



*Episode 44*

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## Martin Lindstrom



*Martin Lindstrom is one of the world's premier brand building experts advising Fortune 100 brands. Lindstrom is the recipient of TIME Magazine's "Worlds 100 Most Influential People." He is a New York Times and Wall St Journal best-selling author of six ground breaking books on branding, including Buyology: The Truth and Lies About Why We Buy.*

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**Voiceover** *This is Business Reimagined. Every week we talk with thought leaders and revolutionaries who are bringing innovation to their industries like today's guest Martin Lindstrom.*

**Martin** *That little effort it takes to move into a consumer's home may take more time day 1, but day 10 you are way ahead of everyone else because remember big data, or data in general, is the same for everyone. Everyone has access to the same data. They have the same data and analysis too. They have the same people employed and they're coming up with the same conclusions.*



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*Voiceover This is Business Reimagined with Danny Iny.*

## **Danny**

*Martin Lindstrom has been a thought leader in the world of branding for over 2 decades. He's written 7 books on the topic and is a regular contributor to Fast Company, Time Magazine, The Harvard Business Review and on television on NBC's Today Show. While many of our guests have followed winding paths to reach success Martin knew exactly what he wanted to do early in life and Lego nearly sued him for it.*

## **Martin**

*When I was 12 years old I started out my own LEGOLAND in the backyard of my Mom and Dad's garden. I was pretty serious about it. I spent about a year to prepare this amazing little LEGOLAND. Only problem was the day I opened the doors no one showed up, except my Mom and Dad. I guess that was the low, low point of my career back then. I went down to the local print office and persuaded them to sponsor me.*

*About 2 days later I had 131 visitors showing up. Guest number 130 and guest number 131 were the lawyers from Lego suing me. They were saying to me it's our brand. I said, "No, it's my brand. I bought the boxes." As a consequence of that they hired me and later on I started up my own advertising agency. I had Lego as a client.*

## **Danny**

*At age 12 Martin had his first client, Lego and his love of branding never left him. He wrote his first book in 1994 giving him a powerful introduction as a thought leader in a space that barely existed yet.*



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**Martin**

*It really happened after I surfed the entire Internet. Back then, when the World Wide Web appeared in 1994 it was very small. I surfed every one of the 234 pages on the Internet which really gives you a sense of how small it was back then. I remember when I was going from page to page is just thought to myself why is there no brands on this because this is going to be the heaven for brands. No one actually had thought about it back then. I decided to write a book about it because I felt this was really the best way to come out with a very bold statement about this brave new opportunity.*

**Danny**

*That wasn't the first opportunity that Martin saw coming. Among his other works included "Clicks and Mortar" and "Brand Child" which predicted the emergence of a company like Facebook. Martin has always been on the cutting edge and given his business sense the way that he self-identifies might surprise you.*

**Martin**

*More and more today I identify myself as a philosopher which sounds a bit strange, but I do think that there's not a lot of time in our world for people to think. I think most people are incredibly busy flicking around with their phones and packing their calendar to such a degree that they have so little time for themselves. What I really thrive on is to sit down and think for a moment and create philosophy around why we behave the way we do. How humans are molding what the future trends are going to be.*

**Danny**

*Even while Martin's re-imagination takes a deep contemplative look at why we do what we do, his work with his clients offers a grounded practical look at how they can use the philosophy that he presents. It starts with 1 simple yet powerful question.*



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## **Martin**

*I think the first question I always ask is how close the organization or the brand is to the consumer. Quite often you'll notice that they're not very close. They think they're very close, but just to give an example. Just last month I did a speech for 3,000 executives in New York City and I asked them a simple question. How many of you have spent time in a random consumer's home over the last year? Two, not 2,000, but 2 people raised their hands.*

*I think that the issue right now. I think most of us are placed behind a computer screen somewhere in a fancy office far removed from the consumer. Quite often we more and more believe that we can analyze and understand the true market needs based on numbers and not based on real stuff meaning getting our hands dirty. I don't need to tell you that then if you have a partner you probably wouldn't describe your partner based on numbers saying I love my girlfriend or boyfriend because she is 1 meter and 75 centimeters tall and because her hair color is 5526 and I love the last 4 digits of her cellphone number. It's 2256. It turns me on.*

