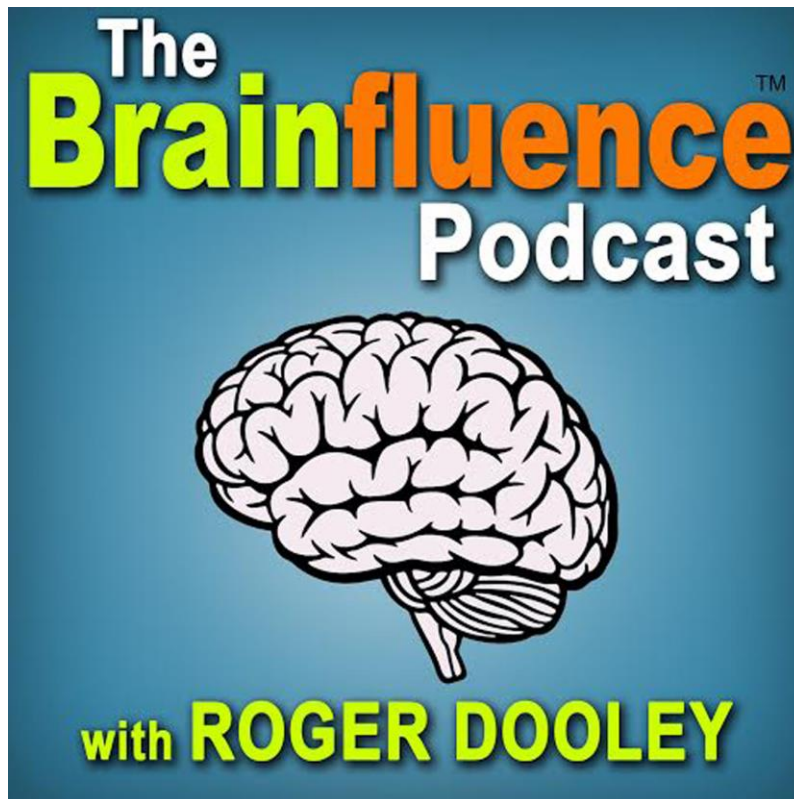


Ep #24 - What Your Customers Really Desire with
Anna Simpson



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Roger Dooley

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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 Brain Influence podcast, this is Roger Dooley and today we have with us Anna Simpson. She's the editor of Green Futures, a publication of The Forum for the Future. Anna also has a new book out *The Brand Strategist's Guide to Desire: How to Give Consumers What They Actually Want*. Anna's about half way around the globe right now, its early evening here in Texas and its very early morning in Singapore. Thanks for getting up so early to be with us Anna.

Anna Simpson: It's a pleasure Roger, thank you for having me.

Roger Dooley: It's good we can connect and ... how did you end up in Singapore or are you actually a Singapore native?

Anna Simpson: Actually I'm from the UK, I've been living in London for the last eight years and I just moved to Singapore this month. The reason to be here really is that Forum for the Future that publishes the magazine Green Futures, for which I'm the editor, is setting up a new future center in Singapore and I will be curating the online platform and the new publication of this future center. I've only been here about a month.

Roger Dooley: How are you enjoying it so far?

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Anna Simpson: I'm really enjoying it. It's a very interesting place to be in terms of a hub of trade for Asia Pacific region and also the mix of cultures that there are here. You have Malay, Indonesian, Mandarin, Tamil, and many, many languages and cultures mixing and a big community of foreign workers as well.

Roger Dooley: Sounds like a great environment and I hope to visit there. I know right now my speaking agent is working on booking a gig there but it's not yet confirmed but there's a chance I'll be there in 2015-

Anna Simpson: Great.

Roger Dooley: I hope to look you up if that happens.

Anna Simpson: Yeah absolutely.

Roger Dooley: Tell us a little bit more about The Forum for the Future, Anna. What is your organization and what's their focus?

Anna Simpson: The aim of the organization is to help and base organizations and whole sectors and even systems, address some of some very complex sustainability issues that face the world and so I guess as a very brief area, I'm sure we all know what these are, but this population growth, resource scarcity, changing climate and many confluence of many important issues that are changing the operating contexts for many of our businesses.

Also putting huge pressure on some of the essential systems that look right that we depend upon really. And so, whether that is our food systems or our energy system or our urban infrastructure or our eco-systems and biodiversity.

