It’s all about disruption

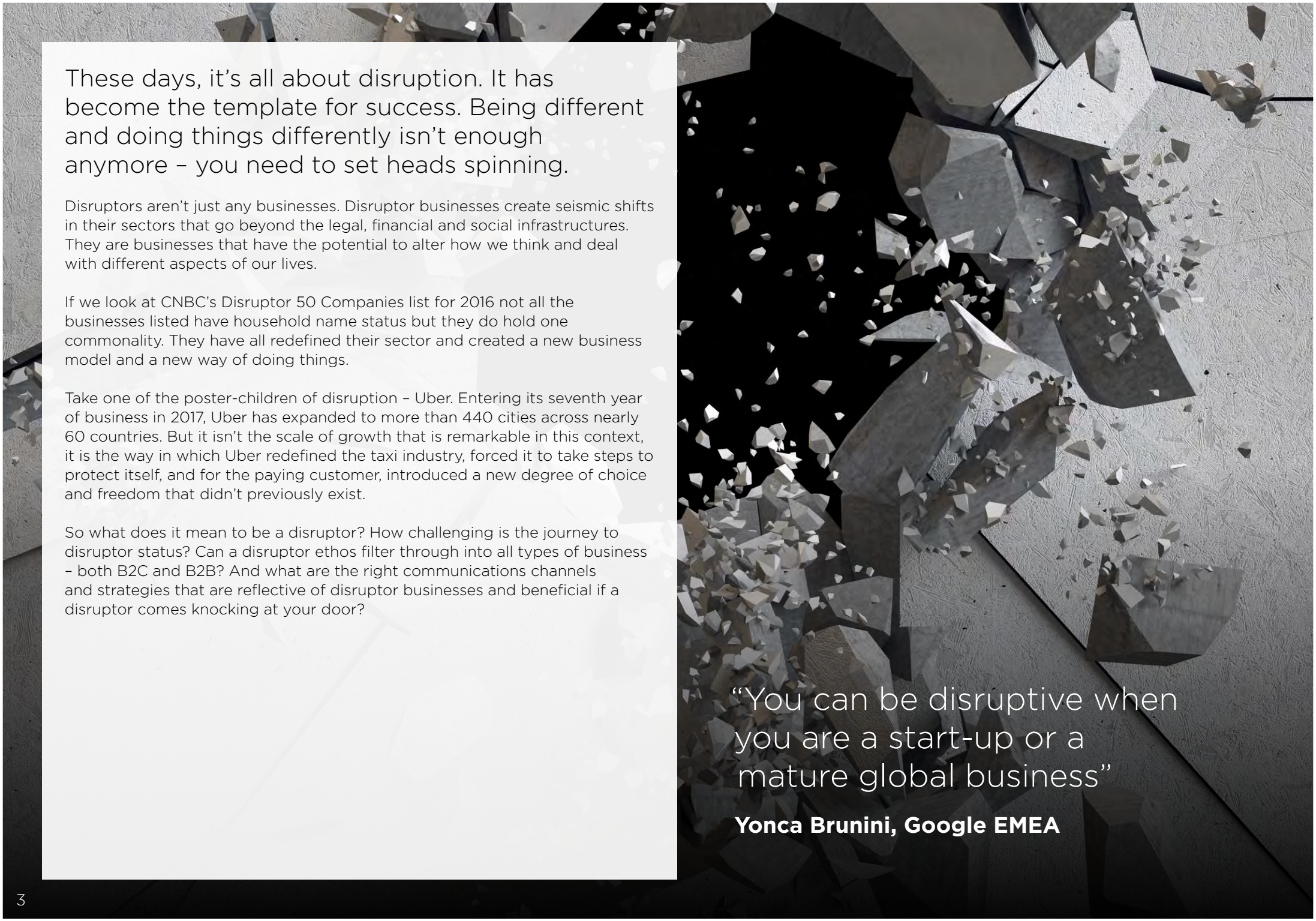
How brands can disrupt and win B2B markets

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speed communications™

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These days, it's all about disruption. It has become the template for success. Being different and doing things differently isn't enough anymore – you need to set heads spinning.

