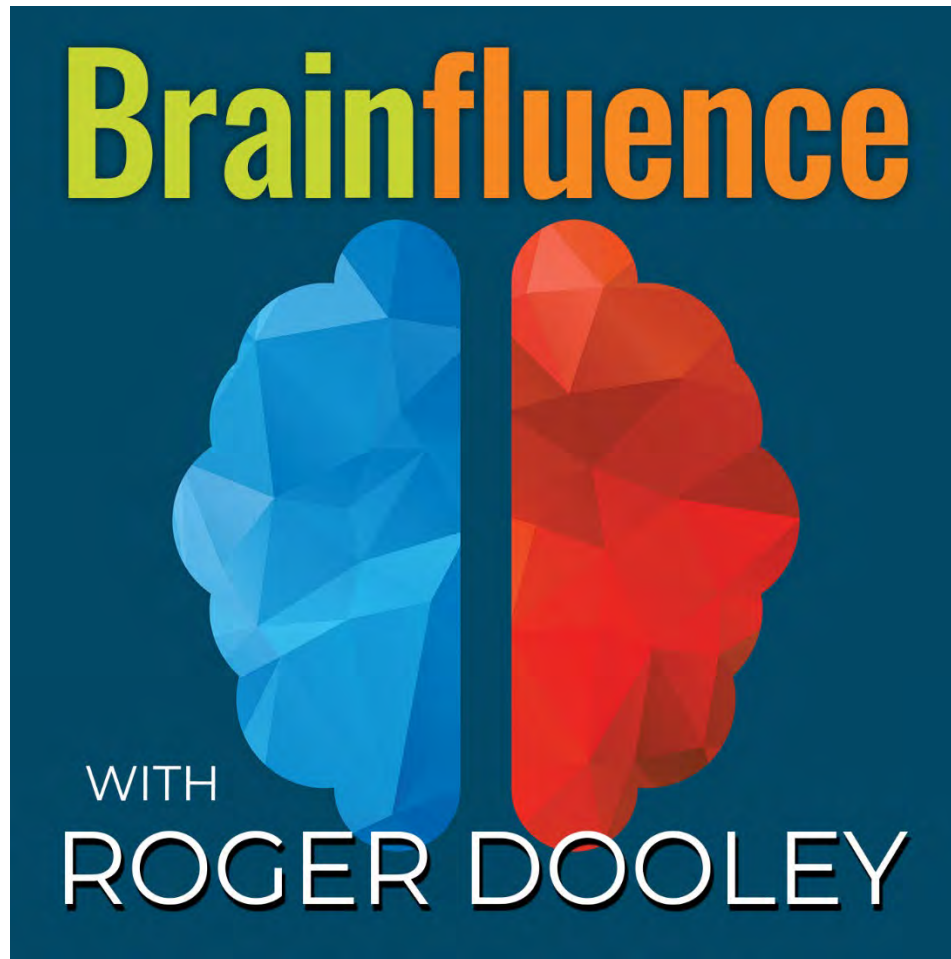


Cognitive Branding with Sandeep Dayal Brainfluence

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Full Episode Transcript

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SPEAKERS

Intro, Roger Dooley, Sandeep Dayal, Outro

Intro 00:00

Welcome to Brainfluence, where author and international keynote speaker, Roger Dooley, shares powerful but practical ideas from world-class experts, and sometimes a few of his own. To learn more about Roger's books, "Brainfluence" and "Friction", and to find links to his latest articles and videos, the best place to start is rogerdooley.com. Roger's keynotes will keep your audience entertained and engaged. At the same time, he will change the way they think about customer and employee experience. To check availability for an in-person or virtual keynote or workshop, visit rogerdooley.com

Roger Dooley 00:37

Welcome to Brainfluence, I'm Roger Dooley. Today, you'll learn about a term I love; cognitive branding. The power of a brand isn't its logo or even its sonic signature. It's how that brand exists in our brains. Today's guest is Sandeep Dayal. He's the founder and managing director of the consulting firm Cerenti, where he's worked with top global consumer brands. He's also a veteran of McKinsey and Booz Allen Hamilton. His new book is "Branding Between The Ears." Welcome to the show, Sandeep.