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Forum Of The Future takes the point of view that no single organization whether it's a business or a government or an NGO can help, well can solve these problems alone and that they need to work systemically so that they need to find ways to understand each other and collaborate across these very systems. Forum of the Future brings together operations and projects and to ... very specific projects just-

Roger Dooley: You work with some very big brands right?

Anna Simpson: We do work with big brands.

Roger Dooley: How would from The Future interface with a Unilever, somebody of that nature?

Anna Simpson: Well say with Unilever and the interface is based very much at the top level where working alongside people and thinking what is the strategy, what's the purpose of this brand, what can it deliver in the long term and bringing them together, so it costs a supply change like cotton. You might need to bring together both the retailers, the suppliers, the farmers, the non-profits working with them and create a vision of what the possible futures are, what the, try to understand what the various pressures are in that systems and create a common road map towards a more sustainable system.

Roger Dooley: I was looking through some of your writing there and saw one article that compared sustainable products to luxury products and I suppose that immediately brings to mind, "Oh yeah they're both expensive , a lot of people can't afford them but I don't think that was the exact analogy I was looking for. How does that analogy work in your sense?

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Anna Simpson: For me the obvious correlation between luxury and sustainability is the long term, so when we're thinking what am I making, purchasing luxury goods, spending lots of money because you would like partly because we hope we'd like it to last so if you take Philippe Patek watches, are marketed. You don't just buy it for yourself, you buy it for your next generation, you buy it for your son.

There is an eye on the long term. There is also a sense of the value of investing in the craft or the artisanal and techniques and skills that make up a product. As opposed to the fast moving consumer goods culture if we buy something, we throw it away, we buy it we throw it away, and we care very little for the quality of it, because what we care about really is the price now.

The luxuries sector enables you to take a long term perspective and that is the essence of sustainability. Sustainability is about thinking long terms, it's simply ... what is it that I can do now that actually will still be good in fifty or hundred years' time.

Roger Dooley: Moving on to your book, the main title is *The Brands Strategist's Guide to Desire*. Desire is an interesting word. I think our marketers have thought about filling consumer desires probably since the inception of marketing and certainly a lot of us think of desire as ... Well gee I want that new sports car or I want that expensive suit or whatever it might be. What does desire mean to you?

Anna Simpson: For me desire is the force that moves us to anything that we do want. Its impulse to go out and look for something, it's the way responding to that sense that there's a lack in our lives. What I try to get to through the book is ... the

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notion that ... marketers will often ... often they've tried to create desire to manufacture desires and often they've brought out products that speak only to the infactual desires say to the desire say for the status.

If you dig into that desire there's a gap between the benefit that buying something such as the watch that gives us a sense of status and it sends out a message to other saying you should respect me, I've bought a luxury watch that should tell you something about me. I think that's a very different thing to a desire actually for respect or to a desire for relationships or a desire to be part of a community or a desire to be healthy and live well or a desire to learn and grow and to be fulfilled as people.

These are the desires that I'm really interested in. I'm also interested in aesthetics as part of the sale, luxury sector comes in here; we have a very real desire for things that are beautiful or things that taste great. All of these desires I see as not necessary the fundamental desires but ones that are really closer to the sense of living well and to the people we love and the things we love in the sense of growing.

I delve into these desires and actually ask can brands respond to them more directly so instead of giving us pseudo satisfiers, things that seem to satisfy our needs, that actually leave us very empty, can brands give us the things that we actually want?

Roger Dooley: To some you are saying that marketers shouldn't be focused on creating desire so much as trying to create products that satisfy these innate desires that consumers have.

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Anna Simpson: Absolutely and I think it says both desires that ... creating products and also services that respond to desires that we have, not just as consumers but as citizens in this people more wholly. Thought doing this I believe that brands can build stronger and longer term relationships with people beyond the point of sale.

Roger Dooley: Do you think that consumers are really changing? Are you implying that in the book, that shopping at least for at least shopping sake has become less appealing? Do you think that's true and does it differ globally?

Anna Simpson: There are studies, and even global studies that indicate that there is some truth in this and so there's one study by Havas Media that surveys thousands of people across six different ... well not just countries, but continents and has found that many of them are asking for value from brands and I guess it's not clear what people mean by this.

