



Biography

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Co-author of *Creating Do-It-Yourself Customers: How Great Customer Experiences Build Great Companies*

My passion is creating conditions that enable employees to deliver world-class service and customers to unlock as much value as they can from goods and services. As a business consultant, experience designer, and educator, I guide organizations in the design of goods, services, experiences, and systems that improve the performance of employees, customers, and ultimately the organization itself.

One of my mentors once said, “Peter, ignorance is your greatest strength.” He meant this metaphorically, of course, as I commonly start projects as a novice and quickly end up being a quasi-expert. I find it ironic that I, a once mediocre student who was expelled his first year of college, am now personally tutored by some of the world’s leading experts on such topics as career development, oil spill cleanup, international banking, and genetic analysis. I also find it ironic that I began my career as an expert.

I sold cameras and photography supplies retail for a number of years in Northern California. The gentleman who owned the shop where I worked only hired photography experts – four semesters of photography in high school qualified me. His secret for customer satisfaction was that we not only taught customers how to use the cameras, but critiqued their photos and educated them about good photography. That was the customer’s goal and that’s how we developed strong customer relationships, repeat purchases, and extraordinary loyalty. Customers would ask for us by name and trusted our expertise so much that they’d even show us their private “boudoir” photos for artistic critique.

This initial interest in media led to a job reading scripts for a producer in Hollywood. Fortunately, none of my recommendations made it to the big screen. Also around this time I spent my weekends as a roadie for a Southern California band, the Surf Punks. The band played loud, memorable songs such as *Punch Out At Malibu* and *Shark Attack*. Their multimedia stage show, which featured a full-sized lifeguard tower, lent new meaning to the term *customer experience*. I ultimately abandoned LA, returned to Northern California, and settled down for what I thought would be a long career in advertising and marketing communications.

At 6’ 5”, I was the star center on an Advertising League basketball team. I learned tons about design and media from the creative people with whom I worked. I liked developing the brand identity of companies, and in one project I led the development of a branding and corporate identity strategy for an insurance company. Yet, I frequently found myself engaged in activities that improved the internal operations of the firms for which I worked. What I remember most from this period is that the personal computer was introduced. What an opportunity! On my own time I wrote a computer program that processed the paperwork we used for placing advertisements. This enabled my coworkers to quintuple the amount of work they could do in a day and automated a monotonous and boring task.

My interest in this new, accessible technology eventually led to starting a company that developed marketing communications on floppy disks (and later, CD-ROMs). My partner and I designed product demonstrations and interactive experiences for a variety of financial, scientific, and technology products. Apple Computer hired us to develop an in-store multimedia experience for customers. These activities eventually pointed us in the direction of product design. We created one of the first commercial products based upon Apple Computer’s HyperCard software. The audience was do-it-yourself customers and the product, *DTP ADVISOR*, was published by Broderbund Software. It went on to win the Software Showcase award at the 1988 Consumer Electronics Show. We also started writing a monthly column for do-it-yourself desktop publishers in the magazine *Macintosh Horizons*.

Then something truly horrible happened. A large oil tanker, the Exxon Valdez, ran aground in Prince William Sound, spilling millions of gallons of oil. The Coast Guard was dispatched to clean it up. One day, a gentleman called and asked if I was available to be in Alaska in two days. The opportunity? Lead the design and development an executive information system that enabled Coast Guard officers to track the

cleanup of the oil spill. The data the system managed would enable officers to make decisions about how best to deploy cleanup resources. I jumped at the opportunity and spent the summer in Valdez, Alaska. The Coast Guard ultimately presented the cleanup results our system tracked to Congress.

The design of products has always held a special place in my heart, especially when those products help people perform better. At this point in my career, my academic credentials enabled me to add *social scientist* to my list of vocations. It is in this role I began working with R&D and marketing teams of various companies to design award-winning software and scientific instrument systems. My mandate was to bring humanism to these systems and the services that surrounded them. The designs and ideas I researched and recommended are seen in over 40 different products, including the Applied Biosystems 3700 Genetic Analyzer, the system that sequenced the human genome. Patent 6,326,147 bears my name as co-inventor of, "Methods, apparatus, articles of manufacture, and user interfaces for performing automated biological assay preparation and macromolecule purification." Try saying that ten times fast.

The world of nanotechnology and polymerase chain reaction can certainly shelter one from what is going on in more mainstream commerce. That's why I also try my hand with consumer products. I'm the co-inventor and co-marketer (in partnership with my wife) of several consumer products. Our products have appeared nationally in LeVenger, Brookstone, and Plow & Hearth catalogs. Perhaps you've heard of them or even own one? Bed&Body® Warmer, Foossage® Body Massager, or Boot Dragon® Boot Warmers? If not, direct your browser to www.auntiea.com and order one. Buy three and we'll pay the shipping.

What I've learned from my retail, product development, and marketing experiences is that it is not just the product that needs to perform. The customer needs to perform as well. Ultimately, customers must perform in such a way to extract as much value from goods and services as they can. This requires customers (and the employees who coach them) to develop expertise.

In addition to social scientist, I also wear the hat of *instructional designer*. I've conducted research at the Indiana University medical school on how best to teach medical students to care for their customers, persons with diabetes. For Fortune 500 companies, I designed some of the first e-learning programs that taught employees how to explain products to customers. In all, I've designed over 50 customer education and employee training programs on a variety of topics, from career planning to hotel management to sales. I've even wrote the book on how to design customer education – *STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE CUSTOMER EDUCATION (McGraw-Hill)*.

My life's story wouldn't be complete without a bit of glue that connects the stories together. I earned a B.A. from Pepperdine University and a Ph.D. from Indiana University. My home base is Reno, Nevada. In addition to consulting I spend part of my time as an adjunct professor at Indiana University and University of Nevada, Reno, teaching performance consulting, instructional design, and marketing. My academic interests revolve around coproduction, constructivism, ethnography, complexity theory, and emergent learning. My new book is called *CREATING DO-IT-YOURSELF CUSTOMERS (Thomson Texere)*. And I am one of those, too – a *do-it-yourself customer*.

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