Jon Stine

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At first glance, Jon Stine's career may look eclectic: advertising copywriter, college professor, sports publicist, women's apparel retailing specialist, marketing director for a semiconductor manufacturer, business consultant. But dig a little deeper, and there is a strong and consistent theme binding it all together.

"Since my teenage years, I've been fascinated by how and why people buy," Stine reveals. "My first high school research paper was all about the psychology of buying—how people define themselves, how they aspire to status, what different brands mean."

This passion for understanding led him, as a teenager growing up in Fort Wayne, IN, to read David Ogilvy's, "Confessions of an Advertising Man," and the classic text "Ogilvy on Advertising." He dreamed of advertising copywriting as a career, and entered the School of Journalism at Indiana University. He worked his way through college as a public relations assistant in IU's department of intercollegiate athletics (at a time when Bobby Knight and Lee Corso were head coaches at Indiana), and landed a copywriting-producer post at an Indianapolis advertising agency immediately after graduation.

It was at the agency that a critical lesson was learned: there was often a gap—a critical, business-killing gap—between what companies thought they were selling, and what consumers were really buying.

"We were launching a new type of pizza for a national chain, and my copy was waxing poetic about the new pan crust and the great taste, and we were quite confident that the new pizza, which had done well in taste tests, would boost sales," Stine relates.

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"What the marketers—and the agency people like me—didn't realize was that the primary reason consumers came to their restaurant was not, unfortunately, about great pizza. It was a family-oriented brand, and the consumers came because they wanted a clean, orderly place with wholesome-looking servers and clean bathrooms where they could have a pleasing family dining experience with their kids. I've learned the hard way that successful consumer companies are the ones that recognize that gap, and know how to bridge it"

In time, this insight led to a desire to get closer to the key business decisions. Stine moved to Oregon to attend the University of Oregon, obtained his master's degree in Telecommunications, and had a brief stint on the faculty at Pacific University, and as head of production for Storer Cable Television. His opportunity to make an impact on the company side came when he joined Portland's Pendleton Woolen Mills, and he rose to become the nationally-branded apparel company's head of womenswear sales and marketing.

Working throughout the country with senior merchants at the nation's leading department stores brought plenty of new insights. But it also underscored the lessons learned years before. "We sold garments. The retailers bought revenue and margin per square foot per store. If we bridged that gap, business increased. If we failed—or worse, forgot— business declined very rapidly."

Though Stine is the son of a CIO, he's quick to remind folks that he's not a technologist. That being said, he's long been involved in the business use of technology to drive efficiency. He was the first manager at Pendleton with a laptop ("Probably because I typed my own presentations"), and served on the company team that installed EDI between Pendleton and its major customers. But he was still flabbergasted when he received a recruiting call from the world's largest semiconductor company. Intel was verticalizing its marketing and looking for a retail expert. Stine took the job, and while the learning curve from women's career suiting to CPUs was a steep one, he enjoyed the ride. In particular, he enjoyed applying the insights gained from working on many disparate types of products to semiconductors, helping to position Intel as a leader in retail technology.

"At Intel, of course, the purchase orders came in for processors. But it was the rare retail CIO who cared about a speeds-and-feeds comparison of this CPU versus that one," says Stine. "What mattered was our ability to envision and execute ways in which technology helped save a week in the supply chain or helped turn a browsing consumer into a buyer. If we could figure that out—and bring in the CPU as a key enabling technology—then the purchase orders would flow."

Stine may never have gone to Cisco Internet Business Solutions (IBSG) if were it not for Mohsen Moazami, who then headed up the Retail-Consumer Packaged Goods Practice. He and Moazami collaborated on a number of projects, most notably the Pan Pearl River Delta initiative in China. Stine's team and Moazami's team developed the first RFID-enabled product shipment from China for Wal-Mart. When Stine called Moazami to recommend a colleague for a position in Cisco's Advanced Services, Moazami agreed

that the colleague was a good match for the job. After a pause, Moazami then asked Stine about joining IBSG. A month or so later, Stine sent back his Cisco offer letter.

As a consultant, Stine's preferred modus operandi is to listen and observe—and to continue to ask "What does she (or he) want to buy?"

"If you just keep asking questions and listening, the real issues will come to the surface. It's tempting, especially being from a great manufacturing company, to assume the posture of a hammer and go looking for nails to hit," he says. "What you want to sell may not be at first what they want to buy. Bridging that gap is what makes this job perfect for me."

IBSG offers Stine plenty of scope for his considerable talents. But he says he has many reasons for being with IBSG. "Cisco represents the future of enterprise ICT, and I want to be a part of it. But even beyond that, the intellectual rigor that IBSG brings to its work is exciting. We seek out new ideas and innovations—but we vet those ideas carefully. IBSG will not allow shaky or poorly-thought-through ideas to survive."