Sandeep Dayal 01:04

Well, thank you. I'm glad to be here.

Roger Dooley 01:06

So, I think probably a good place to start would be a word that you use that frankly I haven't seen used in a marketing context before, actually, in most

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contexts, and that is the term conation [SP]. First of all, am I even saying that right? I don't think I've heard it spoken aloud. Explain what that is.

Sandeep Dayal 01:25

Sure. Conation, it's not surprising that you haven't heard it often because it is one of the 1000 rarest words. So, it appears on that list of 1000 rarest words. But it really is an important word for marketers, I believe. Because it refers to the inherent or innate tendency that we as humans have to take action. And so, you are aware, many times we will see something that we like in stores and so on, and we'll think about it a lot, and we don't actually take any decision on it. So, conation is an internal energy that each person has which drives their inclination to act on whatever it is that is going on in their mind.

Roger Dooley 02:07

Okay. So, in the context of marketing, how would you use that term?

Sandeep Dayal 02:12

So, in the context of marketing, it's kind of like that which is, even after you look at certain things, so you go out to buy a car, for example, the salesperson gives you their pitch and so on, and you've got this whole case, and everything seems to make sense, but you're just not ready to act, you're not just ready to take that action. And that is the piece that is that piece around inability to take action. I call it a sense of indifference or it could be just a sense of inaction. You're just not ready. And that readiness is something that varies from all of us. You, for example, might hear the same story, jump at it, and buy the car and you're done. And then I'm still thinking about it. So, it is important for marketers to understand that this conative energy exists in different people, and you have to make sure that in your marketing approach, you're addressing that piece, otherwise, you're not going to drive people to

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that. And in the book, I do discuss research that has been done by Ryan of Rochester University, and they've actually done a lot of work around what it is that makes people take action. So, in my book, I call it resolve. Have you actually resolved to take action? And there are specific drivers that have been discovered by these researchers, Deci and Ryan, that tell you what those drivers are.

Roger Dooley 03:30

Well, I guess this fits into the total concept of cognitive branding. And I guess I like that term because my thought has been all along, well, gee, all branding is kind of in our brains, really. But to specifically refer to that in those terms, explained cognitive branding, and also your mental model with the four components that you have.

Sandeep Dayal 03:51

Sure. So, at the heart of it, the premise here is that branding should work the way that your brain does. We cannot force the brain to work in a way that it's not supposed to. And we have learned over the last several years through the work that's been done by people like Casey [SP] and Ryan, people like Kahneman, and so on, how exactly our brain works. So, what I say to marketers is, don't make some assumption around how the brain works, use what we already know. So, the first premise here is that design brands that work the way [unintelligible][04:24]. Your messaging and everything you do about the brand should work the way that our brain already does. So, when you look at all of that, there are a couple of pieces that are described. So, one, the first piece is what I call brand wives, which is around the sense of connection that you can establish with people that is through empathy, or it can be through having a common set of values with people just like we do

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with people. Brands behave very similarly to people. And so, through empathy or through sharing of values, you can have common brand wives. That establishes a connection. The second part of it which many of your viewers are going to be familiar with is now we understand that the brain, the way that it works is through system one and system two, which are essentially the instinctive piece and the deliberative piece of decision making. So, in that sense, whatever messaging, whatever experience you provide for your branding should make sense to a person either through their system one or through their system two, either instinctively, subconsciously, or consciously upon deliberation, it makes sense. And then finally is the piece around resolve, which is around people's willingness. Even after something makes sense, are they going to actually act on it? And that piece, as Deci and Ryan have described is based on things like your ability or your willingness to enhance your own skill. So, self-competence is one of the drivers of resolve. Another driver of resolve is the desire to have freedom and control. And then the third one is around expanding your social relationships. So, if you take these two things, these are things that people naturally tend to do in what I call the pursuit of happiness, or in pursuit of goals. And that drives people there. And just to give you an example there, if you look at, for example, there was an ad, a famous girl, a very nice commercial that was done by the United States Navy, and the Navy was facing this issue where people would listen to the story and so on, but they weren't really being able to recruit people very easily. So, they did a whole campaign, which the beautiful campaign, around not so much, which is what they used to do in the past was to show all kinds of interesting toys, that, hey, you will be getting to play on this high tech machinery here and this and that, but they did something which was around forged by the sea, that was their campaign. And the idea was to say that when you go to the Navy, the Navy is going to change you, you're going to become