*You're never going to say that, right? I hope so at let's and because of that at the end of the day I think that's the issue we have with numbers today and data and big data in particular that we have come to believe 2 things. One is that we can create love using numbers. The second thing is also that we are more and more celebrating the past victories because that's what numbers is, remember big data's all about data from the past, rather than allowing that space we need to be creative and think about the future.*



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*What I tend to do is to force my customers and clients to spend time with the consumer. Once that happens we actually start to see a company in a completely different light. What I'm searching for in that process is just to find out where we're out of balance as consumers. Where is it we feel our needs, where we feel in any degree out of balance? It could be that I feel too weighted. Maybe I feel I don't have enough friends or maybe I feel that I haven't achieved what I wanted to achieve through my 40th birthday. Whatever it is it's also representing an opportunity for a brand and also, of course, a self-improvement.*

*That is in many ways the foundation a company and a brand, should work on. Now, once the company had realized that huge gap, because almost every company in the world has that gap. That's the platform we start to build our reconstructed brand around. That's really where we see the major turnarounds. Whether that is a supermarket chain in the United States or it is a soft drink company or car company or whatever it is, all of that comes back to understanding where we are out of balance as human beings.*

## **Danny**

*I have 14 questions coming out of that, but I'll start with one. It seems to me there is a spectrum of intimacy. The title of your latest book "Small Data" it's a counterbalance to the big data trend which is ... I don't think you're intend, correct me if I'm wrong, but I don't think you're intending to say that isn't value or insight to be gleaned from all of this big data. It's the problem is that it tends to be very impersonal. It tends to give us the illusion of understanding of our customer when what we're really looking at is megatrends.*



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*I'm really interested in the progression on that spectrum of intimacy because yes on 1 end you've got the extreme lack of intimacy of looking at numbers on a computer screen. On the other end you've got the extreme intimacy and it is very extreme intimacy of being in a random customer's home as you said. I really perked up as you said that. It doesn't surprise me that 2 out of 3,000 executives have done that. Speaking for myself and I like to think of myself and my business by extension we are very plugged in to our customers and our audience.*

*I have met with a lot of our customers and interact with them in person in a bunch of ways. That said, you know what, I don't know that I've ever been in a random customer's home. I almost don't know how would that circumstance come to be in a way that isn't weird. Is that a literal, do you think everyone should be really that up close and personal? Is that not hyperbolic, but close to in terms of you want to go as far up that intimacy spectrum as possible?*

### **Martin**

*Why are we so afraid of being that personal and so close? If I really want to persuade you as an individual it's really, really hard to persuade you using an email or perhaps even start before to use Twitter, right, and then to use an email. Perhaps a little bit closer we'll use the phone. Perhaps a little bit closer I'll use video Skype. I don't need to tell you the closer I get to you the more I understand you. If I end up in your home and you and I are talking over a beer the chances that I'll persuade you to do something would be much higher than from Twitter.*



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*The issue here is that we've become incredibly afraid of interacting. All sorts of different reason why. One is we're afraid of touching people. We don't touch people anymore. The only thing we touch in the morning is our iPhones. We're afraid of touching because of sexual harassment. We're afraid of touching because of bacteria's or because we are offending people. We steer away from being interacting or being with people.*

*When you walk into the home of a real consumer, a person which actually is interacting with you every day when they listen to your podcast or they buy your product or your service. You will notice a life which is in another context than the context that you know of and that's where you discover amazing insight. If you take Lego as an example, when they had problems back in 2003, which sounds absurd given the fact that they now are the largest toy company in the world, but back then, 13 years ago, they had huge problems.*

*They thought, based on big data, that the instant gratification generation had arrived and because of that they had to change the size of the Lego bricks. They did that. They changed the size from tiny bricks to gigantic building blocks and guess what? The sales went down 30%. That was a year where small breakout groups, so to speak, really started to spend time in ordinary consumer's homes. They end up in this 11-year-old kid's bedroom in Germany where they sit on the floor and ask him 1 simple question. What are you most proud of?*

*This kid pauses for a second and then he points at an old, worn down pair of sneakers. The Lego team is completely surprised because they expected him to answer a PlayStation or Sony this and that, but he didn't. They asked him why and he says because I'm the best*



