Park: Yeah.

Zain: But you align . . . but I align it with the logo of the second cup, and the logo of the sleeve, with the sipping thing.

Park: I see.

Zain: Now, that's . . . I like everything symmetrical, so that's me being completely compulsive.

Park: Well, and now I can see how your Starbucks addiction and your dry cleaners work hand-in-hand if you get a little sip on your collar there.

So what you're basically saying, then, is a habit is a very commoditized act. You know, the Maxwell House, I'll just go buy the cheapest brand, throw it in my pantry, and have it in the morning. Where a brand ritual is about the value and the value add of a brand. And in both cases, you talked about really opting for the most expensive option because it's a ritual within your life that has real meaning.

Zain: Exactly. And I think what you find is in these two cases, it's the most expensive, right? But in the case of my breakfast food, which is waffles and pancakes that I love eating, most days, I go with Eggo. And Eggo's not any more expensive or less expensive than its competitor set. But what Eggo has able to do is provide me with products that absolutely are right for me, and that fulfill my need for the kind of breakfast I like to have. And it also, from a value standpoint, connect the dots by making sure that their

innovation and everything that they're doing is focused around the quality of ingredients and the quality of food from Kellogg as a company standpoint.

So if price is a factor sometimes, but it's more the experience and the quality of the content, if you will, right? The quality of the value.

So to me, I love the way you talk about habit is a commodity, ritual is value add. But it's value add with two components, right? You've got to have the value in terms of the product and the price. Equation has to be right. But also has to have aligned values, where the values that the brand holds are consistent and/or are aligned with the values that the customer group holds, right? That's the only way you have to have that. Otherwise you're never going to fulfill that quality of a bond, which is what a ritual is. A highly bonded, bonded relationship.

Park: And Zain, how do you see that story or brand storytelling plays into the creation of a ritual, or evolving someone from a habit into a ritual around your product?

Zain: You know, it's very simple, right? Storytelling, I use the word narratives, but storytelling is how any relationship gets built. If you ever introduce anybody in your life, right? You know, like, if I ever introduce my wife to somebody who's never met us before, I tell them about how I met her in India when she was there for my brother's wedding, how I proposed to her in a cab in India three months later, yada yada.

All relationships, especially the deep and the meaningful relationships, are built around a series of interactions and a series of exchanges where value gets exchanged to mutual advantage. And you can't build a brand bond, and you can't get to a ritual, without having those steps along the way. And those steps are stories that are waiting to be told, or are constantly being told, as the way and the how brands get there.

Without storytelling, you don't have rituals. Without stories, you don't have a depth of empathy that builds a context around the values people hold. Storytelling narratives are very, very powerful factors towards building deep, bonded relationships.

Park: And then, of course, too, they have to back it up. So they can tell very powerful narrative stories to get you enticed, to have you come into their coffee shop or the cleaner's, or whatever. But then they certainly have to live the story and encourage their customers to then recount and share that story with their folks to help spread the word.

Zain: Exactly. You can't have a narrative without a foundation for a story, right? And then once you have a foundation for the story, you'd better not, start having cracks in the foundation, because you're never going to get to a ritual, right? You're going to lose them at an earlier stage of their relationship development.

It's like having somebody that you've been dating for six months. I know a good friend of mine who used to tell the story beautifully well. She's now the head of marketing at Mondelez. But it's like having . . . you've been dating somebody for six months. You finally get to a point where you invite them for dinner to your parents' house. And you're sitting down for dinner, and this person decides to blow their nose on the tablecloth.

Okay, that's what a lot of brands do, right? I mean, yeah, you're done at that point in time.

Park: Yeah.

Zain: And so all of the work that you've done so far is gone. And it's a very graphic way of articulating it. She does it way better than I do. But the end outcome is still the same, in end outcome, you find yourself having, lost a customer, a potential bonded customer that could be your biggest advocate, just because you decided to have a very inappropriate moment at a very important part of the time, and they were trying to build a deeper relationship with you.

And it's actually scaring how many brands can catch you from a transaction to an attraction, and get you almost close to building a connection, which is a stage before a bond, and then just do something so ridiculously crazy that you kind of wonder.

