

A close-up portrait of George Orwell, looking slightly to the right with a thoughtful expression. He has dark hair and a mustache. The image is overlaid with text and a navigation icon.

REFLEC TIONS

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Orwell's Prophetic
Wisdom & The Still
Revolutionary
Act Of Brands
Telling The
Truth



George Orwell once wrote that “in a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.”

He wasn't thinking about brands when he said it, but the observation has aged with the kind of tragic accuracy that makes you wish it hadn't.

Because here we are, decades later, in a marketplace where brands are supposed to be the “voice of authenticity” while speaking in languages invented in boardrooms, written by lawyers, and polished by committees until they sound like they're apologizing for existing. If Orwell's line was prophecy, then modern marketing is the dystopia he warned us about.

The trouble is, truth is dangerous in business. It's unpredictable. It doesn't fit neatly in a slide deck or align perfectly with quarterly earnings. Truth refuses to round off its rough edges just to make a slogan feel more “on brand.” Which is precisely why brands avoid it like the plague; opting instead for half-truths, emotional sleight-of-hand, and a relentless coating of aspirational nonsense. The sad part is that in doing so, they rob themselves of the one thing that could actually make them matter: reality.

The genius of Orwell's writing wasn't in the complexity of his language, but in the clarity of his warnings. He knew that if you twist language enough, you can bend reality itself.

“War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength.” And in our modern marketing lexicon, we’ve given birth to our own equivalents: “Fast fashion is sustainable.” “Ultra-processed is healthy.” “Your happiness is just one purchase away.” These slogans might as well be lifted from a Ministry of Truth briefing; designed to create emotional obedience, not informed choice.

But here’s the irony: the public is no longer living in the information dark age brands pretend they are. We live in an era where every claim can be fact-checked in minutes, every gap between words and actions exposed, and every scandal dissected in real time. Consumers know when they’re being sold a story, and they’re not always inclined to forgive. Yet the corporate reflex is still to spin, not to own. As if clinging to the fantasy of control will somehow keep the walls from crumbling.

That's why, when a brand actually does tell the truth, it still feels radical.

Not the manufactured kind of “radical honesty” where every imperfection is presented like a charming quirk to make you feel closer to the brand; uncomfortable, inconvenient truth, the kind that admits fault, acknowledges limits, or refuses to exaggerate. It's the difference between saying “our product is the best in the world” and saying “our product is better than it was yesterday, but here's what still needs fixing.” The first is advertising. The second is accountability.

And the market reacts to it. When a brand ditches the script and speaks plainly, people notice. The words travel further because they don't sound like words that were paid for. They sound like words that were meant. That's the real revolution: cutting through the fog of manufactured meaning with something solid enough to grab onto. Truth, in branding, is a sharp object; it punctures the fantasy, but it also lets the fresh air in.

Of course, telling the truth in brand marketing is not without cost. You might alienate the people who preferred the comfortable illusion. You might watch a competitor's slicker, shinier story win in the short term. You might have to fight with your own leadership to explain why admitting that you're not perfect is a sign of strength, not weakness. But the long-term payoff - trust - is worth more than the quarterly numbers you'd manipulate to look good in a press release. Trust compounds. Spin erodes.

Orwell understood that language shapes thought, and that thought shapes reality.

Brands have immense linguistic power; they don't just describe products, they describe worlds. And if the world you're building with your words is a shiny lie, don't be surprised when your customers start treating you like a politician rather than a partner. If you want loyalty, stop broadcasting at people and start telling them something real.

The revolution isn't complicated. It's as simple as stripping away the euphemisms and admitting what you're actually doing. If you're making a product that's "better" for the planet, tell us better than what. If you've made mistakes, say so before the headlines do it for you. If your brand is about joy, stop staging it in stock-photo perfection and show it as it exists, in all its messy, beautiful reality. You don't need to invent stories when the truth is more compelling than anything you could script.

There's an unspoken fear in marketing that if you hand the public the truth, they'll turn it into a weapon.

And maybe they will. But that's not a reason to hide; it's a reason to be better. Truth has a way of forcing improvement. Lies, on the other hand, only require maintenance. And maintenance, over time, is exhausting. You end up spending more energy defending the illusion than improving the reality.

We should stop pretending that truth-telling is some kind of high-risk experiment. In the age of receipts, screenshots, and whistleblowers, it's actually the safest move you can make. Not because it guarantees you'll be loved, but because it guarantees you'll be understood. And in branding, being understood is the foundation of being believed.

The uncomfortable reality is that Orwell's warnings were about power, and branding is power. It's the power to decide what gets said, how it's said, and what gets left out. The choice every brand faces now is whether to use that power to manufacture consent or to invite real conversation. One road leads to short-term wins and long-term distrust. The other leads to slower growth, maybe, but deeper roots.

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If Orwell's ghost is watching us now, he's probably shaking his head at how willingly we built our own Ministry of Truth, this time with hashtags and logos. But he'd also remind us that the door is still open to walk out.

All it takes is the courage to speak plainly. To tell the truth when it's easier not to. To remember that revolutions aren't always loud; they can be as quiet as a brand saying, "Here's who we are, here's what we make, and here's the truth about both." That's not just good marketing. That's liberation.



Gordon Gerard McLean

So I'm the one behind the mystery moniker. Here's a bit about me. Originally from Dublin, I've spent 25+ years as a brand strategist in a variety of creative companies; from Sheffield to London, Istanbul, New York, and Cupertino, CA.

I'm fortunate to have helped launch, build and reinvent some of the world's best brands; including Apple, Bacardi, Bank of Scotland, Bing, Bombay Sapphire, EA Games, GE, Gillette, Grey Goose, Guinness, Halifax, Hilton, Holiday Inn Express, HSBC, Perfect Day, Radisson, Sandy Hook Promise, SAP, ServiceNow, Vodafone, Wells Fargo, and Yerba Madre.

I've also been lucky enough to lead a body of work that's been recognized for its commercial impact by the IPA and Effies, for its strategic thinking by the Jay Chiat's and ARF, for its cultural impact by the MoMA, Emmys and TED, and for its creative excellence by The Clios, One Show, Cannes Lions, D&AD, and others.

Now based in LA, I fly solo under my nom de strat, Fear No Truth, helping agency, start-up, and marketing leaders, wherever they are, to find, tell and manage their brands' true stories.

Let's LinkedIn.



FEAR
NO
TRUTH

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