

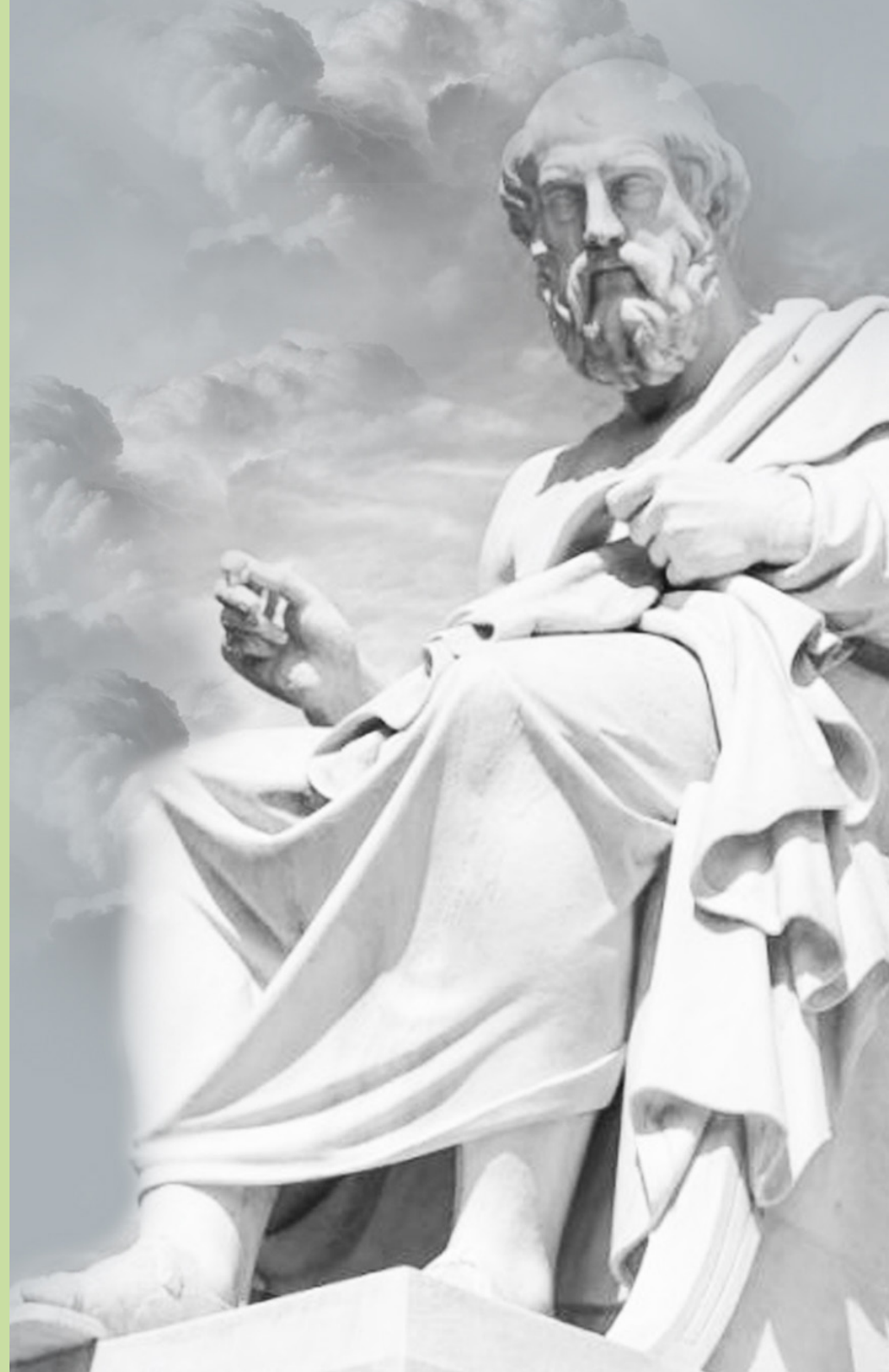
SALES manago

What

***great
philosophers***

can teach you
about marketing

Ebook



Applying philosophy to marketing



Marketing isn't all statistics and success stories, there are many sources one can use to improve business and here, we're looking at perhaps a rather unconventional source of inspiration - philosophy. This shouldn't be too surprising, past thinkers surely must have left us with a great degree of universal wisdom that is applicable to the uncertain waters in marketing.

This handy book is a compilation of articles we have published ourselves, concerning the ideas of various philosophers across the history and how these ideas can be used in modern marketing. Due to restrictions on space and format, we couldn't include everything, so we streamlined it, and present you with the most important useful advices based on philosophical principles in a chronological order. The reason for this particular method is quite simple: the further we go in history, the closer we get to the emergence of modern marketing, and so the ideas of contemporary thinkers become more applicable.

● The articles were originally written in cooperation with Rafal Urbanowicz, the writer behind a popular Polish philosophy blog "Filozofia dla Januszy" (untranslatable word play, with the closest possible translation being: "Philosophy for Dummies"). Just goes to show that when trying to improve your business, being open-minded pays off.

PLATO

Having lived in 427-347 BCE at the very dawn of philosophy, Plato is widely considered by the western scholars to be one of the grandfathers of this elusive discipline and is usually one of the first philosophers aspiring students have to learn about. He was a prolific writer, having penned at least 25 philosophical texts, most starring his mentor (and possibly a fictional character), Socrates, in various debates which he, of course, always wins.

Plato didn't contain himself to just one aspect of philosophy, instead deciding to take a broad approach. He developed fully-fledged systems of metaphysics, morality, aesthetics and delved into the uncertain waters of politics, which in 400 BCE Greece meant that more often than not, he managed to rub the powers-that-be the wrong way.

It's that political aspect of his work that interests us the most, as it can be applied to modern corporate work. **Plato had a very negative view of the politics of his time and considered them a domain of wasteful populism**, where the people who should be deciding the course of nations weren't put into office because of their skill, but because of their cunning in manipulating the masses, were ill-equipped for it, and live distracted by earthly things, such as the pursuit of possessions and the whims of their blood-relatives.

In his famous tract, Utopia, **Plato describes ostensibly the perfect nation** - the mythical Atlantis, where philosophers are "bred for purpose", for a lack of a better term. Children are taken away from their families, subjected to extensive education, and prevented from owning property should they choose to embrace their station as Guardians, as he called them.



Make all your workers understand the bigger picture

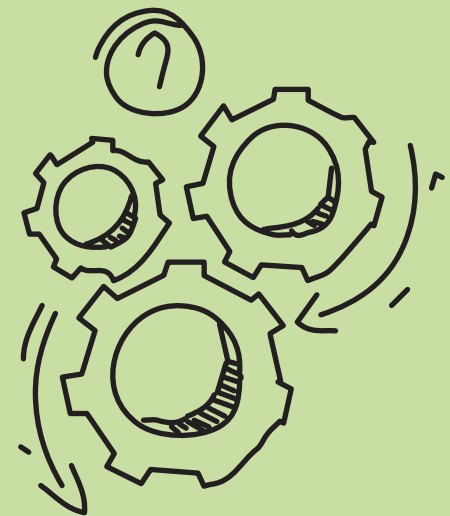
Plato would argue that today, corporations are run in a similarly inefficient manner, where the bigger picture of the long-term strategy is lost on the different parts of the company. On the plus side, during our work, we're all disconnected from our families to a large extent and the people at the top are there, at least ostensibly, due to their education, skill, and experience, so that's something Plato could be proud of.

Now, you probably can't ban the upper management from owning private property, as the common wisdom of XXIst century market economics holds that monetary compensation is supposed to be the incentive for qualified personnel to lend their expertise. But what you can do, is train them well to communicate the company vision to the lower-ranking workers.

