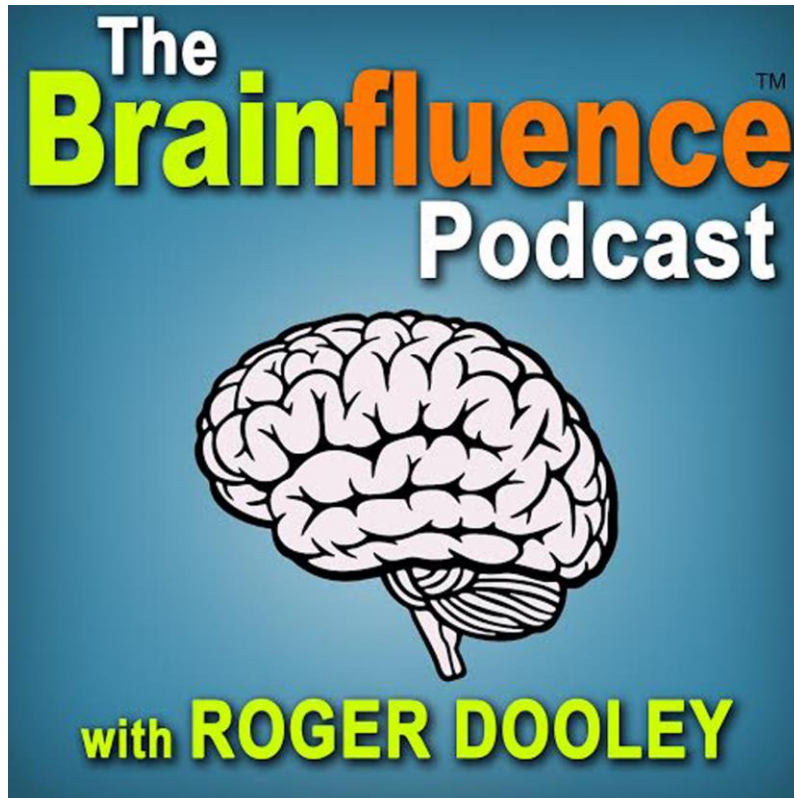


Ep #46: What Great Brands Do with Denise Lee Yohn



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Roger Dooley

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Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley, author, speaker and educator on neuromarketing and the psychology of persuasion. Every week, we talk with thought leaders that will help you improve your influence with factual evidence and concrete research. Introducing your host, Roger Dooley.

Roger Dooley: Welcome to the Brainfluence podcast. This is Roger Dooley. Today's guest is someone I've known online for years, branding expert Denise Lee Yohn. In the past, Denise was Sony Electronics first brand leader as vice president and general manager of brand and strategy. She led strategy at ad agencies for accounts like Burger King and Land Rover, and Unilever. You can find her writings all over the web, the places like Harvard Business Review, Forbes, SmartBrief on Leadership, Advertising Age. She's also been a guest author in neuromarketing too with a great post and comparing levels of customer service to Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Denise is a fellow Wiley author as well. Her book is, "What Great Brands Do: The Seven Brand Building Principles that Separate the Best from the Rest." It's celebrating its one year anniversary isn't it. Denise, welcome to the show.

Denise Lee Yohn: Thanks, Roger.

Roger Dooley: Great. I notice in your bio that you worked for a catalog marketer Spiegel. I take it still doing catalogs at that time. I spent a dozen years in the catalog business myself and it was a lot of fun at least most of the time, it was quite a bit of fun. What sorts of things were you working on there?

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Denise Lee Yohn: Yeah. That was my first job out of college, so long time ago. I was brought in as an analyst so I was doing consumer research, market research and then doing all the analysis. At the same, they asked me to set up an interviewing center so that we could take advantage of all the phone systems and phone operations they had that were handling inbound calls and actually do our own outbound marketing research. I had a little bit of a startup experience very early on in my career and starting up this kind of business within a business at Spiegel. What I will say what's interesting if you don't mind me jumping in.