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something else, you're going to become a better version of yourself that's going to help you reach your potential. So, that goes back to the Deci and Ryan theory, which is that people will act, people, are more likely to take action when they feel like their competence is going to go up. So, people take action in terms of enhancing their skills. That's a natural thing that's wired in all of us. So, this was a very nice campaign that I loved which the Navy did. And it worked really well by the way, when they looked at how many people were signing up for applications and so on, it took off, versus the previous campaign which was all about, hey, there are all kinds of interesting toys you get to play with.

Roger Dooley 07:23

Probably some social identity there too, where you see that you're part of this somewhat elite group, at least that's the implication. In fact, I think most of the service branches abused that. Marines are the few, the Proud, I think. And I remember years ago, there was an army of one campaign. All of these imply this elite level of competence if you go through their program.

Sandeep Dayal 07:47

You're exactly right. So, the simpler way, and some people will interpret it exactly in the way that you did, which is it's about either enhancing your own identity or expanding your social relationships. When you do those two things, it is something that naturally as humans motivates us to take action. So, brands can do a good job. And there are lots of examples that we can go through, and I do in the book around how people do that. The other example that I love to talk about is the priceless campaign by MasterCard. In Mastercard's priceless campaign, in fact, the first one that they came out, they have this father and son and they show that the Father is going to take

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a son out to a baseball game. And so, they're talking about, hey, you go to the baseball game, it's you know, \$15 for the ticket, \$5 for the hamburger, and blah, blah, blah. And they go through the list of souvenirs, and this and that. And then they're saying, getting that special moment with your son, priceless. So, it is, when you take a step back what they're talking about is your ability to use MasterCard to enhance your relationships; in this case, your relationship with your son. It's not about spending, some chump change. It's really about how the money that you will spend through their card is going to end up enhancing your relationship with the people that you love. It was a very clever campaign, and that's why it did so well and ran for so many years.

Roger Dooley 09:05

Yeah. We bring up the system one and system two aspects, in fact, spend chapters on those in the book, Sandeep. A typical campaign is probably going to include some of both. Maybe if your marketing fragrances, it's going to be mostly system one. Industrial machinery skewing in the other direction. But would a typical campaign include some sort of a balance of both those elements?

Sandeep Dayal 09:30

I think so. And I don't think in Kahneman's book necessarily that part is particularly clear. But I think when we are in fact making decisions, when we're making choices... and this is why I like to use Kahneman's stuff here a lot, "system one, system two," because branding is all about making choices. You're choosing between brand A and brand B, so what are you going to use, system one, system two, or both? I would say for most people, this is not a very exclusive system in the sense that hey, either it's system one or system two. In most cases, both things will go and run in parallel to some degree. And

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what I mean by that is that sometimes what we do is that... let's say if I was telling you about something offline about some mortgage, or some product, and so on, which is a pretty much a system to purchase, but what you might do to simplify your life is that you might do what we call a top-down check, a sanity check. So, that top-down sanity check part is the system two. Because you just do enough analysis to make sure that everything looks okay. And then when it looks okay, when the sanity check does okay, then you forget about the rest of the analysis, then you let system one kick in. So, it's both systems very cleverly play in.

Roger Dooley 10:41

Well, I think one of the examples that you cite in the book, I forget in which context you do, but it's one of my favorite ad campaigns of all time is Apple's "I'm a Mac, I'm a PC" where I think you've got both elements. Because on the one hand, you've got the identity, do you want to be the nerdy looking weed or do you want to be the cool kid that has a Mac? But at the same time, they're bringing up some definite factual stuff like, oh, geez, you've got to reboot again, or you've got updates and all the things that were going wrong with Windows in those days. So, that was really a mixed appeal, but I think very effective. I'm surprised that they haven't maintained some version of that over the years.