According to Plato, the role of the Guardians is to educate people, to take care of their “souls” and show them the perspective that may be lost on them, due to the level of work they operate at. In many ways, the people performing the most menial of tasks are responsible for the bulk of your success as a company, but they can't perform their job well if all they care about is keeping deadlines and can't see the connection between the projects they're working on.

For this reason, **focus on your managerial staff, their responsibility is supposed to be much greater than their underlings**'. In Plato's view, their primary role isn't so much to crack the whip and keep productivity high, it's to communicate the ideal the company is trying to work towards.

Keywords: *Management Training*
Marketing Strategy
KPI



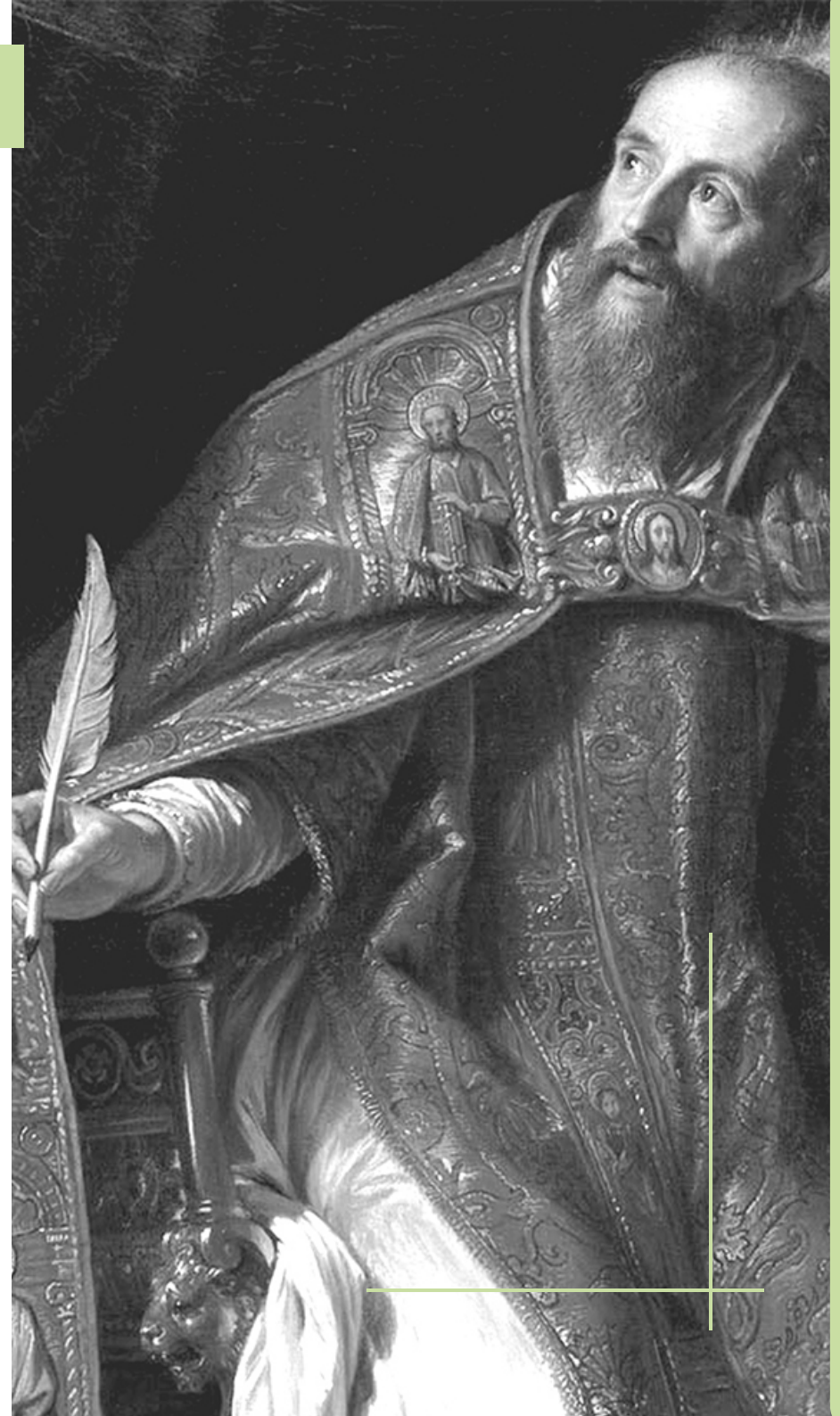
Saint Augustine

Moving on rapidly past the ages to seek the wisdom of medieval philosophers, we arrive at the chapel of Saint Augustine of Hippo, one of the most influential fathers of the early Christian Church. Instrumental in formulating the approach future theologians would be taking for generations, Augustine sought to create the transcendental Kingdom of God on Earth, amidst the fall of the greatest empire in history to the people at the time - the Roman Empire.

Saint Augustine lived before the dogma of the Church had the time to calcify, and close enough to the ancient thinkers, that despite being a bishop of the Church, he took great inspiration from those who did not have the opportunity to find out about the Christian teachings, and he learned from more ancient religions.

To Augustine, the primary issue was that of communication - he knew for a fact that the scripture is God's word, and following it grants divine providence, but he was educated enough to know that it's not without its host of issues. How could God's word be, at times, incomprehensible or contradictory?

The fault, as he stipulated, didn't lie with the one talking, but with the one listening. Scripture, he thought, is as perfect as it gets, but fallible humans cannot understand it correctly. This issue of communication is something modern, data-driven marketing can take a serious note of.



Understand the data you're gathering about your customers

The bulk of operations in the era of automation revolves around personalizing your content to individual customers' needs, and in order to do that, we collect data about them - that's a huge simplification of the current modus operandi, but that's the gist of it.

However, **while the data does not lie, much like the scripture in Saint Augustine's view, it can be misinterpreted**, especially when it lacks the "connective tissue" of causality. We don't really know why people buy the products we offer and why they're more responsive to one form of advertisement than another, we just know that they do and that they are.

Meanwhile, **asking the customers directly about their opinions often results in conflicting information**. A lot of times people don't know why they do certain things themselves, or wouldn't even want to admit that they do.

The answer to this dilemma is keeping an open mind when listening to your customers while remaining results-oriented. Questionnaires and requests for feedback shouldn't be abandoned, just because you have access to the behavioral data of your buyers. What you should be doing is keep cross-referencing the two. Your understanding of your customers' behavior is never going to be perfect, but it's going to get increasingly better as you keep doing business.