I just wrote . . . I mean, my next book -- and I wrote a blog about this -- United Airlines. I've flown United for decades. I was one of the Global Services members for a long, long time, which is an invitation-only group. I just didn't fly for personal reasons last year, and guess what? They dropped me from Global Services.

But it's not even . . . and then they said, "Oh, we'll temporarily put you back on, because we know you're good for it, Mr. Raj." They never did.

And on the flip side, you have American Airlines, who I didn't fly as much over the last four or five years. They called and wanted to find out why I wasn't flying them, and I said, "I'm dealing with some personal stuff, not flying this year." They said, "We understand. We look forward to having you there." And they grandfathered my status in for another year, right? Because, again, when you have 25 years of history that they can actually see, it's pretty easy.

But then, I guess what United did, they took me from being a bonded customer, where even if I had the choice of the same two airlines and American was cheaper, I was flying United. Now I've decided, you know what? Not really. I'll actually give my custom to American. And when you think about how much money I spend when I travel, it's actually the silliest decision that they made. This was like blowing their nose in my tablecloth, right? It's crazy.

Park: Well, they're looking at you as a number, as a commodity, and they're not thinking of you as a ritualized customer that they want to bend over backwards for.

Zain: And that's a fundamental, and you hit it. They're looking at me as a decile, right?

Park: Yeah.

Zain: I went from the top decile to the second top decile, and so they dropped me. Versus treating me as a person and a human being. And they should know better than most that there are people who travel a lot, they're not going to not travel a lot, because they're just . . . when you do it like I do, and like we do, in our business, 30 years nonstop, you travel over a quarter of a million to plus miles a year. You're not going to go down and not travel anymore, right? I mean, people . . . it happens because of some changes that happen in your lives.

Park: Right.

Zain: And you know you're going to come back. And it's short-sighted when brands are not able to look at . . . and I think that's the other part. The one other interesting thing is, in our technology-enabled world that we live in, it's fascinating how much of these kind of relationships have been delegated now to their technology infrastructure, okay?

Park: Right.

Zain: So guess what? Well, the people who in the old days were at least looking at it . . . and this is where American, that invented the airline loyalty program, right? With the . . . with their program, were the ones that actually decided not to trust their computers and just call personally, right? And United, which was a follower in that, suddenly decided to let the computers decide who stays, who doesn't. And boy, what a silly mistake.

Park: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, just throwing a wet blanket on that relationship.

I've got to quickly tell you my United story. My wife and I flew over to London, and then we were working with our ASU class down in Amsterdam, and then we finished up our trip in Paris. And I flew United. I'm not a frequent flyer with them, but I do quite a lot of traveling, and so they had a chance to really bring me, I guess, into the fold.

And the other part of the story is I had back surgery, fairly significant back surgery, about five weeks before this trip, so I wasn't really feeling great when I left. Luckily, a friend of mine had some passes to the United Club in Houston, where we had a four-hour layover, so I used those, and it was great to stretch my legs out and enjoy that part of the trip.

Coming back, we were only to have a 90-minute layover in Newark until, of course, they canceled our flight. And we went from 90 minutes to a seven-hour layover. So I just sent them a really quick, you know, nice little note that said, "Hey, this back issue, is there any chance that my wife and I could hang out in the lounge? We won't drink your free booze. We won't eat your free food. Just need a more comfortable place than sprawling out in the Newark lobby."

And they said, "No, can't do it. Sorry." And I'm just like, wow, there was an opportunity of doing something very simple to bring me into their fold, and it's done just the opposite. So, you know what I mean?

Zain: Yeah.

Park: Yeah.

Zain: I mean, it's amazing, right? I mean, you look at it . . . and ironically, and this is in my next book that's coming out, but I did write a note to the CMO of United and the guy, president of MileagePlus who I know quite well. And whom I've actually defined in that book as a decathlete marketer, right? And I sent this, I sent a note to him, and I said, "Look, I mean, here's the deal." And he goes, "Yeah, let me connect you with the lady who runs the MileagePlus program." And so we get connected with the lady. She goes,

"Yeah, as long as you fly enough for \$13,000 worth before May, we should be able to retain your status."