Roger Dooley: No, keep going.

Denise Lee Yohn: Catalogs seemed to have come full circle now. I don't know if you read recently that JC Penny is considering starting back up their catalog. Twenty-five years ago, they were still quite a popular, quite dependable means for reaching customers. Then it went out of fashion but they're back in again so it'll be interesting to see how that goes.

Roger Dooley: I think there's still a niche-free catalog. When I was in the catalog business, it was just pre-internet. There were a few people near the end who were doing e-commerce but it was still pretty minimal and it was sort of, "Yeah, this is something we're going to have to think about because it's going to be big someday." Now, of course, it's so easy. Good grief! I buy so much stuff from Amazon because they make it so simple. There's still part of the catalog experience I think. I tend to buy my shirts online from folks like Charles Tyrwhitt. It's a British firm. They have a website of course but the richness of the catalog experience and you can see the

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colors and the close up of the textures and so on, is really significantly better I think than the web experience. It's not that the web experience is bad and of course, you can zoom in on photos and so on. It's just sometimes really nice to see a high quality catalog with art direction and so on. It's a great experience.

Denise Lee Yohn: Yeah. I think it also provides brands a real opportunity to do some of that content marketing that everyone is wanting to do and trying to figure. I think that so much emphasis has been on developing and then distributing content online. I think some of these retailers are discovering, "Well, hey, actually if we were to distribute some of our content in print media, it actually takes on a whole different quality." Something that's tactile. It's something that's maybe more lasting, more memorable. I think that's why we see J C Penny as interesting, in Ikea for a long time has done a great job with their catalog. J. Crew and Restoration Hardware and all these brands I think are waking up to the opportunity that a catalog provides to not only created this great shopping experience that you just talked about but then also promote their content.

Roger Dooley: Right. Well, as a catalog marketer, I knew that an awful lot of my catalogs went in the trash. If in about a minute of being received. I think you're right, I'm seeing a few blended approaches out there where you've got a catalog or a sale flyer whatever might be but there's also some content in it that's useful. It might have recipes or how-to things or stuff that might cause people to hang on to it for a while longer instead of just saying "Okay, it's all ads. I'm just going to toss it." They may say, "Hey, this looks pretty interesting. I'll hang on to it." Of course, the longer that catalog stays on a

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consumer's counter, the greater the chances that they'll order from it.

Denise Lee Yohn: Yeah. You got it.

Roger Dooley: Denise, I really enjoyed your book and one of your continuing mantras is brand is business. What do you mean by that?

Denise Lee Yohn: I think the best way to explain is actually to talk about what is a more typical view of brands and brand-building and that is that a brand is an external image to promote. What I've discovered in researching some of the greatest brands in the world is that they have a very different view of brands. Rather than thinking of their brands as something to use externally to express themselves or I should say not rather but in addition to that, they really primarily use their brands as internally as management tools to fuel, align and guide everything that organizations do. As such, the brand really becomes the business. There is no difference between what the brand stands for and how you run the business, and what you're trying to accomplish in the business is the same thing that you're trying to accomplish for the brand. That is this phrase brand as business that I have created to talk about this management approach.

Roger Dooley: That kind of ties into a chat I had a few weeks ago with Brian and Jeffrey Eisenberg who have a new book of Buyer Legends. What their approach is that it echoes what you're saying where these are stories about their customers and the brand's interaction with them. They aren't meant as most stories are to be marketing stories, external marketing stories to tell a customer something about the brand. Rather they're to get

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everybody inside the company on the same page whether it's customer service or sales or manufacturing or whoever. I think that there's a lot of similarity and thought process there that you have to have unifying message that brings all elements of the company together. Because so often different departments can focus on their own needs and go off in different directions.

