

# THE DEVIANT'S ADVANTAGE

How Fringe Ideas  
Create Mass Markets

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**MAIN IDEA**

The odds are very good that the breakthrough ideas of the future will ultimately come from the mind of someone who lives a “deviant lifestyle” – who lives outside the accepted norms of society. Why? Simply because positive deviance from traditional thinking is an inexhaustible source of fresh thinking, new ideas and original business concepts.

Many of today's highly successful commercial products and services started out on the fringes of society and moved gradually to the point where they were accepted and adopted by the mass markets. This path from the fringe to the mainstream is traceable and predictable. Deviance in a positive and constructive sense underpins all innovation and advancement in society. In fact, unless people were prepared to try new ideas, there would be no commerce and no products or services.

In this era of mass communication, the time it is taking for new ideas to move from the fringe to mainstream markets is being compressed dramatically. Ideas are making this journey today in less time than ever before, all of which means change is going to intensify in the future. Therefore, the trick is not to try and delay the inevitable. Instead, a more profitable idea will be to better understand the journey by which ideas move from the fringe into the mainstream. To get ahead of the curve, don't simply try and identify the next big thing which is warming up on the sideline. Instead, go further back and unearth the new ideas which currently exist only at the fringe. Track those ideas as they move forward and project the commercial opportunities that will become available as those deviant ideas find their way into the mass markets. Do that effectively and consistently and your business enterprise will be well positioned and prepared to commercially exploit the new business opportunities which will be created in the future.

The challenge is simple. Either identify and harness the breakthrough concepts while they are still lurking at the fringe of society or get buried by competitors who do.

**1. The Evolutionary Process For New Ideas . . . . . Pages 2 - 3**

New ideas follow a well defined trajectory on their evolutionary journey from raw idea to a commercial product or service. Along the way, viable ideas pass through five distinct stages:

1. The Fringe – where anything goes.
2. The Edge – where word of mouth creates a small market.
3. The Realm of the Cool – where buzz starts to gather.
4. The Next Big Thing – where demand intensifies.
5. Social Convention – the heart of the mass market.

The ideas which will power the engine of business change in the near future are already lurking at the Fringe. The challenge is to identify them earlier and then harness them before someone else does.

**2. The Impact of Deviant Thinking on Society . . . . . Pages 4 - 5**

To illustrate this evolutionary process in action, and to demonstrate the close links between social change and business change, consider how fringe ideas have become mainstream thinking in five different areas:

1. Sex – one of the most effective baits used in commerce.
2. Language – which controls how marketing works.
3. Art – which is used to package goods and attract customers.
4. Science – where business turns for new product ideas.
5. The Abolition of Context – how new ideas are positioned.

In short, all of these areas are constantly changing which is generating a never-ending stream of new and emerging market opportunities. The best defense is to remain alert to the range of new possibilities opening up.

**3. A Toolkit For Harnessing Business Deviance. . . . . Pages 5 - 8**

To capture the benefits of deviant thinking for your own career and for your business enterprise, try using these tools:

1. Understand the nature of deviant economies.
2. Embrace a deviant style corporate culture.
3. Capitalize on your most deviant customers.
4. Develop and use deviant marketing programs.
5. Sell deviant based products and services.
6. Build a little deviance into your branding efforts.
7. Employ some deviant style billing practices.
8. Find creative ways to deploy your core competencies.
9. Try an “opposites analysis”.
10. Use cross-functional 360-degree analysis.
11. Have a beginner's mind-set.
12. Disassemble and reconstruct.

All these ideas are worthwhile but of necessity are not exhaustive. At the very least, they should illustrate that to understand what lies ahead in business, first try and understand what lies ahead for society.

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