

LESSONS IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Dark secrets

Stuart Read and Saras Sarasvathy on turning a perceived negative into a positive

BLIND DATE

Ever been on a blind date? Most people say it's simultaneously scary and exciting, and always memorable. Which is also what people say about Axel Rudolph's Unsicht-Bar, a small Cologne eatery run by the blind where patrons enjoy wine, cuisine and conversation in pitch dark. Even the glow of a mobile phone is not permitted. Diners are attended by blind waiter/guides who describe the food and its location on the plate using a clock face metaphor.

SUCCESS WITHOUT LOOKING

Since its opening in 2002, Unsicht-Bar has won acclaim from restaurateurs and critics alike. In addition to the novel experience of spending the evening with someone you can't see, eliminating the sense of sight intensifies the rest of the senses so that Unsicht-Bar's simple fare (the chef seasons with only salt, pepper, garlic, onions and herbs) comes alive in a way you might never have tasted before.

"You smell better, you are more receptive to differences in texture, consistency and temperature," Rudolph explains. Unsicht-Bar's popularity has led Rudolph to open additional locations in Hamburg and Berlin. (A similar venture, Dans le Noir, opened in Paris in 2004.)

VISION INVERSION

Rudolph's venture embodies a powerful insight into opportunity. Take Post-it notes, for example – who would want a glue that cannot stick? Similarly, blindness is generally considered a liability. Rudolph inverts it.

Opportunities are like blind dates – scary and exciting, yet memorable and often worth embracing



Eating by numbers: a table at Unsicht-Bar (with the light switched on)

Unsicht-Bar makes blindness a point of differentiation and a basis for advantage. He takes a negative and makes it positive.

SEEING UPSIDE DOWN

Inversions are everywhere. Consider violent video games. Criticised for the disruptive psychological effects on minors, games such as Full Spectrum Warrior are now the basis for an emerging software market in treating war veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder. Retro styles are an inversion of the idea that clothing goes out of fashion. And celebrities driving the inexpensive, compact Toyota Prius invert the notion that wealth and luxury are embodied in a large car.

AN EYE TO OPPORTUNITY

The next time you feel you are on a blind date with destiny, look around you. Look for things that evoke a negative response. And think about transforming them into a positive basis for a new venture. For, as experienced entrepreneurs will tell you, opportunities are usually blind dates – simultaneously scary and exciting, yet memorable and, more often than you might think, worth embracing.

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BOOK REVIEW BUYOLOGY MARTIN LINDSTROM (RANDOM HOUSE BUSINESS BOOKS, £8.99)

WHO'S THE AUTHOR?

Danish branding guru and writer Lindstrom is one of *Time* magazine's 100 most influential people in the world.

WHAT'S THE PITCH?

Neuromarketing, using science to make us choose one brand over another and buy stuff, is the most powerful force in retail. To this

end, Lindstrom set up a huge experiment where members of the public were exposed to advertising and marketing materials while hooked up to an MRI scanner to see how their brains reacted.

GOOD STUFF

The research is truly enlightening. Anti-smoking campaigns make people want to smoke, product

placement is often a huge waste of money and the smell of melons helps to sell consumer electronics. The future of market research will no doubt be in the laboratory.

BAD STUFF

Not much, apart from Lindstrom's occasional habit of telling the reader about his jet-set lifestyle and what an expert he is.

VERDICT

Fun and lively look at how our brains influence our decision-making subconsciously. The science is not exact, and very much in the foothills of development, but it's still astonishing in parts.

BUSINESS LIFE RATING: ★★★★★