Well, here's the irony. The next week is when I was flying, actually, to Asia to speak at a couple of conferences with my wife. So we were both flying first, right? That's about almost a \$45,000, you know, ticket that we bought, right? That I bought. We fly all over Europe, you know, Asia and come back, my status doesn't . . . it's still at 1K, right?

Then two weeks later, I fly to Europe and back, again in first, and my status hasn't changed. It's now July. My status hasn't changed. I'm still at 1K. And the irony is, as we were flying to . . . we were flying to India for the first leg of the conference, we bumped into friends of ours who's a global CM for Levi's, he and his wife. So he's Global. They only had two Globals, okay, on that flight, and then they had two 1Ks, which are, I was one of the two. So there were four of us.

They boarded the two Globals first, but they didn't . . . they made the 1Ks, me and this other couple, board with everybody else on our international flight in Group 1, which was about 60 people. So, I mean, you look at it, and you go, "What is wrong with you guys?" I mean, you get a list that shows you there are only four premium customers that you really have. Why wouldn't you just have the other two couples also go when you are, you know, holding everybody else off for the . . . But, as I've been told by a bunch of people, "You sound a lot like sour grapes."

Park: Yeah. First world problems.

Zain: Stop complaining. You're in 1K. You are, have . . . your life is so much better than my life in economy, right?

Park: Yeah. But it does underscore the earlier point that they tell a good story and fly the friendly skies, but they certainly don't live or deliver it. They do, in fact, quite the opposite.

Zain: Exactly.

Park: And that's just a shame. So they're not going to build a brand ritual.

Last question for you, real quick. You wrote a fantastic book, "Brand Rituals," that I've loved, and I've shared with a lot of people. Can you tell us a little bit, what is about that book? And then tell us about your new book coming out.

Zain: Yeah. So I think "Brand Rituals" was a book about how do we now think about the way brand relationships have evolved as the world has evolved over the last 15 years. And that came out of the perspective of, if you look at the traditional brand-building methodologies, a majority of them were created, in what I call the attention economy, which was when mass marketing was game. We had the USBs, the positioning, stuff like that.

And then, over the last couple of decades, that methodology's all evolved towards much more data centricity, and where we all became deciles and numbers versus human beings, right? And my perspective was the way you build brands is not by trying to make people believe certain things and feel certain things about your product or

service, but about the kind of value that you can create by making sure that people use it consistently, and make it an important part of the life.

Because a brand . . . the only reason for a brand to be successful and to exist in any company that it drives a huge amount of profitable growth for the company, okay? So that was the premise behind it. My next book takes up the . . . is, again, taking off on the whole aspect of, I've seen the world change, right? And the way I've defined it is we've moved, over the last year, into a new economic era that I'm calling the insight economy.

And the reason why we've moved here is all of the data and the deluge of data that people have gotten so excited about has not fulfilled its potential of actually making things easier, neither for the consumer nor for the marketer. All it's done is, I've forced people to look at the trees versus look at the forest and try to understand what the big, powerful opportunities are. And in the world that we all live in as consumers and as marketers, in a huge time-starved world, we need to have a point of view about what product or service, and how does it help solve my problem.

And so I've called this new economy the insight economy, because this is the world where we need to understand our customers not as numbers, not as things, not as people who will buy my stuff, but as human beings where brands need to exist to serve their needs in the most distinct manner by solving real problems that they have in a way that's empathetic, and that's authentic, and do it so that they are a resource in their lives versus something else that the consumer or the customer needs to worry about.

I'm actually quite excited. I mean, this was a proposition I discovered as I was kind of consulting with a client about six, seven months ago. I started writing about it on my blog, and the response has been amazing. I think everybody . . . there's a lot of people in the world of marketing looking to figure out why are things that worked for me a couple of years ago, no longer working, right?

And it's because while we were focused on trying to understand our data, and trying to understand what to do with stuff like that, and trying to figure out what decile our customers fit in, the world shifted, and the customer shifted. And truly understanding where the customer is, what their new expectations are, and how to fulfill them better than anybody else, is what will allow brands to survive in the future.