Keywords: *Data Analysis*
Behavioral & Transactional Data
360° Customer Profile



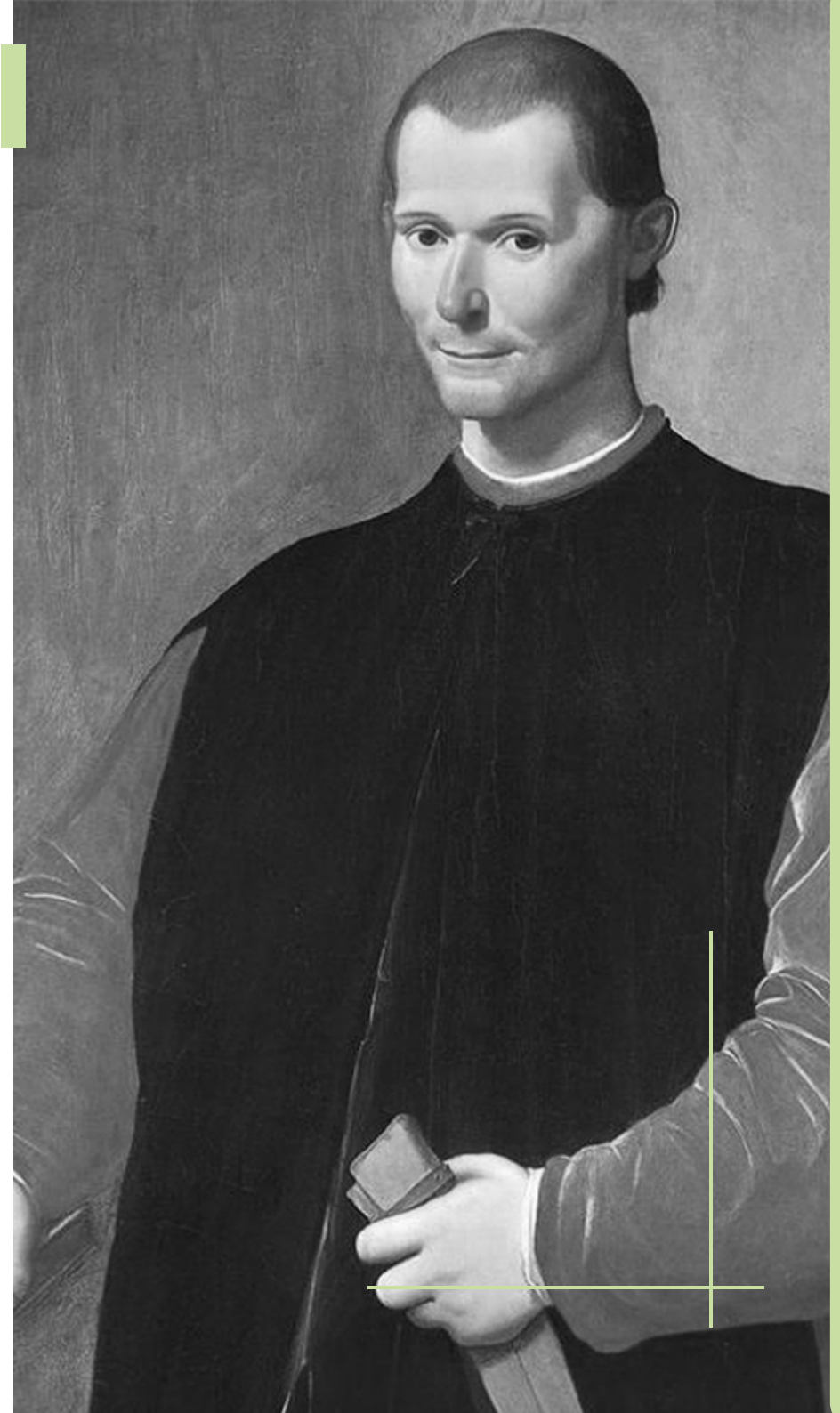
Niccolo Machiavelli

As we arrive at Renaissance, a lot of the ideas we've presented so far will be refined and contrasted with the realities of living in Europe at the cusp of a cultural, technological, and economic boom. Old traditions will be questioned and moral absolutism will give way to political pragmatism, as we take a closer look at one of the most fascinating figures in philosophy - the XVIth century Italian thinker, Niccolo Machiavelli.

Though he was by no means prolific, almost everyone today is well-acquainted with his most influential work - The Prince. To this day scholars can't fully agree whether the work was a satire meant to cause a backlash, in the vein of The Modest Proposal, or if it was written in earnest as a manual of political action.

Despite popular belief, **Machiavelli was not a mustache-twirling villain trying to sell his contemporaries on the idea of oppressing the masses and callous disregard for morality.** It is better to think of him as similar to Pascal - a man offering an argument for morality derived out of pragmatic necessities and reason, instead of religious intuition.

For that reason, his **results-oriented, pragmatic approach can serve us very well in the modern world.** As we find out, there's an argument to be made for a merciful reign that does not merely try to appeal to a god.



Be moral only when you can afford to be

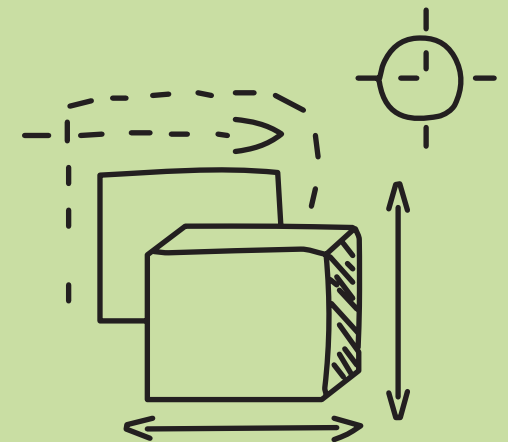
Machiavelli understood that **it doesn't matter whether you're a saint or the Devil himself, power decides the course of history** (and he realized it centuries before consequentialism became a thing). Be that as it may, people innately seek justice and try to live out their lives according to at least some moral principles.

Machiavelli's lesson is that of carefully balancing means and outcomes. Today, even a small company operating in a tiny market niche has a surprising amount of reach, just by the virtue of the existence of social media and completely free means of building zealous communities of people who look primarily to satisfy a particular need and are quick to express loyalty.

So leverage that power well. **Think of your long-term strategy and while you're climbing to prominence, don't lose sight of the fact that you don't seek power just for power's sake** (or at the very least, don't make that apparent). Once you have power, you have the means to be moral, which in many ways is the bigger problem for modern companies, who often forget old tricks and continue irresponsible business practices way past necessity, thus risking a fall from grace.

An often neglected consequence of Machiavelli's lesson is this: **when you have the luxury to be moral, you should be moral.** If for no other reason than because the very people whose loyalty made you powerful expect that of you.