Sandeep Dayal 11:21

Yes. And I'm glad you bring that up because the interesting thing about that piece of branding is that they only talk about product features only so much. When we traditionally think about branding, when you go to somebody and say, hey, what is branding? People associate branding with product differentiation. And really, what that means is that you say, hey, I've got

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product X, how does it differ from product Y? What are the differences? And I'm going to talk about the differences because that's my product differentiation. But really, as you see from the example that you just talked about, in that ad they really don't talk about the product as much. It's like you're the Apple guy, or are you the PC guy? So, it's like which group do you really identify with? And when you make that choice subconsciously, that no, I'm an artist, I'm an Apple guy. Or I'm a creative person, I'm an Apple guy, I'm not that deep. So, you automatically make system one choice through your in-group cognitive bias. So, that was one thing that was interesting about that campaign. The point I also made in the book was that many times when we're growing branding, we sort of see it as oh, I've got to differentiate my products, there are functional benefits, there are functional differentiation, and there's emotional differentiation, so I'm going to just do some combination of branding using the two. But what we learned through that, and there's a lot of research that has come out from the field of psychology, that if you over emotionalize things, particularly with negative emotions, if you have things that are very negative then people tend to focus on that emotional story and your brand becomes something of a sideline. And so, when you have these lots of people go crazy with this because they will do ads and commercials, which will make you cry and all of that stuff so you go overboard, and people will remember the story that made them cry. But if your brand wasn't specifically a part of that story, they don't see the last bit when you flash your brand up there and say, oh, and this is the brand. So, you have to be very careful with how you use all of these different levers. And the good news is that there's so much information and so much knowledge out there, which, unfortunately, I would say brand managers have not used as much. We talked about system one, system two, that's being used in public policies, it's being used in economics, it's being used in investments, everywhere people are

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using it. But you go to branding, which is fundamentally about choice, people are not using it. So, that is what my mission with this book was, to close that gap.

Roger Dooley 13:49

Well, that's an interesting point, Sandeep. Because I think these days marketers are using a lot of these behavioral science tools. If you go on any travel site, you'll see scarcity, you'll see social proof, you'll see all these things in action trying to get you to book that hotel room or book that flight right away. But whether they translate that understanding into their approach to branding, maybe not so much. So, that's a good point. Even companies that are fairly sophisticated in applying behavioral science to marketing may not be applying it to branding.

Sandeep Dayal 14:22

And that's my point. You make a good distinction there, which is, if you think about website design, for example, there's a lot of stuff around behavioral theories, nudge theory, that is being applied specifically to how you design your website. If you go to a store and you look at a shelf, there's specifically a lot of theory that's been used around those types of things. But brand positioning is a very different thing. This is around are you the Apple guy, or are you the PC guy? That kind of stuff. Or is this the priceless campaign? What is the positioning of your brand? That is a huge topic, as you know. Brands are worth billions of dollars. So, it is in that positioning piece, are we bringing the science which is so available today? Are we applying the science in that very critical area? Not in the tactics around the website design, not in the tactics around the shelf design, but in that specific thing. Or even people are using it in salesforce pitches. So, in your salesforce strategy, you can use a lot of these

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theories in your dialogue, salesforce dialogues, and so on. But branding is a very different thing. Marketing is such a big field. Branding is this huge gorilla that's out there. That's a very different piece on which companies spend hundreds of millions of dollars.

Roger Dooley 15:33

Yeah. We were discussing before we started recording here, Sandeep, we both have books from McGraw Hill. And on those books have something else in common that is kind of unusual, I think. And that is we both highlight an ad from a company that isn't really known as being a big advertiser, and that's Google. In my book "Friction," I talked about their Parisian Love ad, that shows essentially no imagery on the screen. It's just search boxes one after another, how this person decides to go to France, meets his love, and so on. It's a whole emotionally involving story. And while it's telling the story though, it's highlighting the frictionless search that Google offers where you type in two characters, and it's anticipating what you need. It's click and show me suggestions. And you see the person clicking on the top suggestions, or the second suggestion, and very rapidly navigating through this entire life process. And it to me, in my case, I thought it was great because it showed how easy and how effortless it was to use their product. But as you point out, I'll let you talk about that [unintelligible][16:37] you described in your book, "The Reunion Ad", but it also does a great job of integrating what the product does with the ad. It's not some random either humorous thing or emotional thing, but it builds the emotion right into using the product. So that was Parisian Love. I talked about the Reunion Ad.

