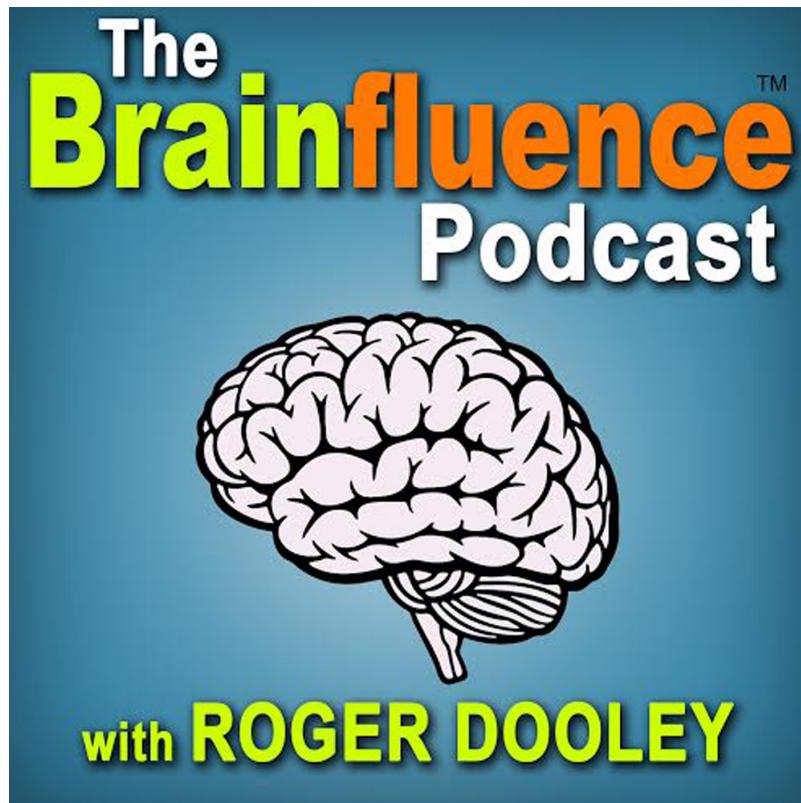


## Brand Your Business for Success with Nick Westergaard



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## **Brand Your Business for Success with Nick Westergaard**

Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley, author, speaker and educator on neuromarketing and the psychology of persuasion. Every week, we talk with thought leaders that will help you improve your influence with factual evidence and concrete research. Introducing your host, Roger Dooley.

Roger Dooley: Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast. I'm Roger Dooley. Our guest this week is Nick Westergaard. Nick is a strategist speaker, author, and educator. He's chief brand strategist at Brand Driven Digital, where he's worked with small businesses, Fortune 500 companies, and even President Barack Obama's Jobs Council. His new book is *Brand Now: How to Stand Out in a Crowded, Distracted World*. Welcome to the show, Nick.

Nick Westergaard: Thank you so much for having me. Looking forward to it.

Roger Dooley: Yes, so, I have to ask Nick, what kind of problem did you solve for Obama's Jobs Council? It doesn't seem to be the sort of entity that pops into one's mind, as needing a distinctive brand.

Nick Westergaard: Well, it was interesting because it was the President's Council on Jobs and Competitiveness, which someone asked me a question recently if that council still exists. It may in fact have been disbanded. But at the time, the big need remains re-skilling folks for careers in advanced manufacturing. So, this was a new job skills training program to do that, and through another client that we worked with in the education space, we got brought in as a partner on this project. It's one of those things that I'm sure many listeners can identify with — happens very fast, need to get moving on it, and they

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were all calling it the Rapid Ready Job Skills Incubator Program.

They said that at the first meeting a few times. And finally, I said, "Can we do something about the name?" They paused and then they said, "Sure, but we need something by Monday." So it was one of those where brevity forced some specificity that led to the naming of the program, which I talk about in my new book, Brand Now, and the chapter in there that I have on naming, which is one of the hardest challenges in all of a brand building, but ended up embracing the simplicity of the name Write Skills Now.

So that is where we ended up there and one of my favorite stories to tell, because it's just fun because it involves the President's jobs Council, but it also is a great example of addition by subtraction, which I feel like is so key today, as we find ourselves so very distracted in the marketplace on various forms of media, and even in talking with one another and engaging with brands.