And if they really want to thrive, then they need to be thinking about the world very, very differently. And so I'm talking about this new world, and the new way people can [inaudible 00:22:36].

Park: And in this book, and your insights that you share, do you help them understand how to turn big data into epic drama? How do they use grand storytelling to connect, to make that data make sense, and help guide them in the stories they tell?

Zain: Yeah, and I think . . . so it's not about making big data into a big drama, right? It's about using what they can get out of big data.

So I talk about interrogating the data, right? Big, small, ugly, indifferent. Instead of trying to figure out how many needles exist in the haystack, is to kind of interrogate the data so you can find the one needle that's right for that customer.

And then absolutely, once you find the customer, like you and I talked about earlier, you can't get to getting having the customer believe that your brand can do what they need done better than anybody else unless you add a story to it, unless you give them a narrative that they can articulate. And so, storytelling, as you have said in your book, which I personally love, so it's a mutual kind of admiration society part, but . . .

Park: Thank you.

Zain: No, but I think that you said in your book, and as we know, right, it doesn't matter for the last 30,000 years as human beings have evolved, as we've seen different societies that have emerged and have gone away, and new ones come in, the one thing that has connected humankind has been stories, right?

It has been . . . whether it's around a fireplace, or it's a story that I sit in a cave, and then I drew out some pictures as a way to kind of memorialize that, storytelling is what's built into each of us as human beings.

That's why, you know, we read stories to our kids when they're growing up, right? That's why we watch movies. That's why . . . and frankly, I'm Indian, right? So I come from the world of movies. We make a thousand plus movies in Bollywood every year.

Park: Oh, yeah.

Zain: Because we love stories, right? Because nothing connects, nothing connects people with things other than stories at a deep, emotive human level. And that's the context of the new book. It's about we are human beings, first and foremost. We're not numbers. And as human beings, we have very, very specific needs that we're looking for very specific brands or products or services to help solve in very specific ways.

But for them to be able to do it that specifically, they've got to recognize that I am a little crazy, I'm a little, cuckoo. I am opinionated. I have a very, very distinct set of expectations. And I may swing from one way to the other, but at the end of the day, if you can fulfill my needs really well, I am absolutely one of your most loyal customers. And I'm not describing myself. I'm describing my wife. Right?

And as David Ogilvy said 30, almost 40 years ago, don't treat your customer like she's stupid. She's your wife, right? And she is, because she's smart, and she knows what she wants, and brands that absolutely treat her with the respect that she deserves will gain her absolute loyalty. And that's what we as business . . . we in the business of marketing need to recognize that and embrace that. And that's what the book is about.

Park: And it brings it full circle to building brand rituals around products and services that matter, that bring meaning to people's life, and that deliver day in and day out.

Zain: You got it.

Park: Well, thank you very much for your time on today's show, Zain. I really, really appreciate it. I'm looking forward to your new books coming out and especially looking at Brand Rituals 2.0, because I'm curious what else have you found about the magical mystery of creating brand rituals in one's life. It's been terrific having you here.

Zain: Thank you, likewise.

Park: And I'd like to thank all of our listeners for tuning in to The Business of Story. Please go to our website where we have lots of tools that you can download right now to help you become a storyteller, a better storyteller to help you advance your cause further and faster.

I'd also like to say I'm such a big believer in Zain's book that I purchased five of them. I will give one a way to the first five people that go to our website, TheBusinessofStory.com and download the interactive PDF. There's a PDF guide that gives you the ten-step process that you can start crafting your stories using the story cycle. And the first five of you that go there and do that, I will be happy to send you one of Zain's books because as he said earlier, this is about open source marketing ideas and expertise. Zain has gone out of his way to do that for me and for us and so I would like to share that forward. Thank you, Zain.

Finally, please go to iTunes and let us know how you like the show. Write a review down. If you like it, share it with others. We're always eager to hear what worked for you and where you could use some more information to help you grow yourself as the innate storyteller you are so that you can go out and truly nudge the world in any direction you choose. Thank you very much and have a great day.