



Mad Ave's Divergence Denial: CK Chats Up Convergence with Al Ries.

*Divergence is a brand's best friend—so why aren't
Mad Ave and the Media paying it any mind?*

— by Christina Kerley —

Part 1 of a 2-part Series

Al Ries' latest book, "The Origin of Brands", co-authored by Laura Ries, provides a much-needed wake-up call to all marketers consumed by convergence hype. The famed thought leader who is in great part responsible for making the word 'positioning' a part of our vocabulary, and who, over the course of some thirty years, has built many of Mad Ave's famous brands, debunks convergence for failing to deliver. He instead illustrates how divergence, convergence's lesser-known opposite, is the catalyst for scores of success stories.

*Ries' message is simple yet revolutionary: Brands, be they high-tech or low, diverge and go in many directions, spawning new brands and new brand categories. **Marketers should focus less on producing fewer brands (that do more) and more on creating new brand categories (that specialize in doing less).***

Convergence contends that products evolve into unified devices through linear evolutions; whereas divergence disputes this notion, citing innovation is spurred through disruptive revolutions. It could sound like a bunch of jargon, until you consider one of the twentieth century's most important innovations, the Internet, was coined a *disruptive* technology.

In dedicating his book to divergence, Ries declares it "the least understood, most powerful force in the universe." Apparently, as goes the universe, so goes business—the very people who promote convergence most are the ones who understand it least; namely, Mad Ave and the Media. **In this first segment of my two-part series, I'm working on righting Mad Ave's divergence denial; in part two I'm tackling the media's myopia.**

Enter Mad Ave, cravers of all things cool and converged. On this plane convergence reigns supreme. Always the soup du jour, forever in style (if convergence were a color, it would be black) and constantly billed as where the world is heading. **For an industry built on brand launches and line extensions, it appears Mad Ave is preaching convergence...but, in reality, is practicing divergence.**

By promoting convergence, what the masses are saying—whether they realize it or not—is that they want fewer brands and less brand competition. Huh? Taken to its extreme, a converged world starts to look like a marketplace of monopolies with a lot of Mad Aver's converged into the unemployment line.

If you own and use a digital camera + camera phone + laptop computer + wireless e-mail device, you're a walking-talking-e-mailing-snapshot-taking embodiment of divergence (you've converged neither your product consumption nor your monthly bills).

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convergence is a winner.
In the marketplace, it's not. ”

Before I get to my questions for Al, here are a couple for readers: Have you ever taken a truly good shot with your cell phone—good enough to post on match.com or your corporate bio? Does your PDA handle e-mail with such ease you'll forego e-mailing from the comfort of your own P.C., where you're not 'all thumbs'? Keep in mind convergence's promise is not to be complementary; its raison d'être is rendering singular-focused products obsolete.

Let's turn to AI for some answers. He's taking your questions too; join in **The Great Debate** and let us know which side of the spectrum you're on, and why.

CK: Flying in the face of all these convergence cultists you're saying not only aren't we heading toward converged products and platforms, we never have. How can everyone be wrong?

Ries: "When looking at the history of products and people, we've never converged; we've always diverged. Divergence is the natural order of branding and every single category long-term will diverge, creating opportunities for new brands and brand categories. **When you study history, look at the incredible number of new brands created by divergence of existing categories**, like Nextel (wireless phones diverged into wireless 'walkie-talkie' phones), Palm (desktop computers diverged into palmtop computers), BlackBerry (wired e-mail diverged into wireless e-mail devices)."

CK: What do we gain through convergence? What do we lose?

Ries: "Wherever convenience is a big issue, you'll find convergence products; but in general they will almost never be mainstream products. Going outside of the high-tech field, when you put a shampoo and conditioner in one bottle, you've got a converged product. **Sure, a lot of people buy combination products, but most people don't. And even those who do buy a combination product don't think it's as good, just more convenient.** Take a convenience store next to a gas station. It's convenient, but it doesn't have the cheapest prices, it doesn't have the widest selection and it doesn't have the best brands.

In high-tech, a convergence product is always behind in terms of its technology because in the year or two it takes for a company to put two functions together, the individual functions tend to be improved on their own. **So when you have a convergence product, technologically, you're always behind and you never catch up; technology changes too fast.**"

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CK: Then why are all these companies beating the convergence drum?

Ries: "If you're an electronics manufacturer, like Sony, and you make a wealth of electronics, **then convergence sounds really good, as you can combine your portfolio of products and technologies to increase market share.** In the boardroom, convergence is a winner. In the marketplace, it's not."

Another key takeaway from Ries: **beware the buzz. The cool is in convergence; but the money is in divergence.** We'll focus on the media's dismissal of divergence tomorrow, in part two of this series.

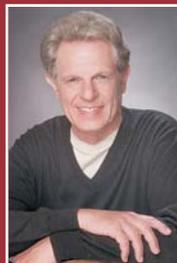
For now, we encourage you to speak *your* mind; join AI and me in **The Great Debate**. Tell us which side of the spectrum you're on and why. I'll even post your comments anonymously—so fear not, we won't out you from the convergence closet.

For more on this **HOT** Topic:

- **Read** Part 2 of this 2-part series.
- **Join the Debate** AI and I answer your questions.
- **Get the book** "The Origin of Brands".
- **Check out** Laura Ries' divergence blog.



About AI Ries: AI Ries is the author or co-author of 11 books on marketing, including his latest, *The Origin of Brands*. He and his daughter Laura run the Atlanta-based marketing strategy firm Ries & Ries. Their website: www.ries.com



About CK: CK is Christina Kerley, a divergence-friendly marketing specialist whose clients range from Mad Ave, Media and Tech. Known by many as 'CK'; she's a contributing columnist who covers topics and trends for *The Madison Avenue Journal*. Her consultancy is at: www.ckEpiphany.com