Keywords: *Growth Management*
Opportunity Evaluation
Ethical Business Practices



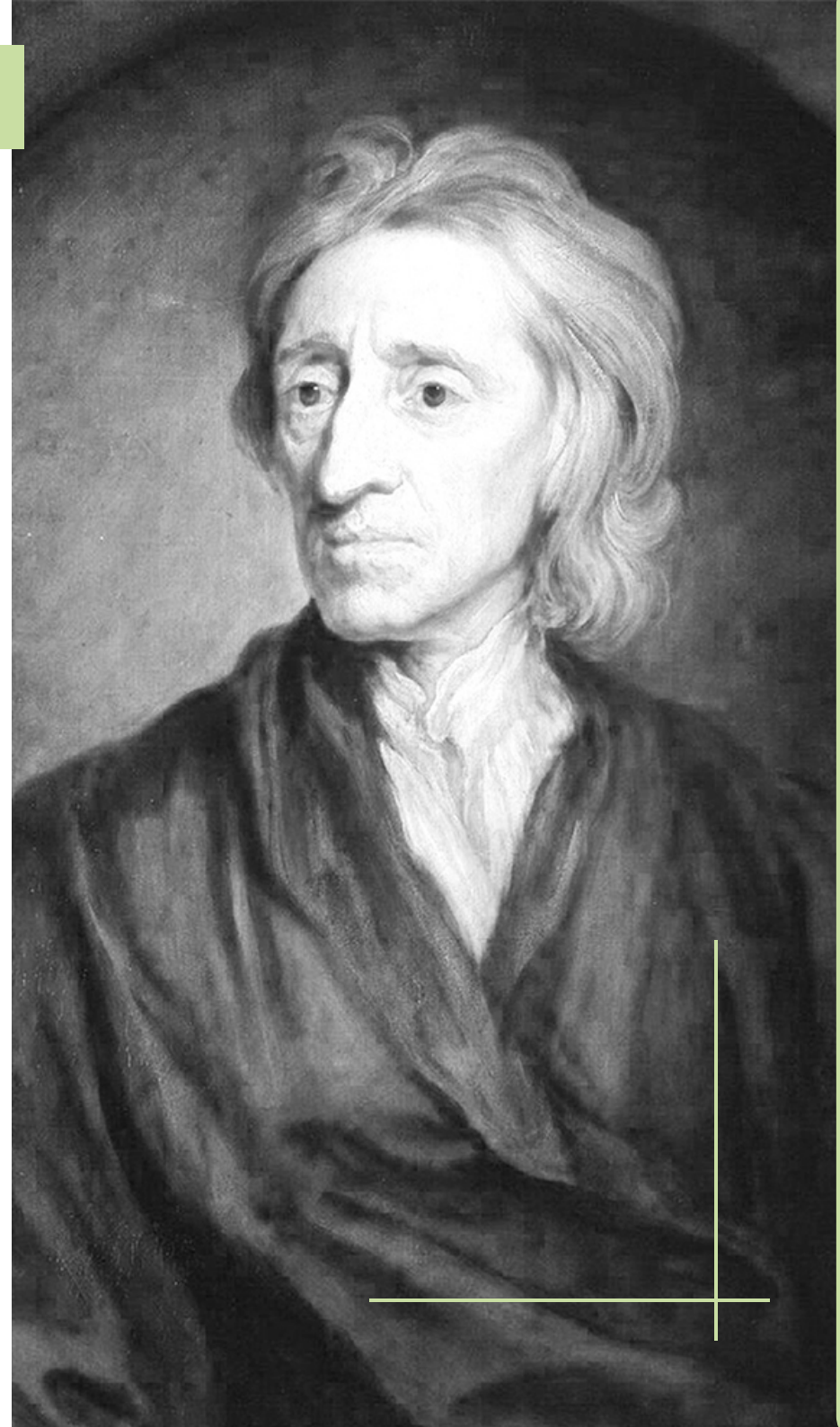
John Locke

As we go further and further in history, it becomes a little more crowded here, with shorter timespans. This is unavoidable - as we get closer and closer to modernity, the words of philosophers will become more applicable to marketing. And so we're nearing the Enlightenment period, where a lot of the foundations for modern, western thinking have been set, and here we will settle for a bit.

We start with the XVIIth century British thinker, John Locke, one of the pillars of the modern view on rationality. Locke, the same as many of his contemporaries like Descartes or Pascal, **tried to rework the foundations of philosophy and focus on things that couldn't be denied**, before moving on to more esoteric questions of metaphysics.

This approach itself is already something we can work with, in the rapidly changing world of marketing **it's good to sometimes take a step back and ask: am I really sure I know why we're doing things this way?** Why do we take certain solutions for granted and should we not try to look at our strategy from a different perspective?

But there's more to it than that. Locke, as with many philosophers leading up to the French Revolution, was staunchly egalitarian and advocated for tolerance because, as he would put it, **we're all the sum of our experiences and people live in radically different conditions**. Trying to understand the needs of others in this way is fundamental to marketing and is the actual reason progressive values like inclusivity are taking hold.



Your customer is not a blank slate

John Locke believed that people are born into this world as “tabula rasa”, a blank slate upon which all experiences leave a mark, forming a complex maze of interlocking relations.

Because of this, we do not enter a new situation and isolate its various, atomized elements and evaluate them in the abstract, we associate them together and compare them to our previous experience. Any snapshot of a person’s perception is holistic.

This poses a unique challenge for companies because it means customers don’t evaluate you in the abstract. **When they shop online, they already have a predetermined idea of what that is supposed to look like.** Moreover, they very well know you’re a company, a brand, and that creates expectations and sometimes concerns, notable is the fact that people nowadays harbor an intense dislike for corporations.

You can’t change that, and it’s fruitless to try, you don’t live in the world alone. What you can do, is just **step ahead of the issue and assert your values.** Be mindful of what preconceived notions your customers may have and work to reinforce them if they’re positive, and rectify them, if their negative (we don’t mean just saying that an issue is resolved, we mean actually resolving it). With modern marketing technology, it is possible to pinpoint the places in your service that the customers find wanting, so focus your attempts there. Concentrate on what’s been shown to work and abandon the things holding you back, and don’t be afraid of experimenting.

Keywords: *Branding*
Lead Nurturing
Connecting Customers on different platforms
Customer Approach Strategy



David Hume

The bells of revolution start sounding in Europe and with them comes a new period of intensive philosophical work at the time when social tensions between classes just could not be resolved peacefully any longer. Here, we will stop and talk about two contemporary scholars, David Hume and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Hume was, to put mildly, very skeptical. Much like his fellow, George Berkeley, Hume was inspired by Locke's philosophy, but what that usually means for philosophers is that they become staunch critics. Hume, like Berkeley, **believed that Locke's empiricism leads to a dangerous conclusion: that no amount of reasoning can prove the existence of material reality outside of our experience.**

While this may seem like a dangerous and pretentious rabbit hole to fall into, this conundrum had actually put a brake on the philosophical horses and European thinkers would spend the better part of the following century, trying to resolve it.

For us, **the most important part of Hume's philosophy is his famous guillotinethe**, and his approach to causality because, in those, we see an interesting parallel in how modern businesses operate - not on an assumption of causality, but correlation.



'Why' does not matter nearly as much as 'what' and 'how'

Today, marketing relies on data about customer behavior. Before the internet and analytics software, there was no easy way of acquiring accurate data about human behavior, marketers would have to conduct extensive and costly market research, which usually amounted to asking people nicely in polls. That approach was hugely ineffective.

What Hume noticed already in the XVIII century, was that **the relationship between cause and effect is little more than a matter of social contract**. We assume that a gun fires when the trigger is pulled, but in philosophical terms, that relationship is unprovable. More importantly, though, there's no real point in proving it.

Hume's famous guillotine states a plain fact: **it is not possible to deduce what should be, from what is**. This is important in two ways, first, it reinforces the value of broadening your perspective when it comes to RND. Improvements in your service and products are nice, but at some point, you hit a barrier, you need to be constantly on the lookout for how to incorporate new ways of doing business into your strategy that don't rely on a stable trajectory of your industry's development.

The second important part is that **you should concern yourself less with why something happens and more with the fact that it does**. Noticing a correlation to improve your service is more important than trying to understand the reasoning behind it. If you can find out that people from a certain place or an age-range like specific things that other, different groups also like, that's a campaign opportunity. You don't need to understand the reason behind the correlation.