There is also studies of generations, they're saying that minions are looking for more value from brands but as rationales' also looking to contribute to a positive way in society. There is also change in markets and so you have many brands moving into Asia, you do have a rise in middle class. As much of what we once called the developing world and now it's very much a world with many inequalities that are everywhere, but with many emerging consumers and emerging at a very fast rate.

I think this does possibly change the operating context for brands and I think there are differences, so you could say in Asia many consumers are more concerned with food security than they might be in the UK or the US and food safety issues.

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What I don't want to do actually with the book it is necessarily generalize. I think consumers are changing but I also think there's a sort of more fundamental lead for marketing to change. I think to me it never really made sense apart from simply for the sake of driving consumers.

It never really made sense to try to manufacture a desire. Why manufacture desire? What good does that serve to society? Why not instead really try to understand people as people and respond to them?

Roger Dooley: One of the interesting things, I think it was in that same Havas study was that surveyed consumers didn't care if 73% of the brands disappeared tomorrow. I guess that means it's the weaker brands that they don't care about. Perhaps they'd miss Apple and Google but not necessary Acer or Ask.Com. How would you interpret that study? That's pretty scary if you're not a first tier brand.

Anna Simpson: I think it is scary and I think that should be a wakeup call to brands. The problem with many brands I think is that they fail to build any sort of relationship with people, with that audience, the people they're out to reach. By treating them simply as consumers, simply as a figure on a spread sheet or a figure on whose money ends up on the annual income.

They miss an opportunity to do what a brand should do, which is be as strong communication's culture building interface for the company or organization. I think yes there are some brands that probably are the Apple's and Google's that we do care about because we have a very strong interface with them and we use them every day.

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I think there are opportunities for many brands to build these relationships by being more creative about what it is that they offer and so take one brand that does consumers well is Ella's Kitchen, that offers... its basic product offer, its baby food, packaged baby food and that's very simple. What it also offers the parents is one of the safety side is the assurance that this is organic food and it's well sourced and you can trace back and find out where those ingredients came from and maybe understand how they were put together.

It also offers tools for parents who... those recipes you don't need to even buy the packaged goods, they put the recipes out all day on line and not just the recipes so that parents can make it themselves if they do have the time or the energy to get to the shops, but the tools to help them really build a stronger relationship with their child.

Again drawings on the ingredients, while you're cooking it up in the kitchen, why not rattle the pasta around so that your child can engage with its audio senses or why not pick out strong colors so that your child can develop its visual sense. This, I think is a real added value that will help, will build a stronger relationship between that buyer, but not just as a buyer but as a mother or father and help to create a ... If that brand was to disappear I think it would create an actual sense of loss.

Roger Dooley: Anna the main focus of your book or the five aspects of desire, the first of those is community, something that really interests me. Just two weeks ago I did a podcast on social identity and one of the findings of social identity research was that people inheritably want to belong to a group and that it's incredibly easy to sort of manipulate

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them if you will, into thinking they're part of a group and actually discriminate against other groups. How do brands relate to the concept of community? There's really some brands have tried to develop on-line communities or on a face book page. I think you have a broader aspect of community in mind.

Anna Simpson: I do and I think that there are various elements to community, there's belonging, the sense that you'd like to belong, there's the sense of exchange. I think it's a difficult area in some ways to talk about with relationship to brands because many people become very cynical and they think, "I don't want this aspect of my life to be branded."

I think there is no reason why when we pay to be part of a club or when we sign up to a service that helps us to build a community. That what we're buying, isn't the relationship itself, it isn't the network itself but it's the context in which that can develop. I think that that's something that brands can offer in a very real and valuable way.

They have done for many years to. Sorts of things from ball clubs to schools to universities and their alumni's and just the scouts network. There are many, many branded communities out there.

Let's say a brand that doesn't seem like a specialist in a community like take Heineken, it's a beer brand. They also depend on people coming together to enjoy themselves. They have a responsibility to ensure that this happens in a safe way which is both a responsibility to society and also for the sake of protecting their brand.

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Their interest is also in creating the ... In the UK, the pub cultures in which their brand can thrive and they've been working very closely with pub landlords and helping people at the heart of the community to even lease a pub and run it successfully. Giving them marketing and training, giving them sales training, management training.