Denise Lee Yohn: Right, right. It's interesting that you bring the idea of storytelling because just yesterday, I was going over with one of my clients there, a grocery retail chain. We've been putting together a brand guide that they will use an entire brand engagement roll up that they're doing. This brand guide is not your typical style guide like use the logo this way or these are our colors. It was more about how does everyone in the organization including the store team members, how do they bring the brand alive and how do they make decisions in the line, their actions with the brand. A core part of this brand guide is actually these stories, these narratives that we've developed that talk about they have three different customer segments. It presents a story for each one of those segments about what their experience with the brand should be.

In telling the story, our hope is that everyone will see how they somehow influence this experience that this customer is having. They really understand the importance of making sure that they're aligned with the brand and making sure that they understand what the brand stands for. They understand the responsibility to interpret and reinforce it appropriately. I think we've used this story telling method as a way of doing exactly

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what you said, having this unifying message. This unifying idea that will hopefully resonate with everyone.

Roger Dooley: Denise, you talked about Kodak as your first example of a brand that really didn't do what you're suggesting and make the brand part of their business. I can remember a brand that imploded so completely and quickly, they went from one of the most respected brands on the planet to nowhere. Then I guess have difficult figuring out exactly what went wrong, like everybody else who's old enough to have used film. I was of course a big user of their products which were always fine. Pretty hard to avoid their products in those days. I even bought a few of their digital products. I had one of their cameras and one of their colored printers.

They seemed to be adequate products. They seemed equivalent to their peers more or less. Nevertheless, they never got traction in that market and many other companies did. What do you think happened to Kodak?

Denise Lee Yohn: Yeah. I should be careful because I don't want to bash Kodak. I think they just provide a really good example because everyone, to your point, is somewhat familiar with them. In my research about Kodak, I think people blamed them on not adopting the digital technology as quickly as they should have or whatever. I think from my research, the common thread that I saw coming through was that they failed to do this brand as business. For example, one of the principles in my book, actually the first one is great brands start inside meaning that they start brand-building by cultivating a strong brand-led culture inside their companies.

I think that that's exactly what Kodak did not do. I think that during the time of transition when digital technology

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was becoming so prevalent, they, I think, started to chase after a lot of different ideas as opposed to really affirming what the brand's reason for being was. This whole idea of Kodak moments and the great emotional experiences that the brand facilitated, they didn't really use that as their central organizing idea. I think they ended up using technology and engineering as their central core idea. I think that's what got them into a lot of trouble because the brand wasn't central to them. Then there are other things in the brand that's business management approach like great brands sweat the small stuff. Meaning that great brands knew that every interaction, every touch point with a customer matters and so I think what Kodak failed to understand was, "Okay, we no longer need to only worry about the camera touch point and making sure that that works well."

But that there's this whole integrated system of software and printers, and sharing platforms that need to be part of this entire experience for customers that could be very powerful for our brand. Because they didn't recognize it, they didn't view that opportunity from the brand standpoint, I think they continued to emphasize their product and not pay attention to all the opportunities that they were missing to make a really important brand impact with customers.

Roger Dooley: That makes a lot of sense. Once you mentioned sharing too, they had an online platform as well that allowed the editing, and storage photos, backups and so on, as well as printing in the many forms that you might want to whether it's for t-shirts or mugs or books and what not. I was pretty unhappy when that went away because it just abruptly disappeared with referral

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to some other service but it was not the same product at all.

Denise Lee Yohn: Right. Right. The whole seamlessness of experience, I think, was really lacking. This is something that we struggled with at Sony as well. We had our sharing platform. We had our printer link, the connection, we branded it. Some was really cool thing. I think hindsight being 20-20 and those solutions were not the seamless integrated experience that customers really wanted. They were just trying to replicate some awkward around that we had all already tried to figure out on our own. I think that part of being a great brand is paying attention to all of those, where are the gaps and the customer experience can happen and taking responsibility for them.

Roger Dooley: Who in that kind of space do you think is doing it right, looking at ... you're not allowed to say Apple either. That one's too obvious. Are there any brands that are in that digital technology space that you think are doing it right?