Disruptors aren't just any businesses. Disruptor businesses create seismic shifts in their sectors that go beyond the legal, financial and social infrastructures. They are businesses that have the potential to alter how we think and deal with different aspects of our lives.

If we look at CNBC's Disruptor 50 Companies list for 2016 not all the businesses listed have household name status but they do hold one commonality. They have all redefined their sector and created a new business model and a new way of doing things.

Take one of the poster-children of disruption – Uber. Entering its seventh year of business in 2017, Uber has expanded to more than 440 cities across nearly 60 countries. But it isn't the scale of growth that is remarkable in this context, it is the way in which Uber redefined the taxi industry, forced it to take steps to protect itself, and for the paying customer, introduced a new degree of choice and freedom that didn't previously exist.

So what does it mean to be a disruptor? How challenging is the journey to disruptor status? Can a disruptor ethos filter through into all types of business – both B2C and B2B? And what are the right communications channels and strategies that are reflective of disruptor businesses and beneficial if a disruptor comes knocking at your door?

"You can be disruptive when you are a start-up or a mature global business"

Yonca Brunini, Google EMEA

What does it mean to be a disruptor?

For the purposes of clarity from the get-go, challenger and disruptor, when talking about businesses or brands, are not interchangeable terms. Challenger brands are innovative businesses that have scaled quickly from start-up status and brought new thinking or enhancements to an existing marketplace. Disruptors in comparison enter a marketplace and completely redefine a category. They are a disruptive force that rattles the status quo and ultimately sets new rules.

To be a disruptor in an evolving world you really need to not be afraid to take a risk. Some of the best innovators and disruptors globally have had that passion, tenacity and vision, yet have never deviated away from the true core of their business.

Business competition has never been fiercer. Those who have been known to disrupt are watching their backs because they know the business world is a cyclical one, and they know that their cycle will someday give in to younger, nimbler, leaner, more creative and more innovative companies.

It is interesting to see today how legacy brands and companies, such as McDonald's or Yahoo have surrendered the mantle of innovation and disruption and now take their inspiration from new, smaller competitors.

"Disruption happens when an existing industry faces a challenge that offers far greater value to the customer in a way that existing firms cannot compete with directly".

Professor David Rogers, Columbia Business School

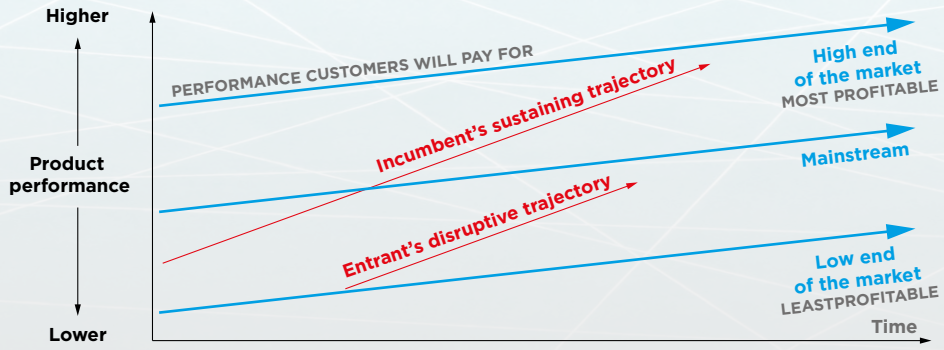
Does adopting the mentality of a disruptor provide competitive advantage?

There is a compelling argument to suggest that all businesses and brands should adopt some of the mentality of a disruptor in order to keep their business fresh and relevant. But what does that actually look like and isn't it just a distraction, particularly in the B2B space?

One of the critical challenges faced by any business is to ensure that they focus on meeting the needs of the audience(s) rather than simply selling a product or service to them.

This is by no means revolutionary, but it does reinforce what disruptors do best – approach a familiar scenario from an unusual angle and put the audience or the customer first. Rather than simply selling at them, the disruptor is providing them with something of value beyond what currently exists.

This premise is never more important than in B2B where thinking about the customer journey and customer experience is absolutely sacrosanct. Ensuring relevancy, authenticity and satisfaction at every junction in that journey or experience becomes the starting point of growing a truly successful and long lasting customer relationship.