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*skater in town. These pairs of shoes are really the evidence for me because when you slide down a skateboard it creates a wear and tear on a certain angle. This becomes my trophy.*

*That was a moment where Lego realized that time is not in essence among this generation if you make them become storytellers. Out of that they changed the size of the Lego bricks back to the tiny bricks again and then started the process of developing the Lego movie. I guess the rest is history. That insight would never have happened through a phone or through a survey. It would only happen if you are on the floor in a bedroom with that kid and where you see and hear that fascination he had for skateboarding.*

*I think it's important for us to understand that that little effort it takes to move into a consumer's home may take more time day 1, but day 10 you are way ahead of everyone else. Because remember big data or data in general is the same for everyone. Everyone has access to the same data. They have the same data money and analysis too. They have the same people employed and they're coming up with the same conclusions.*

*Where you can say big data is all about correlation, small data is, these seemingly insignificant observations we're making in consumer's homes, are about the causation, the reason why. It is that reason why which is defining a wide space of creativity. We could say that if you really want to be creative or figure out what the future is about you could not do it by past numbers. You have to do it by wide space and wide space is small data.*

**Danny**

*I love that. I agree with a lot that you've said. I actually disagree with some of it in a way that is actually supporting our conversation. I think you're right that there's a lot more insight to be had in the minute individual interactions with customers. I don't agree that everyone has the access to the same data. I think that's very much the realm of big*



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*brands. I think for the small players we don't have the big data, so this is really the only way that we can be competitive.*

### **Martin**

*I can actually agree with you on that. I would say that's certainly if you take a look at the big brands like the supermarkets chains. Everyone buys the same numbers from Nielsen. They do all actually end up with the same numbers. Yes, they have discrepancies in the numbers based on their own loyalty card systems. You would quite often see that you end up with the same conclusions because the masses of these data are so enormous that you brought it all together and actually end up with very similar results. I know that first hand because I've worked with so many supermarket chains around the world. Everyone believes that they have unique insight. Guess what? When I align it up next to each other it ends up being almost identical.*

### **Danny**

*I believe that's true for the large brands, but, again, for the small brands, for the small businesses, we just don't have that data. The small data is really all we can get. I love that this is your message because in our courses we teach our students who are entrepreneurs how to build their businesses. I'm constantly trying to push them to it's not enough to read comments on a blog. Get on the phone with people, talk to them.*

*I want to push further because I've never told someone go meet a customer, go meet a prospect in their home. I'd love to hear logistically how do you do that? how do you... Are you just calling up someone who you're hoping will 1 day be a customer and saying can I come into your home? How does that logistically work?*



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## **Martin**

*It is surprisingly easy. I'll tell you the reason why. First of all, you pay some money and that's depending on where in the world it is. If it is in the Philippines it would be \$5 and if it's in Switzerland it would be \$500. You basically pay some money and then they'll open the doors. The reality is that most of the respondents, if not all of them, after the conversation, they're telling me this was incredibly interesting for them as well because of 2 reasons.*

*One is it's very rare you get the chance to sit down with a stranger and tell everything about your life and lip through hundreds if not thousands of photos in your album and talk about the music you love and where you are in the center. The second thing is even more interesting. Quite often when people talk about themselves they start to discover sides of themselves that even they were not aware of. That gives them an insight about themselves and certainly about their lives as well which is intriguing for a brand. I've never tried anyone rejecting me. That's not because I'm trying to be charming or anything like that. It really is because people love to be in the center, so it's fairly easy to do.*

## **Danny**

*Interesting and how would this work in a situation where, because I'm channeling what a lot of our listeners are probably thinking, which is they're small business owners. They don't have a lot of money. Maybe they can afford to pay someone \$50, \$100, \$200 whatever. The other big challenge is that a lot of our audience their businesses are online which means their customers and their audience is all over the world. How would somebody do this if their market is not local and they can't afford to get on an airplane for each interview?*



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## **Martin**

*There's many different solutions to this. One solution is, for example, to ask people to do a video diary. I do that sometimes where I say to them you have a Smartphone already. I would like you to record a piece of information about yourself once every hour for the next 12 hours. Every minute you produce should be sharing the highlight of your thoughts or what you're doing or how you're interacting with the brand or the service or the products. Then, you just send me those 12 minutes every day.*