Roger Dooley: I think it's a challenge for brands to stand out. Anyway, I just saw a statistic. It's not actually a new statistic, but I saw for the first time. Not too long ago that our ... The attention span of a goldfish is nine seconds, and of today's average American human is eight seconds. So, trying to get any kind of a message across or getting people to do something is really, really difficult simply because before you know it, they'll be on to the next thing.

Nick Westergaard: Well it's hard to nail down the stat of how many thousands, and I know it's in thousands, of brand messages we're seeing. And especially as we're walking through life, with our heads down looking at our phone,

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that sounds like a very believable number. I think before the internet, before social media, some raised an eyebrow at that, but we are constantly bombarded with messaging everywhere.

Roger Dooley: Right. A few years earlier, it was 12 seconds. So, so far, longer. At least better than a goldfish. They may be equivalent to a carp or something.

Nick Westergaard: Yeah, it's moving through the taxonomy of fish.

Roger Dooley: So one thing I found a little bit amusing is the ultimate branding test that use recognition by a two-year-old.

Nick Westergaard: Yes, this was a trip to Costco, which I fully embrace that I made to avoid a teaching related challenge that I encountered. I had trouble getting my mind around how I was going to take over the branding courses for a colleague who was on sabbatical for the year, because I spend most of my time on digital marketing, most of my teaching time. So this is 16 weeks of imparting some pretty big thoughts on branding, and it's one of the more challenging times out there for all the reasons that we just talked about. So, I avoided the problem by taking a trip to Costco, and I took my then two-and-a-half-year-old son with me.

We're walking throughout the various aisles and all of a sudden, in the middle of one of these aisles, he says, "Coffee." And first having five kids, my first question is always, "Where?" But we were not in the actual coffee aisle. So I'm looking around and I saw that on our way up this aisle, we had passed an end cap that had the Keurig K-Cups, and they had the Starbucks brand of Keurig K-Cups with the Starbucks siren. My son can't read. He has very few words, but it was simple pattern recognition. He's

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with us everywhere. When we're walking around, when we're driving, when we say, "Oh Mom and Dad need coffee," he sees that picture.

So it is kind of that ultimate test that in this distracted world, and especially with ... you know, you talk about the attention span of a goldfish, I have to think that we aren't necessarily at our cognitive best when we're two and a half years old, that if you can stand out as this major category leader did to my young son, then there is still work to be done and there is hope of standing out in all of this chaos today.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, probably a tall order for a brand that's not quite as pervasive as Starbucks. But nevertheless, that's such a great story, and it shows the power branding because, also, not only was it the brand recognized, but it was recognized for the generic category of coffee. So it's not like you would say, "I'm going to stop at Starbucks." You're going to say, "I'm stopping for coffee," and the brand was identified with that basic category. So that's really a great tale, and I think that Starbucks probably has a future consumer there locked in for life maybe.

Nick Westergaard: Exactly. Yeah, and then, you know, flip it the other way and say, "Okay, what would it take to move someone off of that?" Because those are early connections. I'm sure that we all have brands that we might be able to reverse-engineer in a similar fashion that we use this brand of pen, because that's what your dad always had at his desk. This is the car that I drive because that's what my family members drive. So there's all of these things that, again, are these patterns, these routines that it's not some sort of force field that will keep the consumer there

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forever. These are powerful lasting impressions that can be made.

Roger Dooley: So really in the book, Nick, you cite some stats that show that CMOs, chief marketing officers, are going to spend more of their budget on brand building in the coming years. What kind of activities do you think they're intending to spend that money on?

Nick Westergaard: Well, I mean, I think that that's an interesting data point, because I think on one hand, it's like, "Thumbs up. Yay, branding." But what does that mean? It can mean a lot of different things.

Roger Dooley: Right. That's why I asked.

Nick Westergaard: I feel sometimes, categorically, we use it as an easy answer. I feel like it's a little bit of misappropriation that, "What are you doing with this new social network? This new video series?" We're branding with it. I think that, hopefully, what we're doing with that is we're thinking of something beyond the standard marketing communications looking at real brand impact. I talk about the seven dynamics that can help brand stand out today, and it's not all marketing communication. It is things like cultivating a strong employee culture. It is experiential things that are key as well.