Source: https://hbr.org/2015/12/what-is-disruptiveinnovation

"To be truly disruptive, truly innovative, all you need to do is start with the audience and work backwards."

Samantha Noble, Director of Strategy, Koozai

How do you create a disruptor story?

A disruptor has a very clear story that is central to the brand's central purpose and is reflective of its core and original ethos.

Disruptor brands understand business and consumer trends and have mapped their customers journey from need to sale with pinpoint accuracy. Crucially, disruptors are sensitive to trends and emerging technologies.

Take one of the original disruptors, PayPal. Now a young adult in the disruptor world at 18 years old, PayPal is seeing new start-ups and even traditional banks joining the trend away from physical cash. PayPal views the leaps and bounds in innovation being made as an overall net positive for the industry.

What this demonstrates is that change happens in an incremental or tiered fashion – what went before doesn't just disappear, it is built upon. It is this transformational quality that is key to the longer-term success of a disruptor business, as is the ability to consistently reflect on the following three key questions:

- Why am I here?
- What is my purpose?
- What is the nature of my relationship with my desired audience?

Being able to provide solid responses to each of these questions will help an organisation to build the foundations of its business story and distinguish at what point in its history it disrupted against the status quo.

"Waves of disruption happen and then the incumbents respond and it feeds the boiling ocean again."

Ben Edwards, VP, PayPal

How can PR play a role in communicating disruption?

Disruptor brands tend to be very sensitive to interruptive messaging and as a result often steer away from traditional advertising as a major component of their marketing model.

By their very nature disruptors are organisations that cause change and develop a new way of thinking, which means that the key to great comms for these businesses is flexibility.

PR fits well with this need because it can quickly dial-up creative bravery and enhance disruptiveness, whether it is for an entire business vision or just a streak to be shown off as needed. PR can ensure a consistency of message and business value in an otherwise inconsistent market and deep dive into the purpose of a business way beyond social or above the line channels.

A PR strategy, however, should always aim to look at understanding the wider business ambitions and knit that closely with a nimble and creative programme that pushes the message through the correct channels to the right audiences.

The dynamic nature of disruption requires a far more visionary communications strategy that builds over time and exercises the art of delight to keep audiences engaged and feeling valued.

The key is not being deliberately provocative for the sake of it. It may work for Paddy Power, but in reality, and for many B2B businesses, it simply isn't the right route to go down.



"Effective PR campaigns stand out not just because of their creative bravery but because the audience connected as a result, be that through appreciation, humour, excitement or surprise. It is this emotional as well as rational engagement which creates a desire to share and most importantly connect."