Denise Lee Yohn: I would have to say perhaps Fitbit, the personal tracking device. I think that they have developed a very elegantly simple seamless experience for the user. They have, I think five or six different trackers of different levels of sophistication and functionality. I think what has always been a driving principle of that brand is just being elegantly simple. As long as you can wear this thing around with you and then be somewhere near a Bluetooth connection to your computer.

All of your activity is seamless synced with their online software. You can really get a sense of how you're doing and tracking your activity. Then not only can you

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share that with friends and use social platforms in that way but they're also are very integrated with a lot of other apps and other software for diet or exercise or whatever. I think that in general they've done I think a remarkable job for being a fairly young company of designing a solution that it doesn't really leave the customer or the user hanging at any point, I think it's pretty seamless.

Roger Dooley: I think probably just elimination of friction in the process because you can imagine if you had to manually sync up your fitness device and information in your computer. It would be very tedious and nobody would do it. First of all, they wouldn't be able to figure out how to do it probably. Even if they did, after a few days or few weeks, it would just get to be much of a bother to do it. By making it so seamless and so friction free, they can keep people engaged.

Denise Lee Yohn: Right. Exactly.

Roger Dooley: One thing you alluded to in Kodak is emotion. Denise, some products like maybe fragrances or even beer tend to associate a lot of emotion with their products because that's what they do in marketing. You can only talk about the taste of your beer so much so instead you show Clydesdales or attractive women or whatever. How do some other brands use emotion and maybe aren't quite as obvious as those consumer brands?

Denise Lee Yohn: Yeah. One company that I like to talk about is Basecamp. They are a software developer. Their software is project management and team collaboration software.

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Roger Dooley: Yeah. I actually have an account there although I hate to say I haven't use it in quite a while but I'm familiar with the product.

Denise Lee Yohn: Okay. Good. Yeah. Apparently, I don't want to misquote the number but relative to the size of their company, the hundreds and millions of users they have is pretty remarkable. I mean they've got a great business. To your point, what could be as dry and unsexy and unemotional a software. I think the folks at Basecamp, they, I think have created this cultural phenomena. If I want to be bullish about it but I think they've created this really cool brand that people recognized and want to be a part of. Part of the way they've done it is just their visual and verbal style. If you go into their site, everything's these really cute ... cute is not the right word but these cartoons. They make their brand personalities vary like accessible and very human and very down to earth. Then the way that they service their customers being so dedicated to customer service and really doing what's right for the customer and being fully committed to being focused on that I think also establishes a real sense of trust and sense of bonding with the customer.

Then they also are, I think, thought leaders in the space. From the very beginning, Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson who started a company had very specific points of view of how they wanted to run the company and the kind of culture they wanted to develop among their developers and among their customers. They have a blog that is called, "Signal and Noise." They have hundreds of thousands of followers on that. They've written a couple of books. They created this kind of thought leadership platform that's related to

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Basecamp but I think that's what attract people to Basecamp in some sense because they know that the people who are running the business are being very thoughtful about the way they're running the business.

There's a sense of identification with, "Okay. Well, I want to be an entrepreneur like Jason or David. I want to run my company with the same kinds of values or the same points of view." I think that there's real sense that their customers have some emotional connection with the software. Now, I'm not saying that people go around hugging their computers or whatever but I do think that it makes them want to use a software and want to recommend it. I think that's those important thing for a company like that.

Roger Dooley:

Yeah, I'm noticing that as a trend in software these days. Very friendly, almost cute communications in both the automated stuff and as well the human. I'm a Buffer user and they're constantly giving you little bits of encouragement. "Hey, great job, Roger. You did this." Or, "Wow, all your stuff is posted. Maybe you ought to try something else. Here's some suggestions." Even their people on those few occasions where I've had to ask support question. They really echoed that where they're always over the top enthusiastic like, "Wow! Roger, we're so glad you called. Your prompt our attention. Then we can deal with it. It's like really?"