To help create this context of community. Actually this has led to the informal creation of many clubs. As one example of the pub that Heineken's worked very closely with in Bristol, there was a bit of a dead area for pub communities. Now has pubs with thriving skitters teams and local bands playing and local food being sold there. It's really created a vibrant community hub.

Roger Dooley: That concept may seem a little bit foreign to a lot of my listeners in the United States. The concept of a local pub has really begun to go away here with suburbanization and the growth of chain restaurant and bars.

I was in Amsterdam; actually home of Heineken, a couple of years ago for a speech I had a chance to, or actually, just a few doors down from my hotel I found this wonderful craft beer bar and struck up conversations with a few folks at different times there.

Some of them immediately volunteered that this was their local. I had to reset myself for a second because that wasn't something that you would say in the states. People don't generally these days have a neighborhood bar. Perhaps in a few urban areas the concept still lives on but it's less popular.

Building a community around that, aligning the brand with that, that's certainly a great concept. One of the other

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interesting concepts in that chapter was the idea that eventually ... Right now status is of fairly synonymous with wealth, maybe to a lesser degree power and a few other things but from a branding stand point often a status brands are expensive brands. In the future status might be separated from the concept of wealth and be based on virtual measures like social signals. How realistic do you think that is?

Anna Simpson: I think this is realistic. I think this is even happening. If you look at the millennial generation, many people are looking for jobs that don't just offer high pay but offer a sense of creating value within a community or a responding to a particular cause.

I think this comes back to the roots of status really. If you think, what is status? It's the respect that other people give to us, we can't give ourselves status. Some of the things that we associate with status is a sign of status. We associate wealth and luxury items with status because they seem to us to be a sign that somehow if we've earned a lot of money then we must be worth something to society. People value us.

The people value you for simple tasks that you might do every day that make their lives better or people value you for really serving great role within a community. I think many of us have experienced a sense of we meet someone we think, gosh I really respect you. I don't mind that you're dressed very humbly or I even ... I'm impressed by that that really generates ... it helps to add to my respect.

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There's no reason obviously why these two things should necessary be opposed, we can combine our senses. Enjoying finery with a much more real approach to what value do we add, what do we bring to society. People are now more skeptical of the signs of status when they aren't strongly associated with the respect that should inherent to status. I think this is seen in tycoons, in many media stories in which people who are seemed to be held highly in society fall down.

Roger Dooley: I can tell that in addition to being a futurist you are also an optimist Anna. Your second topic of desire is adventure. That seems to... it covers quite a bit of ground in the book and different sorts of topics. Tell us a little about how Disney crafts its adventures.

Anna Simpson: Disney's adventures are told through stories. Actually this is something that I think is at the heart of adventure. Adventure if you even go back to the Latin, it's about the word "becoming." Who do we become? This is a very strong question for children. They want to know who they're going to be. They have this sense of who will I be when I grow up. I think it's a wonderful thing and something that adults if possible should hold onto.

We go on adventures because they change us. We like adventure stories because they give us opportunities that are different to the ones that we have in everyday life where we might become something different. This is the basic story line for many, many Disney stories.

Often they trace a journey so ... A very famous, typical adventure journey is The Rages to Riches. The Aladdin journey, if you start as a poor street kid and you become

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the sultan in the castle. Actually this projectory in Disney often takes a very similar format. It is from rags to riches, from something that's seen as necessary unappealing.

If you look at the story of woman it's often from a state of being less socially accepted in terms of beauty or status towards sense of being the rich princess and the beautiful princess and the princess with all the bodily abilities like The Little Mermaid.

That a well-accepted social success story would have and so Disney is not just telling a beautiful story, although they tell stories very, very well but its helping to define the children, who they should be. I see that particularly is defining who they should be in terms of successful consumers.

That is something we need to be more aware of. How are our aspirations for life crafted. Brands as Disney demonstrates can play a huge role in crafting our aspirations. That, I think is something to be feared but also is something that brands could play a very responsible and valuable role in doing in the future.

Roger Dooley: That chapter touches on higher education to. That's something I've spent a lot of time thinking and writing about and in particular the importance of brand in higher education. That's something that I would guess a lot of university deans would look down on. They don't think their institution is a brand or has a brand.