Kelly Pepworth, Managing Director, Speed

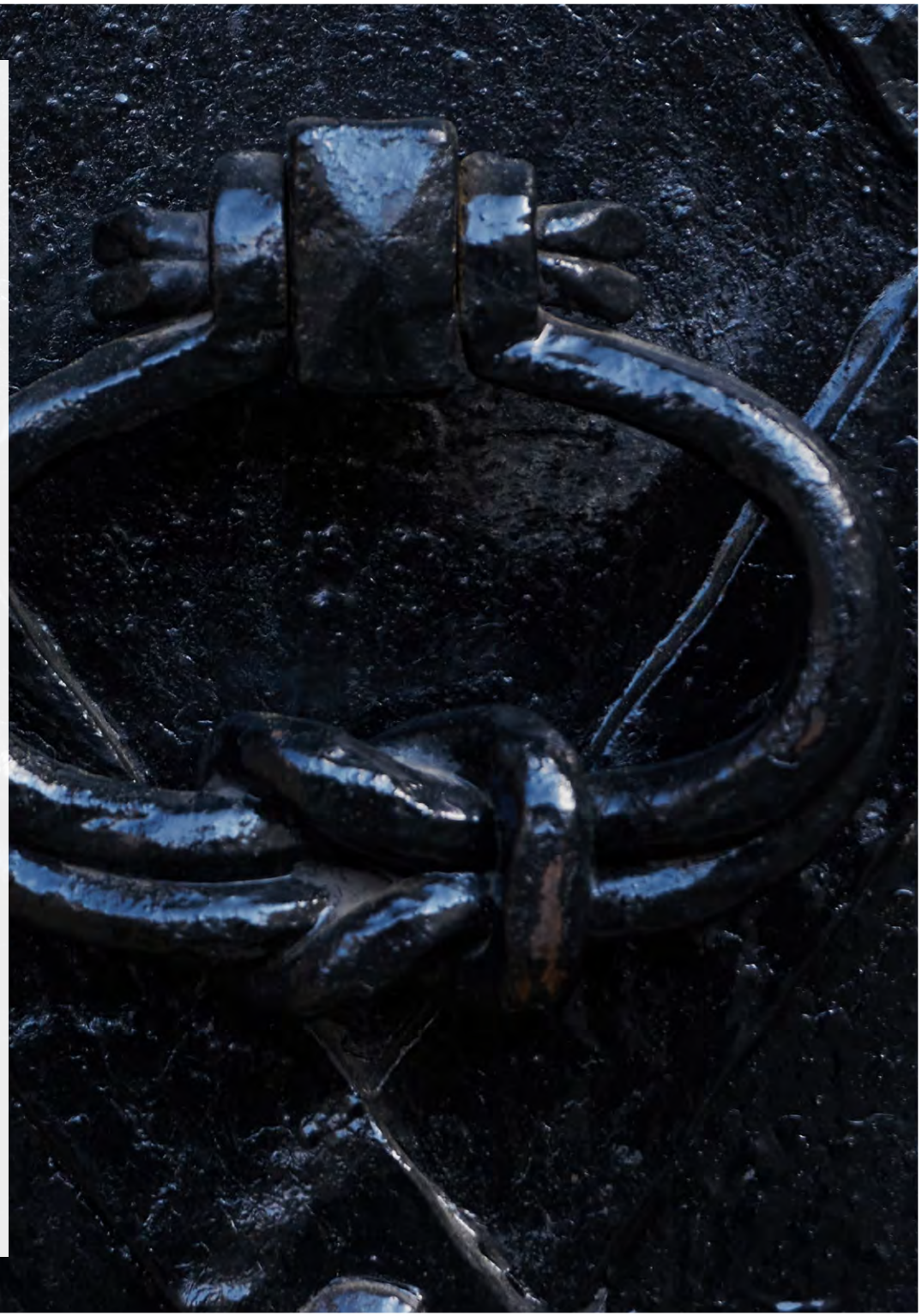
How to respond when a disruptor comes knocking at your door

Firstly, don't panic. Disruptors are a threat and responding reactively is critical, but radically altering a business model in response or even trying to imitate the disruptor could cause more harm than good. It unnerves those closest to your business and sends a message that the disruptor is more than just a competitive threat, it is an actual crisis situation.

Continuing to act with confidence and working with your corporate communications team to play out your agreed strategy and approach is key. Ensuring that the concerns of your key stakeholders (including employees) are being answered in a way that makes sense and resonates will ensure that trust perception remains high.

An effective communications team that can act as the mediator between business and the outside world is important at any stage or time of year, but when a disruptor comes knocking it is critical. Knowing there is a dedicated resource on hand that understands your business vision and the spokespeople that are able to communicate that vision is reassuring when a threat comes into focus. As is having that critical eye that monitors the external context and how your business play into it.

A strong communications team will also be able to advise you as to your best existing assets – be that your experienced staff or your unequivocal heritage in the field you operate in. Ultimately it ensures that you are responding appropriately to the threat and dialling up bravery and consistency in equal measures.



Summary

Change is constant. And the need to stay ahead of that change is constant, too. This in turn means a business that remains sedentary is at greater risk of becoming devalued. Being a successful disruptor means taking risks and being visionary, but equally being critically self-aware.

Effective disruption is not about gimmicks or doing things in a different way as a one off. It's about changing the game from the chasing pack, but doing so in a way that resonates and feels true to the business or brand and the core value that is being delivered to the audience.

The notion that there is "no downside to disruption" is arguably short-sighted and boundary-breaking for the sake of it. What disruption does is open a new way of doing things and allow businesses to step outside of the mould that they know. If a disruptor does come knocking and enter your space, whilst it is undoubtedly a threat, it also a huge opportunity to exploit and communicate your greatest business assets.