*Once people are producing a diary you'll notice in the beginning it will be very staged. As they realize they don't have a lot to say suddenly they find they'll start to say things which is really how they are. Then, suddenly you start to get the reality out of people. You can also give people challenges. Now, 1 challenge is give people through the phones is to say take me through your eating habits today. I'd like you to show me how you're cooking; how you're buying your food; how you select your food; how you select your recipes; how you stack your fridge. You give people themes or assignments to work on depending on what brand we're talking about.*

*I do think that you can do things which are not necessarily as extreme as when I'm moving into people's homes. Where you still get a flavor of the human side because you have to remember at the end of the day you're still closer, much closer than the questionnaire you're filling out or certainly those billions of data points.*

## **Danny**

*I have a question that, as I'm formulating it in my mind I feel like it's the wrong question. I feel like it's almost oxymoronic. I guess I'm not sure how to fix that. I'm assuming that the 11-year-old kid in Germany with the sneakers. He was not the first person that you interviewed. I'm almost wondering how many small data points do you need for the*



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*sample size to be meaningful. As I say it that sounds like nonsense and yet I feel like there's something there. Help me understand this.*

### **Martin**

*First of all, I was visiting my doctor the other day in Switzerland to have a health check. As he took a sample of blood from me, he didn't take 6 gallons of blood just to be sure that I was healthy. He took 20 drops of blood and that was it. Because science today is so advanced it really backs up those couple of drops of blood and then it's enough for you to assess the health situation or condition of a person.*

*In many ways this is the same when it comes to us doing those insights in consumer's homes that you don't need a lot of interviews. My experience is you actually have a pretty clear hypothesis after 12 to 15 interviews. That states what you realize is that people are surprisingly similar and the findings are surprisingly aligned. Now, how many data points do you need? Of course, the more data points you have the more accurate things are, but I also have to say the more they become errors at the same time.*

*Sometimes you need to say to yourself a lot of people have said this is the direction. They really love this idea. It's not everyone who likes it. I fundamentally believe it's right based on people's faces expression when I did the interviews. I'm going to stop it here. This is a matter about you following instinct and building your instinct as an interviewer or as a business leader where you say that idea is just incredibly clever. Why haven't we thought about that before? I fundamentally believe in it. I'm going to go ahead with it.*

*This is 1 side of the story to your question. The other side of course is that as I visit all these homes I personally start to accumulate a huge amount of small data which can*



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*reveal amazing insight about consumer's profile and personalities. Just as you have a website Danny, which is probably talking more about who you'd like to be seen as rather than who you really are just like our Facebook accounts.*

*We have also what's called a perception room in our houses which really is the mirror of our Facebook pages. It is the place where we try to portray a certain image to the world. Now you find the perception room by looking for where you placed your coffee table book. That's really the epicenter of where the perception room is. If you walk into a home where you find the coffee table book and you see that that person has hanged a huge colorful painting on the wall. You can be pretty sure that person is very self-confident. If there is a huge bookshelf packed with books in the perception room, if I may add, you can be pretty sure that that the level of the education that person had as child was not that solid. In fact, we're trying to compensate for that by placing a lot of books in our lives.*

*Now, of course, the statements I come with right now are pretty black and white. This is where the level of small data will help you to increase the accuracy of what you're stating because if I've entered your home and I see the bookshelf, but I also do see that you happen to have a bunch of keys hanging next to your belt at your pants. We quite often today know that that also shows you still have a chip on your shoulder. You want to show to the world you have power.*

*All those different subconscious clues you actually broadcast to the world are what I define as emotional DNA you place behind yourself all the time. All those pieces of small data, if they're put together as a patchwork, suddenly reveals an amazing insight about who you are. Now, when do you stop? Really never, but very quickly you see the pattern*



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*happening. That's where you kick in a say I think this is enough for me to stop here and start to draw some conclusions. Then, of course, you can bring onboard the big data to verify these hypotheses you identified using small data.*