Sandeep Dayal 16:58

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Yes, the Reunion Ad, it's similar, but it was an ad that Google did in India. For those of you viewers that may not know the full history, and this goes back a while, but in 1947, India was split into two countries. One was India, and then what is now Pakistan. So, these two countries. And it was almost a religious divide, so Pakistan became a Muslim country, and India became a Hindu country. But it was a period of great emotional turmoil because families were uprooted, millions of people moved across the border at that time. And so, this story that was done by Google was about this guy who is the grandfather, and he's sitting with his granddaughter and he happens to mention some of the memories that he from the time that he lived in Pakistan. Now he's living in India because he had to move. But he was talking about how he had a great friend there. And he described the garden that he used to go to, the Sweet house that he used to go to buy desserts and things like that. And she very cleverly goes on Google, of course, and does a search for that garden, and she actually finds the garden. And she does search for the sweet house, and she finds the sweet house. And then she actually finds the phone number for them, and she calls them and she was actually able to locate his friend. And then as a surprise, she flies them down. And of course, she uses Google travel to book the tickets and so on. It's sort of a very clever way to build this really emotional story, especially if you live in India, you can imagine the emotion because the nations were just torn apart when this happened, Even though it happened in 1947 those wounds for many people are very fresh. So, this story is being woven into that, and then has just such a nice message around unity. But Google was in every element of that story. Very subtly, but it was there in every element of the story. And that's the clever thing. That is how you want to make sure that when you're doing these brand positionings and commercials, that you don't forget about the brand, you don't get so involved with telling a story that you forget about your brand. The brand and the

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storyline have to be woven together very intimately. And that's when it becomes a really effective thing. So, Google, in my opinion, they've done a fantastic job. And actually, they've done these ads internationally even better than what they've done in the United States, I would say. And the other interesting thing about that ad, by the way, was that it was like a two-minute ad. Imagine how we talk about, hey, people don't pay attention for more than 10 seconds, and this and that. At least that's the party line, I don't really buy into that but nonetheless, that's what a lot of people say. Attention spans are shrinking, and this and that. You've got to get your ad down to 15 seconds. But these guys did a two-minute ad which people watched on television absolutely without taking their eyes off the screen. And then in other cases, millions of them went on YouTube to watch this ad where they placed it. And so, if you do the things in the way that the brain is used to, in the way that the brain responds, you can expand attention spans, you can make these lasting customer connections that we talk about.

Roger Dooley 19:54

So, it's all about engaging the person's mind, their emotions, and when you do that, people will tolerate a little bit more length. Every now and then someone will attempt that on TV. There have been a few Superbowl commercials that ran very long, but were rather engaging. But I think these days, people just assume that commercials are going to get fast forward over, or skipped or ignored. And they figure that you've got to make that impression in, you know, five seconds, 10 seconds, 15 seconds max. Sandeep, talk a little bit about sensory branding, and how that fits into your scheme.