The true measure of success is a business's ability to take calculated risks, explore and innovate and really embrace the rich canvas of experimentation. So in seeing the opportunity of taking on the disruptor elements that suit your business and competitive vision, you are opening yourself up to achieve real business breakthroughs while remaining true to what stands at the heart of your business.



Resources

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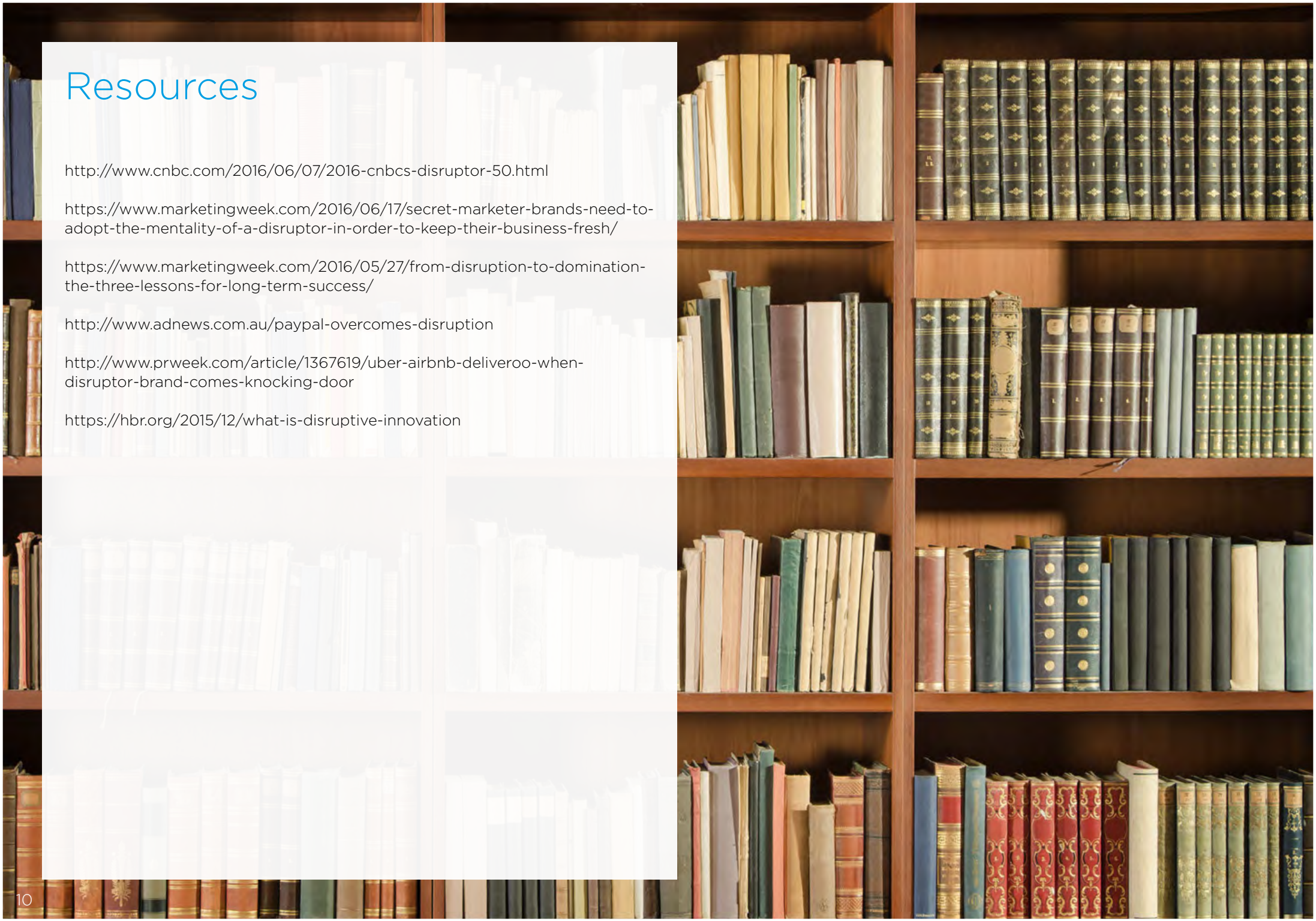
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