



KILLING GIANTS

10 STRATEGIES TO TOPPLE THE GOLIATH IN YOUR INDUSTRY

The Killing Giants Interviews

Bob Parsons, CEO and founder, Go Daddy, Inc.

Bob Parsons, the iconic founder and CEO of Go Daddy, Inc. – the largest internet domain registrar in the world and creator of some of the most controversial advertising on American television (although he'd probably disagree with you) – was one of the first people I wanted to interview when I set out to write Killing Giants. He was the first one I contacted – and the last one I ended up interviewing. He's a hard guy to pin down. But the effort was worth it. Here is a much abridged version of our interview.

Stephen Denny: Every year since 2004, you've run Super Bowl ads. And every year, you announce new sales records and still get hit with an avalanche of post-Super Bowl criticism. How do you react to all this?

Bob Parsons: "Actually, I'm fine with it. I would rather they hate my ad than love it. It's when they're upset with an ad, and they graphically describe or exaggerate why, it draws so much attention to it. If they say so and so did an ad and it was really nice and I like it, nobody gives a shit about that. If they say Go Daddy has lesbian overtones, what's the first thing they're going to do after they read that review? They're going to my website. And I'm going to say, thank you very much."

"All these guys, the ad critics, they need to exaggerate. Actually, I'm just fine with it. I wouldn't have it any other way."

"One has become a dear friend of mine - Barbara Lippert with Ad Week. Initially, I think it was our second year, she referred to us as 'the lowest of the low.' I called Barbara and told her it was actually quite an honor. This year, she said Go Daddy was back to being lowest of the low. I called her and told her I couldn't thank her enough. And I couldn't wait to tell my mother."

"In some respects, it seems like I'm one of the few guys in the world who understands that ads are meant to sell stuff."

Stephen Denny: Does this criticism hurt or help you?

Bob Parsons: "I am hammered every year by everything from church groups to... let's just say women who find it objectionable for whatever reason. I have guys write in and say don't ever fold. I write back and say don't worry about it."





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"Two years ago I had a church group send us an automated message, it was the same one, I got about 500 hundred of them, the people would write their name and address on it. I had these all stacked up. Just for kicks, I asked my staff check to see if any of these people were customers. We had a number of them, after they signed the card and sent it, become customers."

"What I learned was that the key word is attention. When people find out anything about you, and they have an economic decision, they handle the economic decision based on economics. They aren't going to stop buying from me because I have someone in a tank top. They may say they do, but they don't. If people become aware of us, we'll get the deal."

Stephen Denny: What's the role of controversy in advertising?

Bob Parsons: "Everybody got all over Sales Genie this guy in his Super Bowl ad. What the Sales Genie guy did is pull his ads. He shut it down completely, he didn't even let them see it on his website. He made about as big a mistake as he could make."

"The thing to do is go head to head with these people and defend it. You win on both sides. It was lighthearted, there wasn't anything wrong with it, but you had these pundits say, 'This is wrong... you can't do this,' and he was horrified that he did it... well, to me there was a check waiting for him to cash that he ripped up and threw away. His ad did good, but had he handled it right it could have been a homerun."

Stephen Denny: How did all this start for you? Where did the ads come from?

Bob Parsons: "Back in '04 we got to the point where we knew we had the best pricing, the widest product line and the best products and we knew that we had services that our competitors didn't even offer. So why in the world did we only have a 16% market share?"

"We hired a market research firm and they went to work and talked to people who were our customers or who weren't our customers and they came back a month or so later and said the reason everyone isn't your customer is because they don't know you exist. What you need to think about is moving into mainstream media. We said Ok, let's do it, and by the way the Super Bowl is coming up."

"At that time, we had a market share of 16% - today, it's over 50%. Today, we're not only the biggest player in this industry put the fastest growing. It's a real unusual situation. The reason is that we continue to focus on that everybody needs to know we are an option – it could be for the right reason or what people think is the wrong reason – but eventually they all become our customer."





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"That decision was as right as rain."

Stephen Denny: What do you see as the role of the CEO?

Bob Parsons: "I have a very non-traditional role here. I handle here, entirely, vision and culture."

"I make business decisions but I have an executive staff – the junior member has been with me 7 years. They make the decisions. If they're not dead on, they're close. I want to make sure the culture is always what it needs to be. This is a fun place to work. That the company stays edgy, that the company doesn't get stupid and try to become something we're not. That we continue to invest in new products. That we stay focused on making sure our customers are pleased with what we're doing and we don't get to the point that if a customer calls and we have a problem and we start justifying why we have a problem, well, that's the beginning of the end. Never tell a customer they don't know what they're doing."

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Many thanks to Bob and his team for pulling this interview together!

*You can pick up your copy of *Killing Giants: 10 Strategies to Topple the Goliath In Your Industry* (Portfolio, 2011) [here](#).*

*You can also pick up your copy of *The Killing Giants Framework: 3 Areas of Excellence that Define How Davids Topple Goliaths* at the Kindle storefront [here](#).*

