

The real "big idea"

 By [Walter Pike](#)

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I have become fascinated by the idea of ideas.

Ideas move from person to person. Ideas change. Ideas grow. Ideas form the essence of everything we do as people. Religion is an idea, love is an idea, so are anger and revenge. Politics are ideas and brands are ideas.

Memes are ideas as well, ideas that spread mostly by imitation, sometimes copied like genes with variation so they can first mutate before they spread. Language is a meme and so are political ideologies.

I am particularly interested in ideas on two levels: How they come about, and how they spread.



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Ideas don't come out of nowhere, they need a context and a platform. Some are formed soon after birth and many become prejudice, some are transferred at school, from reading or from friends or strangers.

New ideas often need a spark often called 'inspiration' to form. Ideas can be static and stay exactly the same as they are passed on from one person to the next. Sometimes these ideas become a consensus in a group, what we call 'group think'.

New ideas are inspired by connections, connections between different ideas and connections between different people that

bring different thinking. Two ideas can connect and hybridise and produce a brand new idea that connects and mates and mutates once again.

The marketing problem is essentially one of how to spread ideas. The method we use to spread these ideas depends on how we establish the connection between where the idea is and to whom the idea is to be given.

We have essentially got three different types of idea-spreading channels or media.

- **Broadcast media** (one source many recipients);
- **Personal connections** (two-way communications between individuals); and
- **the internet**, which makes it possible to have two-way communications en masse.

When the strongest channel was broadcast, as it has been for centuries ever since the invention of the printing press, we learned how to spread our ideas in highly targeted and crafted messages and gave the same message to everyone. We call these advertisements or press releases and PR. Often this is also called the Big Idea. If we pushed this big idea single-mindedly, often enough and with enough impact, we could drum the ideas into our target market's heads until it becomes part of them. We even have a name for that. It's called "brand awareness."

If we want direct feedback we must talk to individuals in a one-on-one conversation using technology such as the telephone.

The first medium in history that allows conversation on a mass scale is the internet. And as connections to it become ubiquitous and cheap, it is ever-growing in importance. It is the true many-to-many channel, It's the only medium in which ideas can be spread in bulk and still allow two-way communication and allow recipients to talk to each other and coordinate a response. So the internet has become a site of coordination. It is an uncontrolled place in which brand ideas or any other ideas can morph and change.

The savvy marketers of the future will realise that the key to success is the understanding of how connections between individual players create a community, and how ideas transfer in that community. This is certainly not the standard influencer marketing of today nor the threat of ad blockers stopping marketers applying broadcast marketing tactics to the internet. Nor is it the creation of "content" that is spread using the internet as it is a broadcast channel.

It is a step later, it is facilitating behavioural change by helping the spread of ideas, being part of the conversation.

Before we can begin we need to know:

- The participants in the conversation.
- What their roles in that conversation are.
- The structure of the communities involved in that conversations, their connections and their position in the community.
- The ideas they currently hold.

Once she can understand how her brand ideas could spread and what ideas will spread, the role of the marketer of the future will be how she designs her product/service and her communications so that ideas that make up her offering actually do so.

So much still to learn.

ABOUT WALTER PIKE

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