They do a great job. You end up feeling good about the conversation as opposed to feeling like you were shuttled off to an offshore answer center or something where some drone just cut and pasted answer number 37b into the email. Denise, what do you think brands that have a love-hate relationship. I guess I think

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companies like Facebook or Google where they obviously have tremendous loyalty among their customers and they both in near monopoly positions in their spaces and people do like to use them. They're very hard to get them to switch but at the same time, they make people a little bit uneasy. They may feel a little bit big brother-ish. Facebook at least makes these strange and unexpected changes to the way the product works that disorient their users from time to time. How does a company balance that? Is that a good thing or should they be doing a better job?

Denise Lee Yohn: Yes, I think they should. You're right. I feel like we're at a point where people are starting to question whether these companies really have their best interest in mind. It's not a question that I should come up at all because as far as I know, and everything that I read and research about Google as well as Facebook is that they really are in service of their customers. Sometimes maybe very unintentionally but nonetheless are damaging or destroying this great brand equity that they've built up for so many years. I think we're at this point where whenever I bring up Google to my colleagues, I hear just as many people having concerns and bashing them. I have people who love them and are extolling their virtues.

I think we're at this point where people are going to be more questioning and I think more skeptical and I can't say that I know exactly what these companies need to do but I think transparency goes a very long way to either establishing or restoring trust. To one of our extent, these companies can really open themselves up and invite scrutiny and invite the skeptics to really understand what they're doing and how they're doing it.

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I think that will hopefully tip the scales back to a point where people feel like, "Okay, yes, I'm giving up some privacy or yes, they're monopolistic," but on balance it is a good thing.

Roger Dooley: Now, speaking of love-hate relationships, what about the airlines? I'm tremendously loyal to United Airlines but it's not because I feel that they are so vastly superior to every other airline out there. It's because of the rewards program. I'm elite on United so I get treated a lot better and if I go to another airline, I get treated relatively poorly like everybody else. I'm loyal but it's not a love-based loyalty. It's just a practical thing and it seems like over all the airlines are one of the few industries that seems to be working to make their basic product less attractive and have less capability and just about every other company tries to make the product better and better, and migrate things and improvements downward into the basic product.

Instead, they're disaggregating everything and either charging forward or making it available only to their better customers. What do you think about this strategy? Is this something that may work in the short run but is going to hurt them in the long run?

Denise Lee Yohn: Yeah. You know Roger, you have hit on one my hot buttons because I feel the exact same way towards American Airlines that you just described about United. In fact, a lot of times, in the talks that I give, that's one of the things I talk about is that I'm not loyal to American. I'm handcuffed to them. My handcuffs are made of platinum because I happen to be platinum lifetime member. Just recently, I think it was just yesterday, the day before, read some article about how

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American is trying to make its seats seem bigger by putting bigger digital displays on the backs of the seat in front of you. Then also somehow making the headrest more comfortable or something.

In the back, what's happened is that the seats are actually getting smaller. Customers are not stupid. We know what you're doing, these airline companies and I think the industry is ripe for huge disruption. I was hoping that virgin America could be that. They still maybe I know that they financially had some struggles. Their one airline that is really trying to actually make the experience better and really being very customer-focus in that. Unfortunately, what that means is it's more expensive at times. I think that there comes the time when customer is going to need to decide, "Am I willing to pay 50 bucks more for a better experience?" Until that happens, until there is this I think movement towards willingness to pay, I'm afraid that we're just going to continue to see most airlines scrimp and say even, then try to pull the wool over customer's eyes. It's really unfortunate.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. It seems like JetBlue is even throwing in the towel to some degree. Here in Austin, southwest is very popular. They seem to do a pretty good job in their unique style. Unfortunately, they don't much international and as a result, from my standpoint, not that all my travel is international but I have to divide my flights between the two airlines. I end up sticking with United just like you probably stick with American.

Denise Lee Yohn: Right. Exactly.

Roger Dooley: How important is design in building a brand?