Keywords: *Data Correlation*

Research and Development focus

A/B/X testing



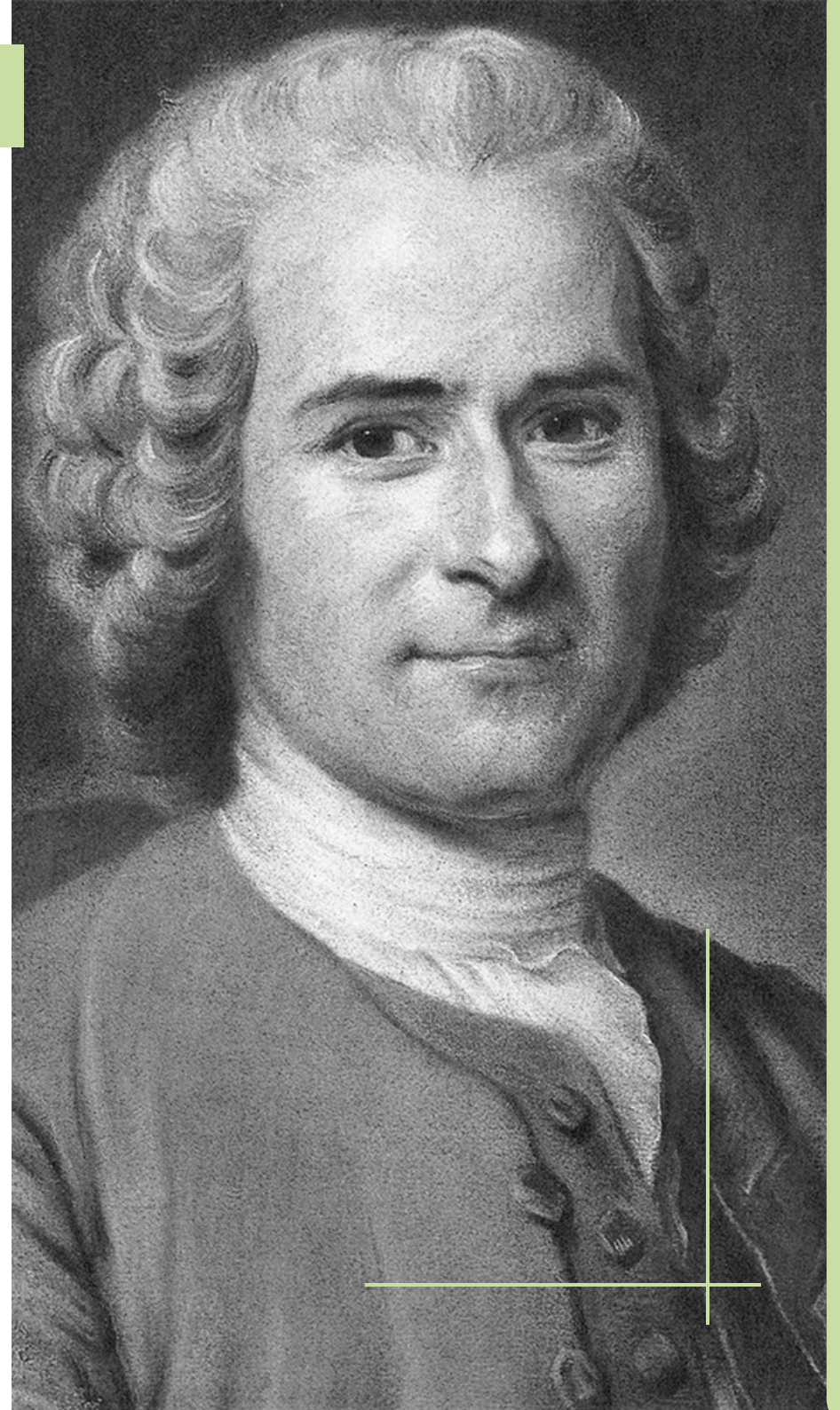
Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Usually, philosophy likes to claim to be a hard, meticulous, no-nonsense endeavor. However, it isn't always like that, the XVIIIth century saw a blossoming of a new movement - romanticism, which emphasized the importance of emotional thinking and individualism.

Our spokesperson for this new force is Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a French philosopher mostly associated with this extensive work on ethics. Rousseau had the opportunity to live both at the peak of colonialism, and when personal liberties of citizens were starting to be recognized as rights, making for a very interesting contrast.

Rousseau was an advocate for individual freedoms and for an empathy-driven mindset, as well as stemming the effects of industrialization and preserving the natural environment

And both these factors, empathy and appreciation for nature, can serve us well in reaching customers.



Wear your heart on your sleeve

With all the buzz about automation and Big Data, it's easy to forget about the roots of marketing: word of mouth advertisement. We largely lost the direct connection with our clients, and to be completely fair, it was a mutual process - customers became progressively less interested in talking to representatives and more interested in quick, easy encyclopedic instructions, so we acted on that need.

But that doesn't mean we should stop caring about what our customers have to say. **When they express themselves, especially with your products, they're trying to show their feelings,** build their emotional identity. Moreover, customers in a lot of industries tend to be impulse-buyers, led by sudden whims, not meticulous strategies.

Additionally, **modern consumers expect a degree of caring from companies,** in how they operate their business (who they hire, when, how and how they treat their workers) and what impact they have on the environment. Going green can be a costly endeavor, but it can be less costly than finding yourself at the end of a righteous consumer backlash.

Ultimately the takeaway is that you **can't really be a soulless, corporate machine, regardless of how productive that may seem and how used to it you may be.** Unlike in the 50s, these days people care, and you kind of have to care to.

Keywords: *Brand Identity*
Social Media advertising
Environment-Friendly Business Practices



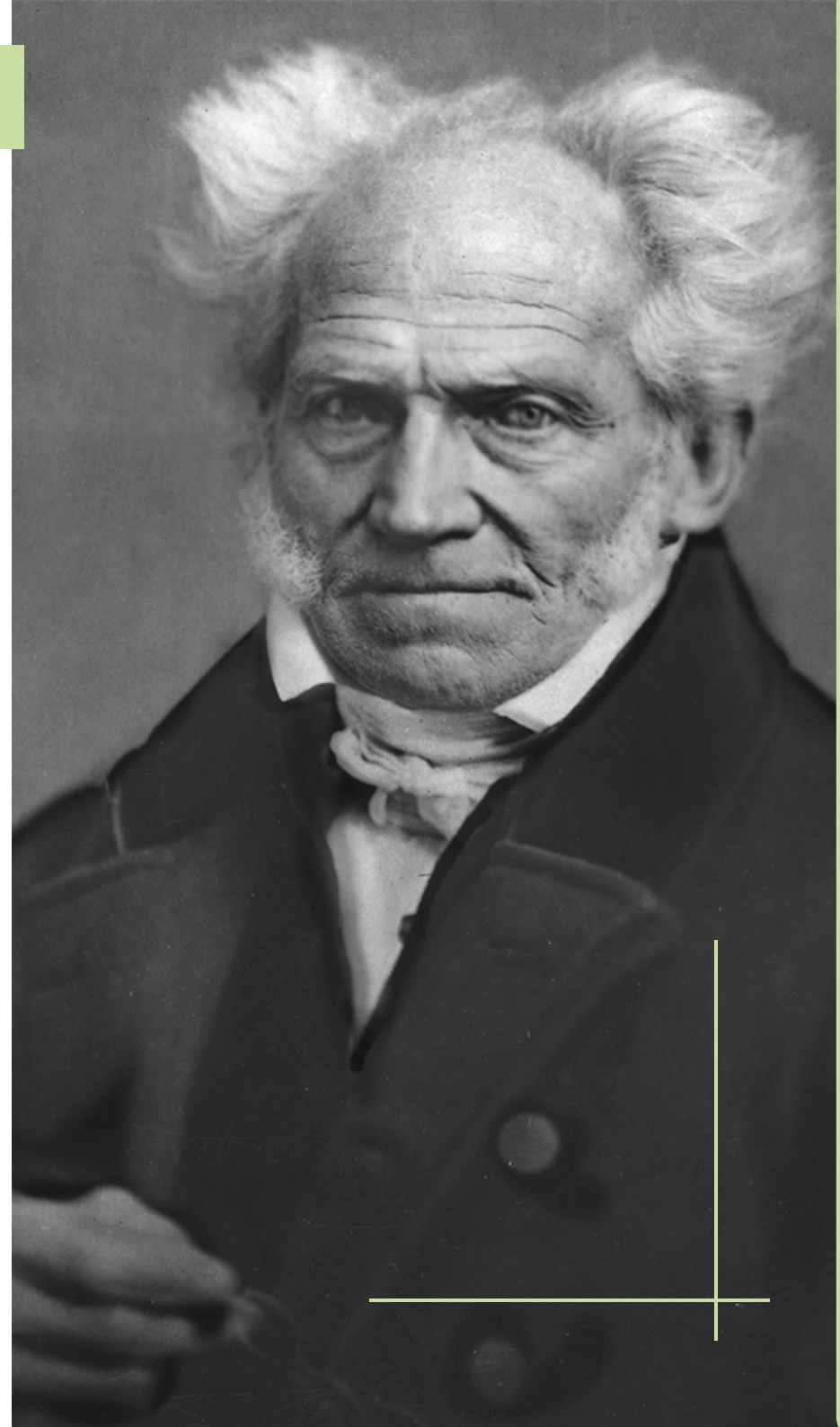
Arthur Schopenhauer

By Schopenhauer's time, marketing is well and truly a force in the industrialized world, and the capitalist norm is being settled. From now on, things will get a little less-straightforward as thinkers like Schopenhauer start exploring existentialism and start to ask questions about what drives us.

