

Brand You: You Are the Company You Keep

There's a Frenchman whose name I don't remember—I found it on Google, but it has escaped—who apparently was the first person who said, “You are what you eat.” At some level, that's pretty obvious.

Well, I want to now take that to the big, enormous, giant, strategic topic of innovation. And what I'm going to argue is that, in fact, the most important strategic factor associated with innovativeness is, “We are who we hang out with, we are the company we keep.” Hang out with interesting customers who are pulling you into the future, you will become more innovative. Hang out with interesting little vendors who are doing fascinating, weird stuff, they will drag you or push you, as the case may be, into the future.

Members of the board, consultants, employees, vendors, customers—everybody with whom we interact is important to that innovative decision. As I like to put it: Hang out with boring and thou shalt become more boring. Hang out with cool and thou shalt become more cool.

Point: Every decision we make about who we hang out with is a simple decision, answering the following question: Innovate, yes; or innovate, no. Interesting person? You just signed up for innovation. Uninteresting person? You didn't.

Think about it. You are what you eat and you are the people with whom you spend time. Look at that portfolio very precisely—customers, employees, vendors, etc.