Sandeep Dayal 20:27

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Yes. So, the way that I talked about branding between the years is that what is happening with system one is that over your lifetime, you're forming certain beliefs you're having certain learnings because continuously our senses are on. We are hearing things we are listening to things; we are seeing things and so on. Our senses are on and all of this information is going into our brains. And what I say in the book is that this information doesn't get written down, it's not a memory as an exact event by event, perfect memory. What it is, is that our brain takes this information, processes it, and make certain rules around it. And that's what people refer to as cognitive biases. I refer to it as cognitive wisdom. But nonetheless, that's it. But when you are designing brand experiences, so this comes to the part when you're executing a brand and you need to design a brand experience, the thesis is that the more things, the more lines of code that you give the brain, the better it's going to remember. The experience becomes that much more immersive. So, it's kind of like when you walk into a Starbucks, it's what you see. It's the colors, they use the Starbucks green, the Starbucks icon. You walk in, you smell fresh roasted coffee. When all of these different things hit you, in your brain, all of that information gets encoded as part of your experience. So, I say to brand marketers that when you're writing your brand briefs for your agency, think about every sense. Write a brief for what the visualization is going to write a brief for, what the sensory smell is going to be, and so on. And we see that in many examples, many of the hotels like Marriott's and so on in their high-end properties, they will pipe in certain smells. You see that for Singapore Airlines, Martin Lindstrom [SP] talks about this all the time where they have this special smell that Singapore Airlines uses. And there are many examples of brands that are doing that. And they're doing that so that when you walk in there, subconsciously, all of these things are becoming part of your experience, so that when you go and experience even a part of that piece

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somewhere else... if you walk by a coffee store and use if you smell just the Starbucks coffee smell, the remainder of the experience is automatically populated in your mind by your brain because it knows what that is. So, that's what immersive experiences are. So, you should really, as brand marketers, think specifically about how you're going to do a brief around every sense and engage it.,

Roger Dooley 22:57

Sandeep, I've been writing about neuromarketing for years, and people always focus on the threats, what they think might be threats to consumer freewill that somehow marketers are going to take over their brains with these super-effective commercials or campaigns. And of course, those super ads don't really exist. But you do talk a little bit about the dark side in your book. Explain what marketers should not be doing.

Sandeep Dayal 23:22

Yeah, so I'm a great believer. So, I do think that we are heading in a direction wherewith everything that we're learning about the brain, there's a lot of research being done so our understanding of how our minds work is actually getting better and better. So, in that sense, there is the opportunity for marketers to use that information and subconsciously influence people in a way that is in the interest of the marketer, but not in the interest of the consumer. And that can happen. And I think that is where we as marketers, as brand marketers, have to self-regulate ourselves. And that is where it's a matter of ethics. And it's kind of like what you're willing to do and not do. And there are certain, for the simplest example, there are lots of websites which will trap you into using them or make you check some box inadvertently, and then suddenly you thought you were buying one set of whatever it was, but

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now you're suddenly getting one monthly or something, you're getting charged every month or it's not easy to cancel it and so forth. So, those are dark tech techniques. Those are dark patterns. That's the term for dark patterns. And if you go on the web, you'll find all kinds of dark matter techniques, which were used also in election campaigns by the Trump campaign and to some degree by the Democrats also, in terms of raising funding and so on and getting people to contribute more than they realize they were contributing. But I think we as marketers have a responsibility to make sure that we use this information in a very ethical way. So, in my book, in the spirit of self-regulation, I give marketers three rules, very simple rules. One is what I call the canonical principle. Don't do what you wouldn't want others to do to you. And the second principle, which comes from Immanuel Kant's philosophy, which is called the categorical imperative, so I call it the Categorical Imperative in this, or the Kantian Imperative. It's around don't do something which if everyone else started doing would be a bad thing for society. That's what the Kantian principle is. And the last one is that don't do something that would embarrass you if it was published on the first page of the New York Times, and then you would be embarrassed. So, just follow those three rules and you can actually get through many of these enigmas, all these ethical dilemmas that sometimes marketers will find themselves in.

Roger Dooley 25:38

Right, well said. That's probably a pretty good place to wrap up. How can people find you and your ideas online?

Sandeep Dayal 25:44

Oh, sure. Well, let me show a copy of my book. So, one is you just look for this book, online, anywhere; Branding Between the Years. It's available on all the

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online stores, actually worldwide now in this case. So, that's where it is. And you can also get more information about me and my blogs, which I write periodically, on sandeepdayal.com.

Roger Dooley 26:03

Great. Well, Sandeep, it's really been fun having you on the show. I can tell we've got a lot of things in common. So, thanks for joining us.

Sandeep Dayal 26:11

Well, thank you for inviting me. I think we could just keep going here, but this was wonderful and very enjoyable. So, thank you for having me.

Outro 26:17

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