Schopenhauer is widely considered to hold a pretty gloomy outlook, like Nietzsche or Camus, although much like with Machiavelli, the truth is a bit more complex than one man being disillusioned with harsh reality. In the post-enlightenment world, people needed to find a good reason to face the escalating hardships of the world, and that's where existentialists like Schopenhauer come in.

To the German philosopher, **the “will to live” is the defining characteristic of the human condition and every human being innately has the need to face new forms of suffering to grow stronger.** In fact, left without challenges to overcome, human beings fall to a destructive form of routine.

This, of course, lends itself to marketing very nicely. First, because **everything we do aims to resolve some kind of adverse condition and improve the process of sales.** Second, because it puts the customers themselves into a very useful perspective - they do have to face their lives and to that end, they use products.



Strength in adversity

New developments, market shifts, changes in broad patterns of consumer behavior, new technologies - commerce is a world of constant turmoil. New crises arise constantly and have to be addressed.

The defining feature of a successful business is adaptability, or how Schopenhauer would put it: a will to live. A business must be ready for anything and on some level, look forward to new challenges as they represent growth opportunities. To use perhaps a crude example, the 2020 pandemic changed a lot in our habits, but also greatly contributed to eCommerce sector growth as the consumers accelerated their move towards online shopping.

Schopenhauer is also famous for stipulating that aesthetic rumination on art or nature constitutes the rare moment of respite in our struggle against reality. This warrants a mention, because **corporate life is very demanding and both you and your employees need to recharge batteries every now and then.**

Lastly, remember that your customers have to face hardships as well. **Present yourself to them as a challenge-solver, something they can rely on to address daily woes,** or as that brief moment of respite on their journey, not merely as a pragmatic solution or a source of products that raise their self-esteem.

Keywords: *Flexible Strategizing*
Customer-centric Approach
Worker Benefits Programs



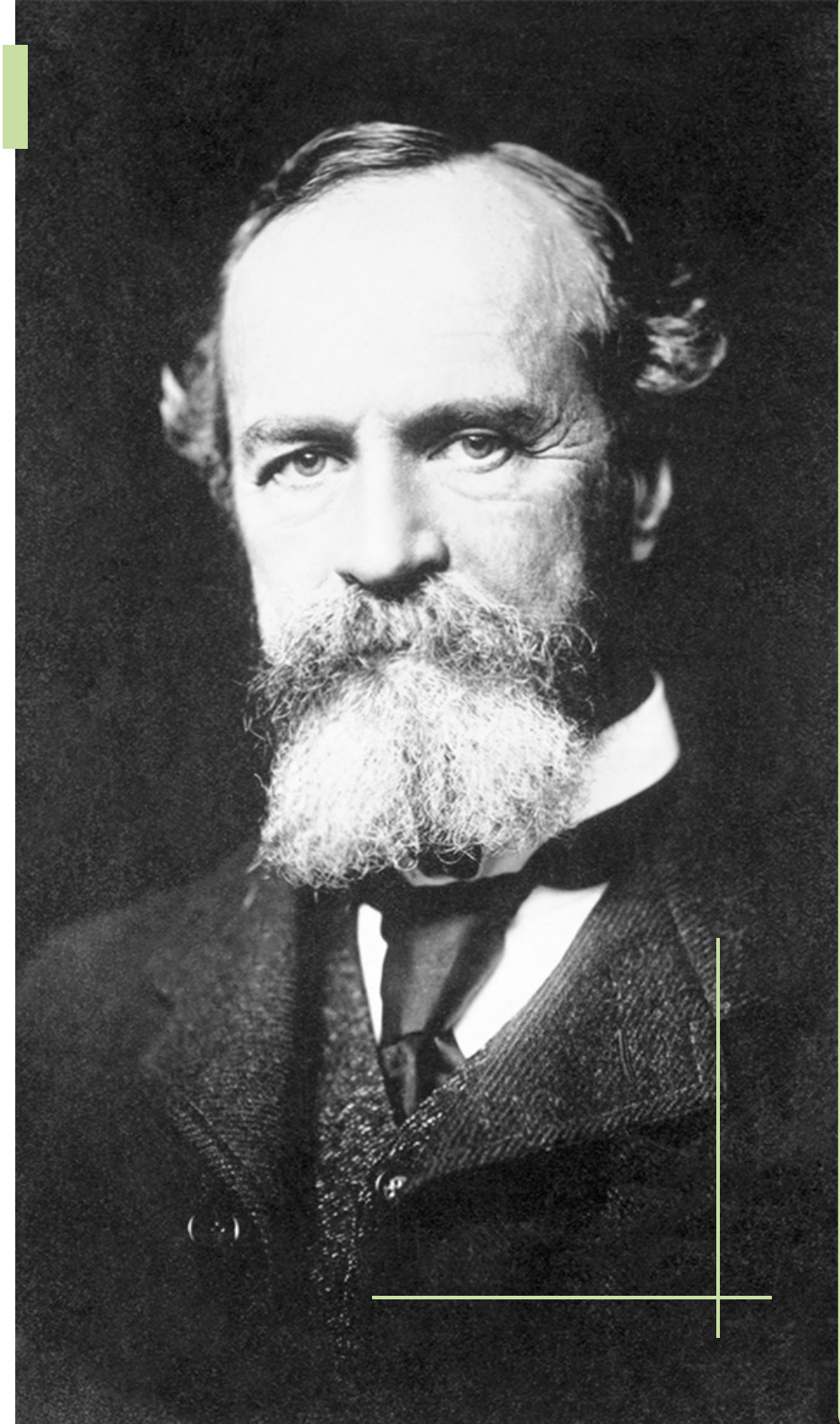
William James

By the end of the Enlightenment, philosophers were completely bored with the abstract concepts of truth and metaphysics. In the world of free-market economics, universal human rights, freedom of worship, who would ever have the time to wonder about concepts as immaterial as truth?

This new world is a world of consequences. Philosophers like William James were much **less inclined to consider the question of “why does something happen?” and more interested in asking “how does that affect us?”**

However, James wasn't completely locked in this mode of thinking. He included a caveat about what he called “the will to believe”. Essentially, **it isn't unacceptable to have faith in unprovable, theoretical notions if you get some positive benefit out of it**, provided of course it those notions are congruent with the facts of reality.

In this way, a person is free to explore possibilities and maintain beliefs providing peace of mind, yet remain grounded with the focus on the material impact of their actions on the world.



Stay positive, focus on the results

The most straightforward application of James' philosophy is the notion that the **material results are much more meaningful than theoretical explanations**. This means that all sources of knowledge about customer behavior or preferences like forms, questionnaires, and general opinions, are less relevant than hard data.

If the customers purchase your products, that in itself means they enjoy something about your service, and the increases in sales a more meaningful indicator of increasing customer satisfaction, than anything they actually say.