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Denise Lee Yohn: I don't think we could under estimate the value of design. I think we need to be careful that we should be talking about big D, design. I think that there is an element of visual design that is extremely important. In my book, I talk about companies like Chobani, the yogurt brand that the number one yogurt brand in the US in three years. Some incredible growth because in part the brand just has this wonderfully appealing and very distinctive visual design. I think little D design is important in differentiating a brand or making a standout. I think big D design in terms of designing the customer experience and designing a business, and creating a culture of design thinking within organization.

That is going to be if it's not already really the competitive frontier or where winners and losers will be found. I think it's companies that really understand the importance of being intentional, being brand-led and being very I think, I want to say detail-oriented in the sense of being anal but being very disciplined about execution. I think that companies that really understand that are the ones that are attracting customers to them and then retaining those customers because the experiences they have are so superior. At the same time, they're attracting and retaining employees and associates because the experience of working for this company is also just extraordinary. Like I said, I don't think we can under estimate or under state the value of design to brand-building.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. You need to hold a ... Apple is an example but clearly that's been a really important part of their strategy. Not just in the products but in their packaging and everything else. Even relatively small companies had produced great designs. Things like the Nest

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thermostat or something. They were a startup and produced a very elegant simple design for product that ended up getting them bought out at a pretty high price. I guess you spend some time working with LandRover, directly or through with an agency but brings up to me the concept of product authenticity. I've driven a Hummer for years and I think that's a very authentic product because you can actually do ... I don't take mine off road but if you wanted to you could.

Land Rover to me has that sort of product authenticity as well. You can actually go out unto the bush in Africa or something, you'll see Land Rovers doing the work there. Is it possible for a younger company that doesn't have decades of product history to create an authentic product or a product that conveys authenticity, hopefully in a real way, not a fake authenticity, fake authenticity, can that even exist, in a real way to their customers.

Denise Lee Yohn: I guess it depends on what customers view as authentic. My sense is that authenticity ... when customers say that they want authenticity or they're looking for authentic brands. It has less to do with heritage or long term sustainability but has more to do with integrity, doing what you say you're going to do. Keeping your promises. Delivering on the expectations that you create in your advertising and marketing. If that is the definition or the standard authenticity that today's customers are using then absolutely, I think that there are brands that can start up from the very beginning be extremely authentic. It's a matter I think of embracing that as the value, as a way of doing business that you become known for over time but certainly if it comes from the start. Yes, I think it's very possible.

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Roger Dooley: I think authenticity counts even if people don't use I think of watches too where you can buy a million diver watches or aviator watches but there are a few brands, they actually feel that if you were going to go diving or flying airplane, those are maybe the ones that you'd want to use. Even though you don't do it, just having that on wrist feels different than having one that looks authentic but just relatively an expensive knock of one. Anyway, we're just about out of time. Let me remind our audience that we're speaking with brand-building expert, Denise Lee Yohn, author of, "What Great Brands Do: The Seven Brand-Building Principles that Separate the Best from the Rest."

We'll have links to Denise's book, website, all the resource that we talked about today along with the text version of our chat at rogerdooley.com/podcast. Denise, how can our listeners find you online and connect with you?

Denise Lee Yohn: Yeah. First of all, Roger, thank you so much for having me on your program. I really enjoyed our discussion. I feel we could talk for hours about all these different topics so thank you. My book is called, "What Great Brands Do." If you go to the website, whatgreatbrandsdo.com, you can learn more about the book. You can access some of the templates and exercises from my book and then you can also access links to purchase the book. That's also where then you can get to my main site which is deniseleeyohn.com. As you and I met, I think maybe through Twitter, that's a great way to get a hold of me. I love interacting with people on Twitter so my Twitter handle is Denise Lee Yohn and I always write back or I always follow back.

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As I said, I'd love to just connect with folks. Those are some good ways to get in touch with me.

Roger Dooley: Great. Well, thanks for being on the show Denise.

Denise Lee Yohn: Thank you Roger.

Thank you for joining me for this episode of the Brainfluence Podcast. To continue the discussion and to find your own path to brainy success, please visit us at RogerDooley.com.