So, I think there's many different things that can fit under that budget line item. But I hope that it's some of those other things. I know experience ranks consistently high, but that, too, is a big vast category in and of itself. So hopefully, we're looking at meaningful, standout experiences that can help cut through the clutter a little bit.

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Roger Dooley: Right, yeah. I guess I have to offer a counter-argument, Nick, not that company should not focus on working on their brand through really good content that says something about the company. But it seems like today, so much of the brand is out of the brand's control. It's formed by the consumers. I mean, United could do all kinds of wonderful content and great marketing and really emotional ads, and you know, name the category. But people are still going to think about passengers getting dragged off planes and puppies being suffocated and whatnot. It just seems that it's tougher than ever for a brand to exercise that control.

Nick Westergaard: Well that's actually a great point and I'm glad you brought it up, because I think that reinforces exactly what I was talking about. United is a great example and I talk about them in the book for many of the reasons that you just mentioned. That's why branding has to be more than activities that take place in the marketing department that we call branding, because it really doesn't matter how many ads they run telling us to ... It's incredibly ironic, but to fly the friendly skies when they're dragging people off flights, hurting dogs, breaking people's guitars. I mean, it's anything but friendly.

I think that's one of the big shifts in branding today, is that, previously, we would have just advertised over it. Run more of the Friendly Skies ads. I think, today, it is something bigger than that. Well get back to Starbucks. We're using two enormous brand examples, but sometimes, I think those brand examples that are that big and vast are easy to cite because we all have a shorthand with them. But look at Starbucks. They made some head that they probably would have preferred not to

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when an employee arrested two black men waiting at one of their shops.

In the end what they did wasn't running some sort of ... You know, you can almost see it. Some sort of canned ad about how we embrace diversity. What they did instead was, they said, "We're going to shut down our shops and train people on these issues," and that has real brand impact. It does not look like things that might have typically been filed under the branding budget line item. But I think that that is a powerful testament to their commitment to branding because there's so many great definitions of a brand.

But you talk about the emotional aftertaste that you have after having an experience with a brand, with an organization and all of those United ones that we just listed are kind of icky. The Starbucks one isn't great either, but I do. I'm filled with hope that they're going to make things better. I think they'll be the first to acknowledge that it's not some quick lever that you can flip. But I also think that it was great watching that play out. I'm sure many listeners could remember on social media, you had people chiming in sharing the article, sharing this news that they were closing for a day, which being a business of their size, is no small commitment.

But saying that and having many people re-share and say, "Hey, I wish our government would do this. Hey, I wish our school district would do this." So I think that not only did they attend to that crisis, I think that they did something even bigger as a result that provided a real opportunity for leadership. This is my long way back to your point that it is changing and branding isn't just a subset of marketing.

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Roger Dooley: Right, and I think it's a great example, and just because, as you say, that wouldn't be a line item in my marketing budget or the brand-building checklist. But I think that step at that time of shutting down stores for a period of time really conveyed a powerful message, and it also had an actual marketing impact in terms of social shares and whatnot, the same sorts of things that marketing people like to follow, those ... you know, the social metrics and so on. I think another thing about execution, I think of Amazon as being a great brand. It's usually at the top of the most loved brands, most respected brands list.

And really, they don't do much, if any brand advertising. They just execute like crazy. You order something that's there in 48 hours, so just every time, and the price is usually pretty much as good as you're going to see elsewhere. And just by very consistent execution, they've built a brand that is certainly more powerful than companies that have invested in all sorts of brand advertising.

Nick Westergaard: Yeah, I mean, I think that's one of the best examples. Even it's simple. It could be easy to miss. It is the fact that they walked that talk so effectively. I think it's interesting that they bought Zappos, who does the same thing, but in a very different way. But I think at the end of the day, their ethos are very much in line with one another.

Roger Dooley: Well that kind of brings us to our mutual friend, Denise Lee Yohn, who says that brand and company culture are tied together inextricably and they can't really be separated. Do you buy into that?

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Nick Westergaard: Absolutely, I do. Denise is great when I taught branding, that story that I told about before I had a book of my own focused on branding. Her first book, *What Great Brands Do*, is one that I've used on my syllabus, and she's a great thinker and a great person at making connections. Like we were just talking about, her latest book, *Fusion*, is incredibly interesting, and it talks about how just what we were previously saying that branding can't live inside the marketing department any more than culture can live inside HR.