## **Danny**

*I love this and I feel like it unearths a challenge to the pursuit of small data. For every one of the anecdotes of what a little piece of data means it's very easy to come up with a dozen counter arguments. The argument that having a lot of books in the home or in the perception room is indicative of a childhood of lack of education, so over compensating a lot of people would argue I could see a scenario where people grew up with books, so they're used to having them, so it's quite the opposite.*

*Having the keys on your belt maybe people just have a lot of keys and they've got to put it somewhere. I'm assuming that there is and you talked about instinct. It's not about any individual data point which doesn't tell you very much in isolation. It's about the configuration of all those data points together and your instinct in interpreting them.*

## **Martin**

*Absolutely, it is the context we're talking about her right now. Of course, when you take things out of context in certain scenarios, in certain cultures, at certain points of time then it may be completely out of context. I think you're right about 2 things. First of all, the instinct is incredibly important. I define it an instinct as an accumulation of experiences you gather throughout life. You may not be able to achieve why you feel that way. You just know that this is the right direction.*

*I think the issue we have here Danny is that business leaders today have forgotten about why they were employed in the first instance at the company they're working for. They*



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*were employed because of their instinct. They were not employed necessarily because they're good at mining data, because there's a whole department which can do that, at least of it's a bigger company. If it's a smaller company and you're an entrepreneur you certainly were starting off your business because you had an instinct and you fundamentally believe there was a need for your product or your service out there.*

*The issue is that we are not present today as people. The first thing you do when you're waiting for someone in a bar and the person hasn't shown up is to grab your Smartphone and do something with it, anything with it, just to look like you're not a loser, right? I think the issue here is that as you do that 3 things are happening. The first, you don't observe things around you anymore. You don't pick up those seemingly insignificant observations.*

*Two, you disconnect yourself from the world, but 3 is even worse. You never get bored because boredom has today become our biggest enemy. We're so petrified of being with our self, alone, and being bored. We fill that space with stuff. I was sitting in business class today from Zurich to Amsterdam where I am right now. There was 4 people in business class and all 4 were playing either Candy Cross or some other Tetra type of game. We are afraid of being alone, but creativity is spinning out of boredom. It's when we're bored we become creative. Yet, we do not allow that space in our brain anymore.*

*That comes back to our ability to see things. That, in the end of day, then leads to us building up our instinct. I think it's incredibly important for business leaders to understand that the more time you spend with consumers the more solid your instinct is. Most importantly the better you are at putting yourself in the shoes of a consumer and pretend like you are that person. Simulate how that person is thinking.*



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*This is reason why the Rupert Murdoch's of the world is able to read 50 or 100 papers as he does every day of his own and put himself into the shoes of a Sun reader from United Kingdom and change the headline because he knows that reader would not like it. To read the Wall Street Journal, which he owns, from a Wall Street Journal readers point of view and change the headline according to what that person's thinking because he thinks as a consumer because his instinct is intact.*

*This is the essence of where I think a good business leader is separated from the bad business leader. In the end of the day, all it comes down to nurturing that space of being observant and allow yourself to use your instinct every day.*

## **Danny**

*Whether it's Rupert Murdoch in the newspaper world; whether it's you in the world of branding and we're talking about people who've achieved a Sherlock Holmes level of observation and deduction in terms of their instinct. You're absolutely right. I think the deck is stacked against people developing that instinct. If you're an entrepreneur and you're just starting out, then first of all you probably don't have a ton of experience. You don't have a ton of access to resources. Maybe you don't trust your own instinct.*



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*Also, instincts are formed by virtue of practice and exposure and life experience, so maybe there just hasn't been a ton of that. You're right, the context of the modern age with Smartphones, with things vying for attention all the time it makes it even harder to develop that instinct. Combine that with the fact that some people are just naturally going to have more of a tendency and inclination to be good at this than others. At what point do you draw the line and say up until here I'm going to figure it out myself as an entrepreneur versus, you know what, I'm just so far behind the game and this is so not my strength, I should really get somebody else to do it for me.*

**Martin**

*I think you will never ever get to point where you know or you feel you know the consumer so well that either you believe that you don't need to go to consumer homes anymore or you say this is not for me. If you are an entrepreneur, no matter what business you operate in, you should never be too good to not go into the home of a consumer and spend time with them. I'm slightly busy, but I still have...*