James' methods are also ideally suited to cutting right to the chase in case of any uncertainties when it comes to marketing strategy - **when it doubt, just follow the results**. This also applies to resolving in-company conflicts, the reasoning of any particular employee is much less important than their results.

Of course, not everything will be quantifiable and uncertainty will occasionally creep into your marketing actions. This is where the will to believe comes in: **you have the freedom to maintain a positive attitude when you can't rely solely on the facts of the matter.**

Keywords: *Results-oriented Approach*
Customer Satisfaction Analysis
Product Testing



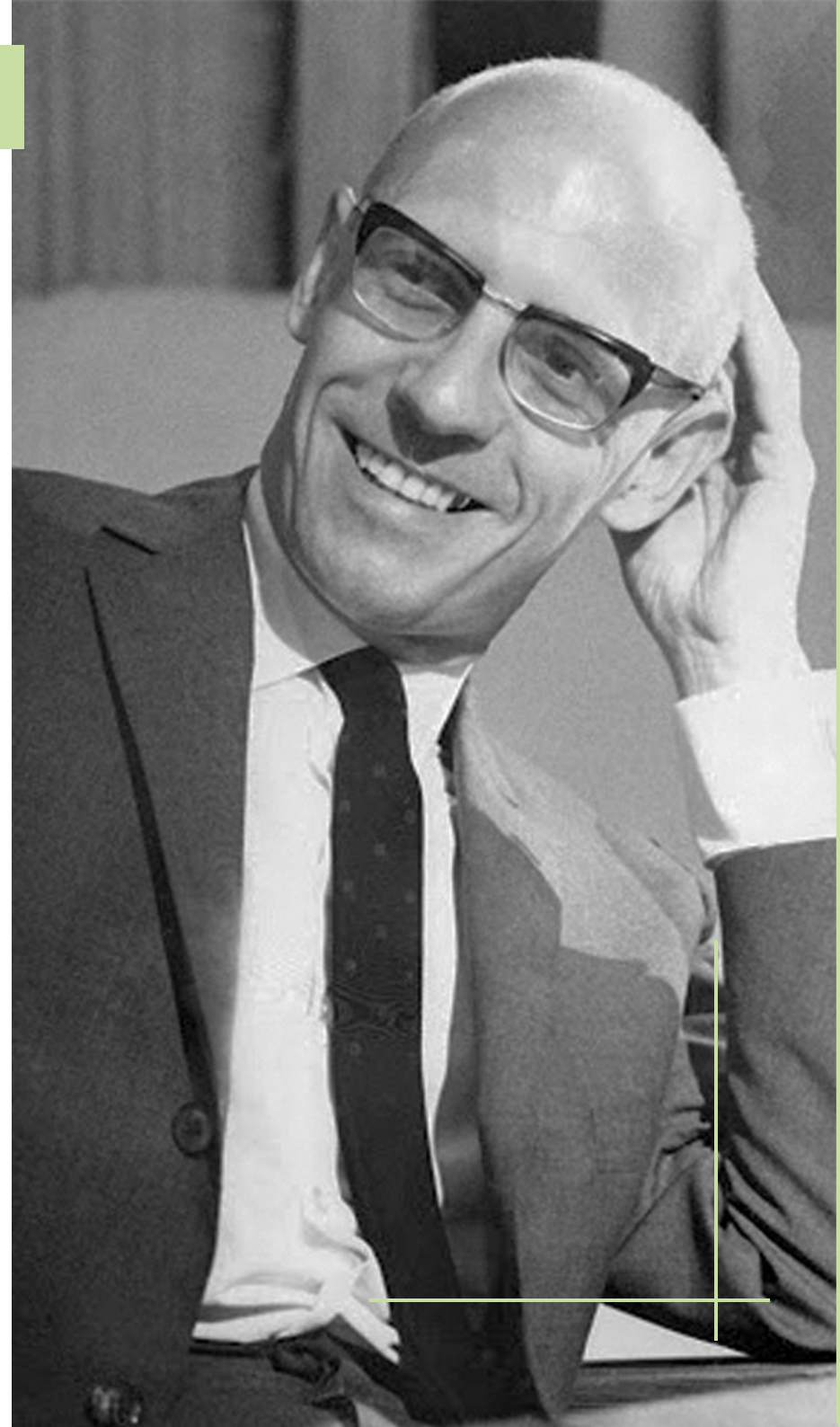
Paul-Michel Foucault

Finally, we reach one of the most turbulent moments in world history, between two earth-shattering conflicts, lying at the intersection of an ideological war waged by two wholly incompatible economic models: Soviet communism and American liberal capitalism, constantly teetering on the verge of a nuclear holocaust.

Foucault was an openly gay man living in a time of a worldwide push towards conservative values, AIDS ravishing the population while various governments were trying to scapegoat the LGBT communities for it, and cutthroat capitalism systematically disadvantaging minority groups. Needless to say, he wasn't happy about any of it.

Insights from thinkers like Foucault are particularly important to us because, whether you agree with this animosity towards the economic status quo or not, these philosophers address marketing, in the form very close to how it looks today, directly.

And with Foucault, this insight manifests as a discussion about soft power. The idea that **people, subjected to an all-encompassing reality of capitalist incentives, do not need to be controlled with a whip**, because, at the end of the day, they have to satisfy the needs born out of living in this reality anyway.



The modern panopticon

In the XVIIIth century, philosopher Jeremy Bentham proposed a thought experiment involving a special kind of prison - the panopticon. The panopticon's structure is that of a cylinder, with the guardhouse located in its middle. From that vantage point, the guards are able to observe all prisoners simultaneously, but more importantly, the prisoners can also see each other as well.

What Foucault noticed, is that **the perception of being watched is indistinguishable to the prisoners from actually being watched**. What that means is that prisoners would feel intimidated into compliance even if there were no guards at all, they would be doing their job for them.

Translated into marketing terms, this means that **all people within the superstructure of online businesses** - be them the employees of your company, the users of your service, and even you yourself - **are subjected to the same set of incentives and are indirectly guided to perform adequately within this framework**.

As far as your customers are concerned, this means that all you have to do is **present your service in a form that is familiar to them, so subtly nudge them to perform actions they are familiar with**. As long as you can make them perceive you as a part of the superstructure, their behavior becomes highly predictable.