Instead it represents a knowledge of learning and very lofty goals but I think and I'm not certainly not the only one that thinks this, there's a big shake out coming in higher education in which many institutions will probably

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fail in the next ten or twenty years. Schools that lack some kind of brand or distinction from other schools are really going to have a lot of difficulty. From your perspective what kind of change do you see taking place in higher education and particular in the context of adventure.

Anna Simpson: I think there is a very real change taking place in higher education and I like in many sectors driven by high connectivity and on-line. Many, many more students are taking these massive open on-line courses. I think there's also a change in how we skill up for our professional roles. There is this sense of this illusion that many people have gone through even well reputed universities and come out with strong degrees and have been unable to find jobs that are fulfilling or that pay well.

People are taking a much more pragmatic approach to education and they're also going about it in different ways that they may not necessarily choose to attend university straight after school. They may choose to go directly into employment and then build skills on a different way on-line perhaps. The operating context is changing. I think the value.

The universities have always had brands and they've always needed and cultivated them. They may not have thought of it as a brand because they associate a brand with sales. They sell education but they also sell hopefully in many instances the quality of education. There's no reason why that should not be associated with a brand.

I think they do need this and what they need to offer to people is the sense of adventure, the sense of learning,

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growing and help people to develop on an individual level their story. So what through taking this degree with us and becoming part of our community. What will you become? What can we offer you? How might that be a life time journey? How might that not just be... after many thousands of dollars you'll need to spend immediately, but how might we add value through your life?

Roger Dooley: It's really about creating that vision of what could be hence the adventure. Without getting into the details of the remaining categories of desire which are aesthetics by vitality and purpose, do you think that brands need to focus on one of these primarily or do they have to focus on all five of them and try and balance things out and is there some sort of middle ground where perhaps they emphasize one but pay at least a little bit of attention to the rest?

Anna Simpson: One thing I just want to emphasis is that the five desires that I talk about, just for examples. They're not the five fundamental or the five only desires, they're just ways of exploring desire more fully. Some brands will associate more strongly with one than with another. Some might not associate with any of them but will find another desire that they really believe they can play a role fulfilling.

The crucial thing of a brand is to have a clear sense of purpose. What is it there to achieve in terms of fulfillment within an individual's life. Is that helping that individual to go an adventures or to have a strong sense of community or to help an individual to achieve their own purpose in life or is it helping them to really value their senses, really value all that to have a strong aesthetic experience.

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Some brands will find that one or more fit very well with what they're trying to do. In some ways I really don't think it matters as long as the brand has a clear sense of its identity and what it can add, what is there for?

Actually in the book what I come up with, what I offer is a sort of tool for brands. It's called DCBA, it's a little methodology but we start with desire, we start with asking what does my audience, what does my brand's audience look for? What do they want? Who are these people and what do they desire?

Then to build on that... what's my culture? What can I ... what's my character? How can I respond to this desire? Then the brand I think emanates from that strong sense of identity within an organization, strong sense of this is my purpose.

The actual products or services that actions the A, that actions and the brand undertakes can then respond to this. They can then emerge from this strong sense of identity and purpose in society.

Roger Dooley: Right so basically the opposite of what many marketers would think of as marketing where you start with a product then you figure out how to sell it and how to convince people that they really need it so ...

Anna Simpson: Exactly.

Roger Dooley: Anna we're just about out of time. Let me remind our listeners that we're speaking today with Anna Simpson and her brand new book is *The Brand Strategist's Guide to Desire: How to Give Consumers What they Actually Want*. Seems like a novel concept but actually I

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recommend this to any person involved in branding who is looking for a ... particularly a futuristic and sustainable oriented thought process on branding. It's definitely different than your usual how to sell your brand type book.

Anna tell us how we can connect with you on-line, find your stuff and connect with you personally if that's appropriate?

Anna Simpson: Yes please do and thank you very much Roger for this conversation. I'd love to hear from any of you. You can follow me on Twitter at @_annasimpson or you can email me and my email is a.simpson@forumforthefutre.org.

Roger Dooley: Great okay ... and for our listeners we will have links to both Anna's book and the links that she just provided on the podcast show notes page at [roger dooley.com](http://rogerdooley.com). Anna thanks so much for being with us today.

Anna Simpson: Thank you very much. I've enjoyed it. Thank you.

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.