

“With today’s business being driven by data, the *Geek Nerd Suit* philosophy is a must to be successful in the shifting customer landscape.”

CARRIE THARP - CMO, NIEMAN MARCUS

GEEK NERD SUIT

BREAKING DOWN WALLS, UNIFYING TEAMS, AND
CREATING CUTTING-EDGE CUSTOMER CENTRICITY

CHUCK
DENSINGER

BROOKE
NIEMIEC

MASON
THELEN

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THE ORIGIN STORY

You'd be right if one of the things you took away from the story of Patagonia was to be wary of individual leaders or outside experts who say they have all the answers. On that note, let us introduce ourselves. We are consultants who run a consulting firm called Elicit. But before you chalk us up as some kind of dream team out to change the world, let us tell you where this book came from.

Several years ago, we were sitting in the CMO's office at Best Buy, tasked with helping them understand their customers in a changing market. Amazon was famously beginning to turn Best Buy into their showroom, and Best Buy was asking themselves very difficult questions about their future. The CMO, whom we'll call Hadley, was a wiry guy with dark hair and tight sideburns. He had a lightning-quick mind, and eyes that darted around the room as if always on the hunt for something more interesting. We had just completed

a behavioral segmentation for the company, and he was impatient for change. “You guys have given us the segments, but my team just doesn’t get it.”

“What do you mean?” Mason asked. “They seem to understand them perfectly.”

“No, I mean they aren’t doing anything with them,” Hadley said. “They don’t know how to use the segments. I’m just getting more pie charts, not more customers.”

This was a common complaint and pattern. Helping companies to become more customer-centric often seemed like it should be straightforward. You line up all the customer data. You torture it until it reveals its secrets about your customers, and the positive returns start flowing in, right? On the surface, Hadley seemed to have the right formula: organize the data, analyze it for insights, and act on it. But the company was going about it in the wrong way.

“That’s because your analytics team doesn’t generate new customers—your merchants, marketers, and stores do, using the technology your IT department manages,” Chuck explained. “Why aren’t your teams talking with each other?”

Hadley fidgeted, raised his arms in exasperation, and sighed. “Just tell me what I need to do.”

Chuck leaned forward. When he glanced over at Mason for some backup, Mason was dialed out, jotting something down in his Moleskine. Chuck stalled, waiting for Mason to return to the conversation. Mason looked up with a curious grin, not saying a word.

“Look,” Chuck said to Hadley. “We understand your problem. Give us a few days to think it through, develop an implementation strategy, and meet with you again to present it.”

Hadley rolled his eyes, planted his hands on the desk, and said, “Fine.” We knew he wasn’t assuaged. We were failing at what was supposed to be the easiest part of our job—explaining, in clear detail, our strategy.

Outside, in an adjacent office, Chuck turned to Mason, “What were you doing in there? Writing love letters? Come on. We’ve got a problem here.”

Mason took out his Moleskine, picked up a blue dry erase marker, and headed toward the window. On it he wrote:

GEEK NERD SUIT

We stood in front of the window, staring at those three words. Hadley’s problem at that moment was that his teams were just lobbing the ball to one another and failing to communicate. He was getting data and ideas from all of his teams individually, but no collaborative solutions. What Best Buy needed was for its geeks (technologists), nerds (analysts), and suits (strategists) to work together.

Finally, we looked at each other, smiled, and nodded, leaving it on the window as a small artifact of what was to come. And thus, the labels Geek, Nerd, and Suit were born. The ideas had been percolating for some time, but these three words suddenly made it all coalesce. Our minds were racing, ideas flowed, and plans were

hatched to help Best Buy. A problem we'd been wrestling with just came together in a big way.

As we walked out of the office, our first thought was, "Let's call Brooke." That afternoon, the three of us talked at length about how this was *the formula*: getting Geeks, Nerds, and Suits aligned was the way to make it work. It was the first of many such sessions, sometimes sitting in conference rooms in preparation for a client meeting, sometimes over a hastily-consumed lunch at an airport, sometimes during "office hours"—our evening work sessions at the hotel bar in which "two bourbon brilliance" worked its magic. The ideas took shape and worked themselves out as we applied them with our clients over the coming months and years.

When we returned to Hadley's office a few days later, we said, "Right now, your Geeks, Nerds, and Suits are working separately, which is paralyzing your ability to make real change. You need them to start cooperating to serve customers instead of creating charts and graphs and overwrought ideas."

It was the first time in weeks that we actually heard Hadley laugh. From that moment on, we restructured the ways in which his teams communicated, shared information, solved problems, and collaborated. Not only did it get Best Buy new customers, it helped them better serve their existing customers, setting the stage for a decade-long, innovative push from a brick-and-mortar big box to a customer-centric behemoth with a unique approach from its competitors, serving customers in stores, online and—in the case of the Geek Squad—in their homes.

We'd realized that what was missing from Best Buy's—and pretty

much all of our other clients'—approach to serving their customers better was not vision, desire, or effort. What was missing was true customer centricity, and the right partnership to make it a reality.

Geek Nerd Suit was born in that moment of inspiration, but its roots went back to the times earlier in each of our careers in which we were the ones hiring outside consultants to help our companies become more customer-centric, and we were the ones seeing solution after solution not work. Businesses and the consultants they hired so often failed because they made broad-sweeping decisions about the customer experience and split into isolated teams to address the details of implementation.

From that moment of insight, we fleshed out the ideas, deepened their application, and proved them to ourselves and to our clients time and again in our work—creating collaboration not just in the brainstorm, but in every drop of rain.

“True experts in modern customer understanding—
this book exposes their secret formula in detail.”

KEVIN KRONE - CMO, SOUTHWEST AIRLINES

“This is a foundational book for business leaders
who are ready to truly focus on their customers.”

ERIC HUNTER - EVP, MARKETING, PIER 1 IMPORTS

In their scramble to reach customers, many business leaders start acquiring mass amounts of data. Others create incredibly complex analytics. Some think the answers come from the top. What is often lost in this quest to innovate is the very thing we claim to value: the customer. Customer centricity might sound like just another buzzword, but it creates the framework required for customers to fall in love with your brand. The strategy? A dynamic and powerful partnership across IT, analytics, and business—between the Geeks, the Nerds, and the Suits. This book not only shows you how to create effective collaboration between your teams to solve problems, it shows you how to create a business atmosphere that runs itself and clears the path for innovation.

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