

# WHOSE BRAND IS IT ANYWAY? COMPANIES BATTLE CREATIVE CONSUMERS.

**LET'S SAY YOU MANUFACTURE WIDGETS.** A clever customer has turned your widget into a hood ornament. Now there's a website showing others how to do it. Is this good news or your worst nightmare? Bentley Professor Pierre Berthon is studying the "creative consumer"—a phenomenon fueled by the Internet that poses both challenges and opportunities for companies desperately trying to protect their brands.

**PIERRE R. BERTHON**, Clifford F. Youse Chair of Marketing

**Q+A**

**BY "CREATIVE CONSUMER," DO YOU MEAN PEOPLE WHO MAKE FURNITURE OUT OF FEDEX® BOXES OR CREATE THEIR OWN ADS FOR STARBUCKS®?**

All of the above: just think Mentos® + Diet Coke® on YouTube. Creative consumers have been transforming, changing and adapting brands for ages. Today, thanks to the Internet, they have a global audience.

**WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT THEIR MOTIVATIONS?**

They want to get noticed, to subvert the brand message, and most of all, simply to have fun.

**DO COMPANIES FEEL THREATENED BY UNAUTHORIZED INNOVATION?**

Sure. Many try to prevent consumers from being too clever with their products. They sue, demand that websites come down. This usually backfires, by the way.

**HOW SHOULD COMPANIES DEAL WITH CREATIVE CONSUMERS?**

First, they should be more aware of what's happening. Then, they should ask themselves, is this an opportunity for us? If the consumer inventiveness isn't dangerous, perhaps it should be recognized... even embraced.

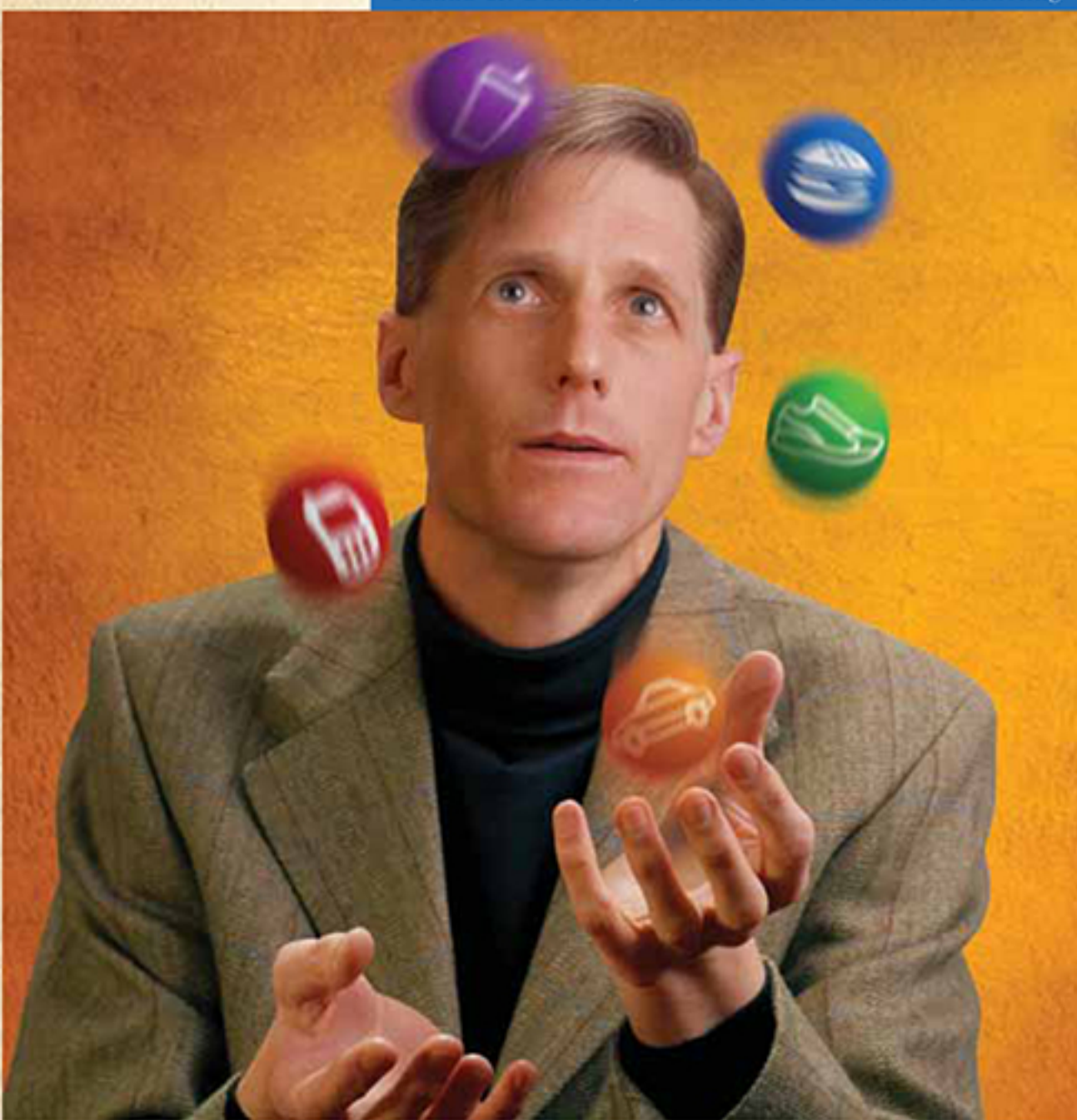
**SO COMPANIES CAN GET CREATIVE, TOO?**

We've seen brands holding do-it-yourself TV ad competitions. That's an attempt to co-opt the creative consumer.

**IN OTHER WORDS, BRAND MANAGERS ARE BEGINNING TO LOOSEN UP?**

Like it or not, the brand is already out of their control. Consumers are equal partners now!

**MORE** Professor Berthon discusses his work at [www.bentley.edu/research](http://www.bentley.edu/research)



*Professor Pierre R. Berthon is the Clifford F. Youse Chair of Marketing at Bentley College. Prof. Berthon's teaching, research and consulting work focus on e-commerce, marketing and management decision making. His most recent paper discusses managerial approaches to dealing with creative consumers.*

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