

Foreword

Welcome to the brave new world, where science and knowledge meet, and perhaps give the *status quo* a run for its money.

This book is about Rule Developing Experimentation (RDE)—a business process with which a company can know more about customers than many think even possible. That information sheds light on what the company has to do to ride the wave, get the next set of customers, and then anticipate the future. Armed with these new information-gathering tools, a company can find out what turns on their current and potential new customers, insightfully create new products, successfully launch them, and happily grab market share from the competitors. Imagine this as the world for generations to come—where what you *are* means less than what you *can be* tomorrow, and what you can be tomorrow becomes increasingly simpler to achieve for a company so determined.

So with this vision of what the world's going to be like, let's return to *Selling Blue Elephants*. Moskowitz and Gofman are experienced in this world where in order to survive, businesses must understand the customers' needs, both current and not yet thought of. Translating them into successful business rules virtually overnight—and at the same time doing it inexpensively—is something that was unimaginable just a few years ago.

The authors have managed to systematize the approach so any business person can take advantage of it whenever needed. This is not one of those dreary handbooks or over-simplified manuals for people feeling challenged in marketing, product development, and so on. Howard and Alex have struck a beautiful balance; a readable scientific foundation free from mind-numbing and deep statistical excursions; a balance of hands-on experience without making the reader feel boot-camped or even coached; and principles plus case histories that are downright entertaining, informative, and educational. The book leads you on a captivating journey with each chapter introducing gradually more and more useful details about RDE widely applied from food product development to political campaigns, from advertisement to stock market predictions, from driving innovation to package and magazine cover design. And the list goes on. By the end of the book you realize you are ready to try it yourself. It is deep enough in details to let the reader jump-start RDE immediately, and at the same time general enough to stimulate a search for new applications.

When I started reading their work, I was amazed that companies could actually learn so much by systematic variation. It was surprising to me, who had grown up in a world of smart and systematic thinkers. We used some of these approaches when I worked closely with the founder of Schwab.com, but not to the extent, nor with the same rigor that our authors have done. We survived and grew, but we could have done things far faster and better than we did had we had the blueprint from experimentation. When it came time to apply this approach in our study and book, *Success Built to Last: Creating a Life that Matters*, we got a chance to use the systematic experimentation that our authors promote. It worked like a charm, and confirmed in two weeks of “scientific work” those insights that we had found in a couple of years of interviews. We authors were convinced, and in fact so convinced that we wrote up the chapter about RDE as the final “methods” chapter in our book.

One of the traditional questions of any foreword is *who is this book written for?* With *Selling Blue Elephants*, this is a tricky question. On one hand, brand managers, advertising specialists, product developers, marketers and market researchers, designers, communications professionals, and of course students will clearly benefit from reading this book and applying RDE to their respective fields. The general reading public will find much of this book fascinating. On the other hand, even the authors seem to be uncertain where the limits of the approach are. Who knows, maybe the biggest RDE success will come out of the areas only hinted at or not even touched in this book.

So, again, why is RDE so important? Quite simply, none of us in the business world really knows all the answers all the time. Oh, certainly there are some of us who can ride a winning streak, who may be connected to “what’s going on right now.” But as an investor and business builder, I think it’s important to take a longer view. It’s good to be right. And, I’ve learned over the years that nothing is better than knowledge. *Selling Blue Elephants* gives us the way to gain that knowledge about the customers’ mind easily, anywhere, anytime, and for virtually any topic. The authors have, in effect, created a manifesto for change that will be equally powerful in the hands of the small business and the large corporations anywhere in the world.

Spending a big portion of my professional life trying to understand and explain to others what entails to become successful, I feel that this book and RDE may be the most useful tools on the road to success for motivated businesspeople.

Howard and Alex have put together a really captivating book. They’ve woven together stories about business successes in a way that I as a businessman and investor find fascinating.

—Mark Thompson

Executive coach and management advisor, and co-author of the international bestseller *Success Built to Last*