Keywords: *Market Research*
Behavioral Profiling
Contact Base



Woody Allen

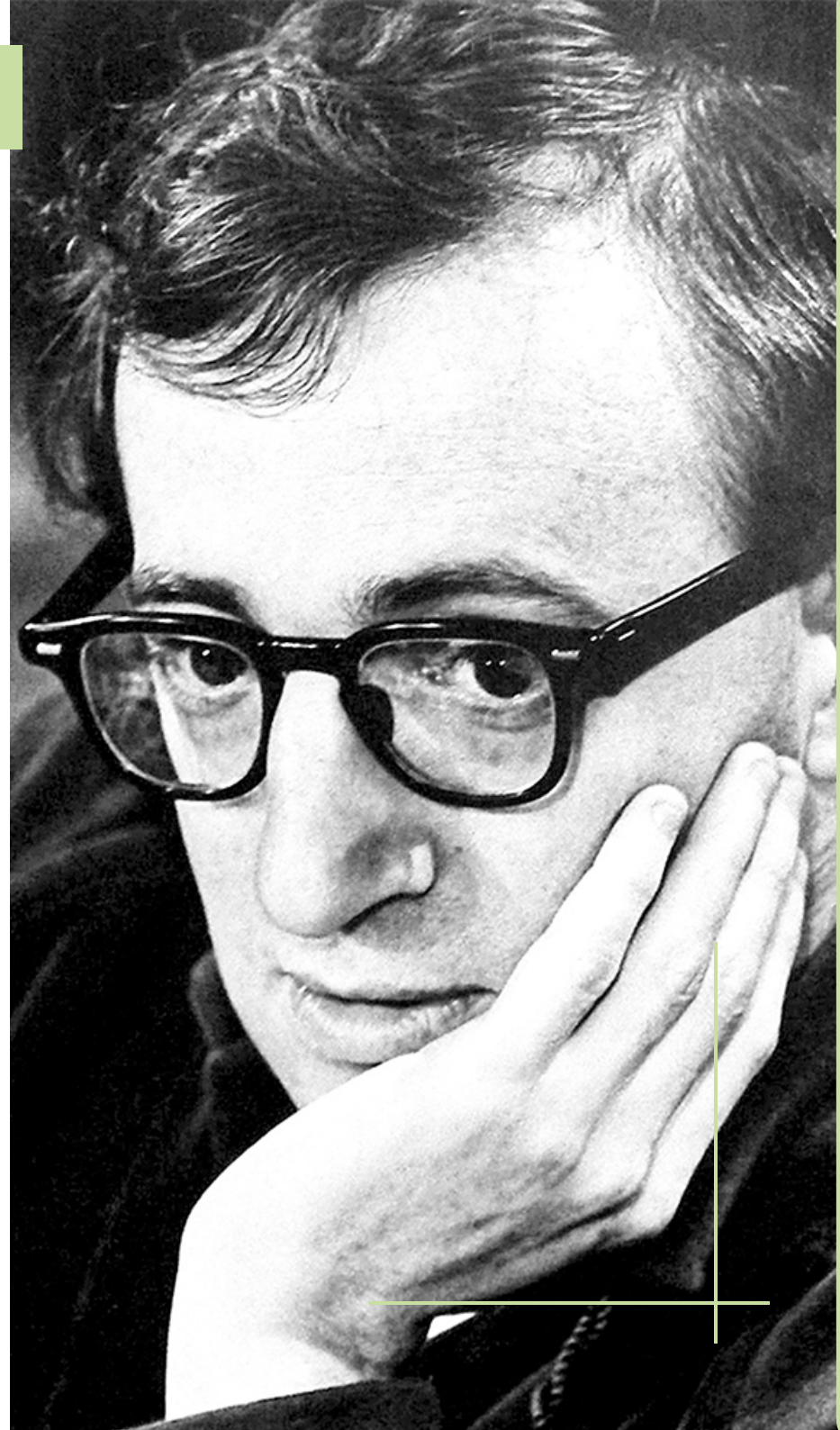
We're going to end on the most contemporary philosopher, actually, one that is still alive, comedian and film director Woody Allen. His presence on this list of esteemed thinkers shouldn't be surprising - philosophy was always a practice born more out of deep insight about life, than from meticulous, technical studies.

Allen has something of an ironic outlook on modern reality, approaching it from a position of dark humor. **His personal philosophy revolves around tearing down established tradition and poking holes in what passes for common wisdom.**

Those of us who look for substantive arguments may be quick to dismiss the short and quippy nature of Allen's philosophy, but that is no less knee-jerk reaction than seeing it as some kind of grand wisdom. **It's not grand, but it doesn't need to be, it's useful and it's to the point.**

The essence of Allen's approach lies in being disillusioned with impressively-sounding statements that don't actually say much.

When applied to marketing, this means focusing on what you do and self-improvement, and not buzzwords or standardized practices that amount to little more than performative gestures.



Standing in a church doesn't make you a Christian

A marketer isn't someone who says, they're someone who does. The sum-total of your successful conferences is ephemeral and performance doesn't account for much. You can fake your way into a pretty high position if you're determined enough, but why even bother?

Marketers way too often fall into the trap of presenting their services as some kind of a magical panacea, or a night supernatural ability to create results. The reality is that **marketing becomes more and more about management, and less about flashy, innovative solutions, as time goes by.**

This doesn't mean that marketing is a sham, it achieves results, but **the results it achieves are both contextual and directly related to your existing infrastructure** - no marketer is going to conjure up results from nothing. If they say they will, they're lying, and you shouldn't expect them to.

The important part to remember, as far as Allen's philosophy is concerned, is that **you have to keep a realistic outlook on the landscape of marketing.** Marketers say a lot, but you will know them by the fruits of their labor.

Keywords: *Accurate Reporting*
Data Management
Employee Poaching

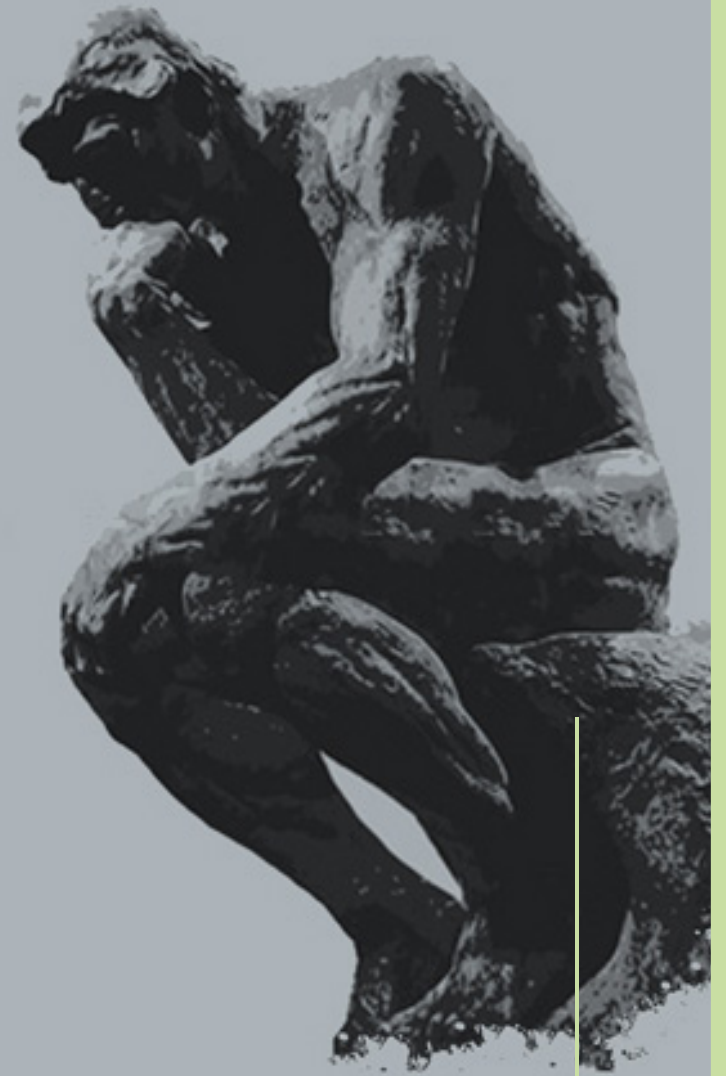


Universality of philosophy

As a human being first and as a marketer second it is always not healthy to close up on one vision. The wisdom provided by these philosophers encourage to have an open mind and dwell on possibility gaining inspiration from various sources.

A smart marketer organizes his work on ideas and principles, most of which haven't appeared only in marketing but have been there for centuries before. Whether you read about John Locke and his pressure on the fundamental importance of empathy and understanding the needs of your clients or about harsher James' ideas about the importance of hard data, it all serves the growth of your business.

Philosophy, if studied thoroughly, can be a great source for universal knowledge that builds a foundation of a strong business. By choosing the elements that are inspiring for you, it is possible to fill the gaps in your approach towards the client, the processes or the company itself.



What great philosophers can teach you about marketing

www.salesmanago.com

SALES  **manago**