**Danny**

*Slightly?*

**Martin**

*I still have spent time in 2,000 different consumer's homes across 77 countries over the last decade. I do that because it keeps me alive. There's no excuse for me not doing it. I also do it because I want to send a very clear signal to business leaders across the world that if I could do it; they could do it. There's no excuse here. What it allows me to do is also to fine tune an art form which I think and I believe every business leader need to have and that is to understand their consumer.*

*Now, it may be you're terrible at it in the beginning. I tell you 1 thing you'll be much better than anyone else because in a world where everyone is blind. The 1 eyed is the one*



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*who is the king and very few people are doing this today. The fact that you will start going into consumer homes or spend time with consumers in a very causal format will just put you miles ahead of everyone else. I urge you to break that rule and really build up that instinct.*

*Now, in terms of instinct in general, when do you follow your instinct and when don't you? I think you always need to work with experts around you, which can help you in the beginning, to navigate you through the deep waters until you feel you feel you can touch the bottom of the sea. When you start to do that you can disconnect yourself from all of those advisors you have around you.*

*I certainly have had both mentors and people around me which have helped me in 1 way or another to navigate through my thinking, whether that has been to talk to religious leaders when I develop my philosophies about branding and religion; to talk to neuroscientists; to talk to century experts. All those people which are very removed from my core expertise of being a brand guy have in 1 way or another helped me to build up a combination of insights infused into the very core concept of branding which at the end of the day has meant that I'm evolving the very definition of what brands is.*

*I tend to say that creativity is to combine 2 ordinary things in a new way. You do that by always teaming up with other people. They will then help you to infuse new stuff into your mindset and because of that strengthen your core instinct.*

**Danny**

*To what extent has, I would imagine your thinking hasn't changed very much since publishing the book, but a lot can happen over the course of a year. A lot of things can catch our attention, so often when you go to launch and promote your book part of your*



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*mind is already excited about the next thing. Can you share a little bit about where else is your attention focused in addition to the ideas inside of small data?*

### **Martin**

*I think this thing is going to evolve a lot. I think 1 of the key topics I'm incredibly intrigued by is what I call transformation. It is an idea about that we as humans are not transforming anymore. As we talked about previously the first thing we do when we wake up is to touch our Smartphone and really then we are at work after 2 minutes. We're at work when we go to the bathroom fiddling around with the phones. In fact, I did a consumer insight study with young teens the other day in New York City and 1/3 of all these teens were actually on the phone in the shower.*

*We're at the phone when we are having our breakfast. On the way to work we are doing work in the car and at work we do private stuff. There is no really there's no transformation process taking place from 1 scene to another. It's mirrored in the way we are behaving when it comes to our computers. We never really reboot our computers anymore because we never reboot our brains anymore. I think you're pretty sure of what happens with your computer when you're not rebooting it. It gets slower, so does our brain.*

*There's a lot of consequences around this whole mechanism of not being affected by transition anymore. I think it's going to be 1 of the biggest opportunity for brands in the future. That is to infuse transition into your moments of life which really gives you that breathing space or that sigh, that space where you can breathe a feeling and stuff like that. That whole space I find fascinating and I think we've only scratched the surface. There's so much more to say on this topic.*



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*Episode 44*

**Audra** *That was Martin Lindstrom challenging you to get more personal with your audience. It sounds a little scary doesn't it? Sitting down with a customer in their living room and asking about their life. Here's the thing, it's pretty clear that Martin is a predictor and trendsetter in the marketing space. He's calling for transformation. What if that transformation is reconnecting with each other instead of trying to feel numbers and connect with big data? You can find Martin's book "Small Data: The Tiny Clues that Uncover Huge Trends" at Amazon and other bookstores. You can find him online at [MartinLindstrom.com](http://MartinLindstrom.com).*

**Voiceover** *This has been Business Reimagined. Join us next time as we talk with our own Danny Iny and special guest interviewer Lou D'Alo.*

## **Danny**

*People are still very quick and eager to talk about leads and to talk about a list. How many people come into our funnel? How many names on your email list? what I've always said is that it matters a lot less how people are on your list than it matters how much those people care about and are invested in what you are saying and what you are doing.*

**Voiceover** *Learn more about us at [Mirasee.com](http://Mirasee.com).*



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