And yet, I think the problem that we have for both of these things, brand and culture, huge, inextricably linked, but sometimes, they're boxed up in inconvenient ways on the org chart.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, and I think people end up sensing that one way or the other, because I'm just ... not to pick on United, I'm actually a very good customer of United Airlines. But I just read that American Airlines is redesigning all of their 737 seats. I guess one of their most common planes for medium-haul flights and adding more seats, and the first-class seats are taking pitch out of the economy seats, and the flight attendants are complaining that the bathrooms are so cramped that people can't get in and out of them and sometimes lock the doors by accident when they open them at the same time.

Now, I would guess if you asked American Airlines executives, if they were a customer oriented, they would certainly say, "Yep, the customer is absolutely our number-one priority." But I think that when people see the results of this kind of thing, it's evident that the culture really in that company is more about, "How can we get a few more passengers on and boost profits a little bit?"

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Nick Westergaard: Well, I mean, the airline industry is a great example because it's become ... I mean, it's just so stripped down experience-wise that it really runs counter to what's happening, and I think that that's a great move. Another example of working on the execution of that standout experience, I'd say that as challenging as the airline industry is, I think one thing that is ... It is always promising when you're in a boring or a nonchalant industry, is that there's usually an opportunity to do something big if you think about what it is and stand out in a way that others aren't.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, so, Nick, you get into the rational emotional debate by talking about brand strategies that are aimed at the head or the heart. Do both make sense at some times?

Nick Westergaard: Yeah, I mean, I think they are both key appeals in understanding your customers, the people that you serve, I think depending on a lot of different factors, and in terms of what type of business you are, where you're meeting your customers, what need you're filling. I think it's usually ... That helps dictate whether you are maybe more head focused or more heart focused. But I also think that another opportunity to flip that script is when, sometimes, we think, like say, on the B2B side, we think that we are head focused only.

We're thinking about efficiency, speed, all of these things that chances are others are saying in your industry as well, whereas, if you consider appealing to the heart, you can come at the problem, come at the customer and what role you serve in a very different and meaningful way as well.

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Roger Dooley: I think we talked on the show quite a bit about those either rational or emotional appeals or conscious, non-conscious. In general, you need both. In other words, generally, your product or service is filling some kind of a real need that people or businesses have and it has to meet some minimum criteria for that or it has to be able to do what they need it to do. But then beyond that, those more emotional heart base things can be differentiators between brands, and people can feel better about one brand than another brand even if the service they're offering is substantially the same.

I mean, take Amazon. There are a number of companies. So I wanted to, say, buy a camera. There are hundreds or thousands of companies that I could buy that camera from and get roughly comparable pricing, roughly comparable delivery, but they just don't have that emotional attachment that Amazon does, for me at least.

Nick Westergaard: And there's an unemotional payoff there too. I mean, we know the box will be there. We've seen it happen, and that place to occupy in customers' hearts and minds reinforced with that consistent behavior is powerful over time.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. I actually learned a new word. Actually, it isn't that novel of a thing. I often learn new words when I'm reading somebody's book. But you talked about something you call the extraction exercise. Why don't you explain what that is and maybe give us an example of that?

Nick Westergaard: Well I love this activity and I can't take credit for it. Jay Acunzo, formerly of Google, who has the Unthinkable podcast, was a guest on my podcast and was talking about ... This is kind of a exercise to help you develop

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your own brand personality. What he talks about is, say you've got some industry that you can't work your way out of. Say you're a management consultant. Then what you can do as an extraction is think about a brand that you admire from some other sector, way outside of your fishbowl, and say, "Okay, I want to be the Anthony Bourdain of management consultants. What would that look like?" Or, you know, "We want to be the Starbucks of plumbers."

So any number of thinking about these brands that stand out that you admire that you aspire to be like and thinking about how you can mirror some of those activities and delivering your experience and building your brand as well.

Roger Dooley: Right. Why don't you carry that to the next step and pick either one of those or a different example, how one might translate into some concrete strategies?

Nick Westergaard: Oh absolutely. I talk in the book about how there was one of these that it was kind of a ... I don't know if you'd call it a reverse extraction. But it was applied to me when I was a guest on someone else's podcast. They referred to me as ... because I consult, I speak, and I also teach here at the University of Iowa, and he called me the Indiana Jones of branding and marketing. That kind of jumped out at me and I thought, "This is great." That handle and introducing myself that way provides a great shorthand. I can bring over some of the maybe exploratory, real-world ethos of the Indiana Jones brand and use that to communicate who I am, and in maybe a more interesting way than saying, "I am a consultant and college educator."

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And so, I've worked to bring that to life in my marketing on both sides of my personal brand, both in terms of my fieldwork, consulting, and speaking, but also in the college classroom as well.

Roger Dooley: So when you speak, you show up with a hat and a whip on stage?

Nick Westergaard: I knew you might say that after I said, "Walking the talk," in that way. Not yet, but there's-

Roger Dooley: You might go for that. There's something to be said for standing out. My friend, Brian Massey, also here in Austin, is the conversion scientist, and he always goes on stage wearing a lab coat. He actually makes some jokes about it, calling himself a consultant and a labwear model. It's memorable. I mean, people are trying to think, "Oh man, I heard 15 people talk today. Which one was he? The guy with a lab coat? Oh yeah, I remember him." I've seen other folks ran themselves that way at conferences where they've got one guy that I knew, always wore an orange blazer, a really bright orange blazer, and these folks are more memorable than the ones that just ... and pretty much look like everybody else.

Nick Westergaard: I think that's a great example. I talked in the book, the second half, I talk about some of the different types of brands that you can apply, the Brand Now dynamics too, and one of those is our personal brands. I think that anybody, like your friend, knows that people personalities can very much function as brands, and those visuals can be key. A lot of people think, "Oh it's a personal brand. You've got a logo and all these other things," but your brand touchpoints are different, and what you wear, some cases, people literally can use costuming, but other times,

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it is an ethos that what they want to convey by consistently dressing a certain way if it's not always the exact same outfit all the time.

Roger Dooley: Right. Yeah, I think, of course, a lab coat communicates something about a scientific approach to business. So it's not only memorable, but it ties into the message, which is probably the best situation. But I'm really visualizing you jumping up on stage to Indiana Jones theme music and being very memorable in that way, Nick. So anyway, let's move a little bit to content marketing. You spend quite a bit of time in the book talking about that. It seems like these days, content marketing is perhaps the only kind of marketing that some people are thinking about years ago. It was all about SEO and driving organic traffic.

But today, obviously, it's about building a brand and building, following ... You talk about content brand. What do you mean by content brand?

Nick Westergaard: Well I think that I talk about branded content, and a lot of times, we think about none of these standard white papers that everybody's putting out with their logo stamped up in the corner and it is very much content with your brand on it. I think the other opportunity is to think about how you can create content brands, and that sounds like just a semantic exercise of flipping some words around. But it is a very different thing that you are drawn to the brand of this content as opposed to the corporate parent brand that's putting out that content as well.

Roger Dooley: So one brand might have multiple content brands?

Nick Westergaard: Exactly. An example is Patagonia. They have several different content brands, video series, blogs. They

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have their warmwear blog that advises folks on how to repair their clothes, so that they're not buying new jackets constantly, which completely aside is a crazy thing for a clothing company to be saying, but it very much fits their ethos, who they are as well. So that's really important to think about. They also have their footprints chronicles that track the journeys and environmental impact that their clothing has as well.

Roger Dooley: What benefit do they have by dividing these up into individual streams of content as opposed to just saying, "Okay. We've got this corporate content area where we're going to have articles about a range of topics and ... " or videos or whatever they have.

Nick Westergaard: Well a brand is a discrete package of information that is designed to produce emotions. I think that, sometimes, we can do different things when it comes to content brands. For example, there is a difference between the CBS Nightly News. 60 Minutes is a content brand. That means something. That's a very specific entertainment ... not entertainment, but news-focused example. But I think oftentimes, in creating our own content, it's useful to look at some of the more popular traditional content to see what we can learn as marketers.

I think too often, we look at how we can create brand XYZ video series instead of thinking about what the show is that we're creating and how that might be branded and it might be presented by brand XYZ, as opposed to leading with brand XYZ as well. That content brand oftentimes can mean more to the audience than just more branded content.

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Roger Dooley: Right. It can appeal to segments of your audience, because I'm sure, in the case of Patagonia, their customers are not all uniform. They have customers with specific interests, specific outdoor pursuits. Some may be very interested in, say, keeping their clothes as long as they can and recycling and so on, and others may not care about that as much as really just having the latest, coolest gear. But by creating those different segments of their content, they can appeal to different audiences.

Nick Westergaard: Absolutely. I think that especially when we consider all of the content that's out there, that's kind of the asterisk that I put on all of this content talk, because I do think, to your point, it's something that we're talking about constantly. The challenge that that creates is that, now, all of a sudden, everybody's creating content. There's more content than ever before. As marketers, we're sometimes drawn to the inertia of that and we end up creating more kind of look-alike content, what everyone else in our industry is creating. They've got white papers; we've got white parents. They started a video series; let's do one of those too.

This is kind of coming full circle. Another place where we can add is by subtracting. I don't know that every brand under the sun needs a daily, weekly blog series, videos coming out constantly, a twice-a-week podcast, all of these different things. I think, sometimes, especially for small and medium-size brands, I think it's better to execute one or two things flawlessly instead of kind of mindlessly checking all of the different content formats off of an arbitrary checklist.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, actually, it brings me to my next question, Nick, and that is certainly many of our listeners are from smaller,

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more entrepreneurial organizations, and we talk about some of the big company campaigns and so on or content marketing that obviously takes a lot of resources too. For these smaller organizations or even part of a bigger organization that just doesn't have the budget, where should they begin in trying to create this distinctive brand?

Nick Westergaard: Well I think one of the biggest things is, a lot of times, the cognitive dissonance is, because we're a small resource-strapped organization, team, we don't have time, don't have resources for that branding thing. I would flip it around and argue that you absolutely have to focus on the brand behind your marketing megaphone because your communications have to be that much more impactful. So just more of the same basic content won't do. I think it is important to go through some form of a brand audit exercise. Brand blueprint is a format that we use a lot, and think about who you are, what you stand for and how that filters down to everything.

I think that having some brand strategy and that could be a big scary term, but I think a properly a well-worded strategy can fit onto something as small as a sticky note, if who you are, what you stand for and the need you meet in the marketplace. I think with that information, that's the first step to anything. So the minute we start talking about resources, being slim, I think it's important to make sure that you know who you are and what you stand for.

Roger Dooley: I think maybe one advantage these smaller organizations have, too, is that they may not have this sort of built-up brand perception in their consumers' minds. You know, trying to change any one of the top hundred brands and say, "Okay, we're going to do something different now because we don't like the way our brand is perceived."

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That's a very difficult task because we were talking about, well, it's the United Airlines. A smaller organization may have more flexibility. If they do want to pivot the brand a little bit, if they rethink and say, "Okay, this is what we really want to be," they can do that probably a lot more easily than larger organizations.

Nick Westergaard: Thank you so much for saying that because that's ... I'm glad you reminded me. That's a point that I make in my book. When I talk about Brand Now for small business brands is, sometimes, yeah, you think, "Oh we don't have all of these wonderful riches and resources that any number of the big brands that we've been talking about have." No, that's true, but we have exactly what you just said. We have control that we can exert in a way that we don't have to go through the huge committees and get all of the technology approval requests in and all of the exhaustive measures that those entities have to go through.

So granted, sometimes you'd prefer the money, the resources, but I think that there are amazing things that you can do with that kind of control and a commitment to be a standout brand.

Roger Dooley: Great. That's probably a good place to wrap up. Let me remind our listeners that we're speaking with Nick Westergaard, author of the new book, *Brand Now: How to Stand Out in a Crowded, Distracted World*. Nick, how can people find you?

Nick Westergaard: You can go to [NickWestergaard.com](http://NickWestergaard.com). That's Westergaard with two a's. You can also just go to [BrandNowBook.com](http://BrandNowBook.com), as well.

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Roger Dooley: Great. We will link to those places and any other sources we talked about, including a couple of conversations with our friend Denise Lee Yohn on the show notes page at RogerDooley.com/podcast. We'll have a text version of our conversation there too. Nick, thanks for being on the show.

Nick Westergaard: Thank you so much, Roger.

Thank you for joining me for this episode of The Brainfluence Podcast. To continue the discussion and to find your own path to brainy success, please visit us at [RogerDooley.com](http://RogerDooley.com).