

JANUARY 2024

Rebecca, Doc the puppy, Snowball the kitty, and I welcome you to 2024!

A Fresh Look!

I am trying out a new format for my newsletter and would love to hear your thoughts on it. Instead of featuring three or four stories as I have done in the past, I am considering a shorter narrative that covers seven or eight timely topics.

Marketing newsletters have an average of 32% of readers opening the file and my rate is 52%. My 2024 goal is to increase my readership to double the industry average.

Please email me your feedback. Thank you in advance!

John

How well have you launched into the new year thus far? I have continued abstaining from soft drinks that began at Thanksgiving, but I am still undisciplined when it comes to Twinkies, Ding Dongs, and Snowballs.

Here are the compelling stories that I'd like to share with you, along with the insights learned from each one.



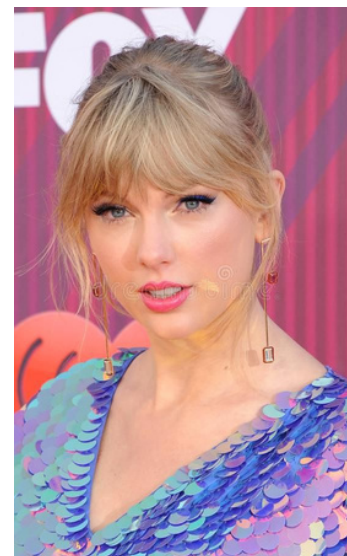
Thin Mints Alert! Girl Scout Cookies on Sale NOW

Mid-January is one of my favorite times of the year. It's not because of the NFL playoffs or college basketball season. Now through March 3, it's Thin Mint time!

On every weekend trip to the grocery store or hardware store, I find **Girl Scouts** showcasing their beaming smiles as they practice salesmanship by selling their Girl Scout cookies. [Check out the locations and times](#) where Girl Scouts are selling. These Scouts rotate in three-hour shifts and sell flavors that include:

- **Thin Mints** – my favorite!
- Caramel deLites (also known as **Samoas**) – my second favorite
- **Peanut Butter Patties** (also known as **Tagalongs**)
- **Lemonades**
- **S'Mores**

Fletcher's Take: The **Thin Mints** sell out first, so don't tarry until the final weekend or you will be... mint-less. Oh no!



Not-so-Smart Fake: Taylor Swift Cookware AI Advertisement

Fox News reports that an AI-generated **Taylor Swift**-endorsed ad offering a giveaway of high-end cookware was a fake. I won't mention the brand and give it recognition. The audio of the ad stated, "Hey you all, it's Taylor Swift here. Due to a packaging error, we can't sell 3,000 (brand name) cookware sets, so I'm giving them away to my loyal friends for free."

A spokesperson for **Facebook's** parent company, **Meta**, confirmed the ad was removed from the platform.

Fletcher's Take: Any time something seems too good to be true, it usually is. Also, with the advances of AI, we are starting to see and hear unauthorized ads. Scammers are ruthless and the truth will **never** get in their way.

Smart Advertising: Focus on Seniors

Two of the most memorable TV commercials of the 2023 Christmas season focused on senior citizens. The most dramatic was a [five-minute Chevrolet commercial](#) that showed an elderly woman with Alzheimer's disease, sitting in a depressed state at the front window of her home.

Her young adult granddaughter decides to take her for a drive – in the 60-year-old **Chevy Suburban** that has been kept under wraps in the garage. When the granddaughter pushes in the old eight-track tape, the **John Denver song, "Sunshine on My Shoulders"** plays in the background as they drive along. What a touching soundtrack.

[Amazon produced the second commercial](#), which shows three elderly ladies sitting on a bench on a cold day. One opens a package that contains three sleds for them to ride down a snow-covered hill, which they do, with the Beatles song, **"In My Life, I've Loved You More"** playing in the background.

Fletch's Take: The most memorable commercials tend to tell a story and connect with the brand along the way. Walt Disney said it best: **"Emotions trump everything!"**



Tough Times for a Pair of 70-Year-old Brands...

Not-so-Smart Start: Sports Illustrated to Close

What was revered as THE legacy media of the sports world, **Sports Illustrated (now re-branded as "SI")**, lost its way and, as a result, may cease publication. The official reason for possible closure is that the publisher has lost its licensing deal after failing to make its quarterly payment to the magazine's parent company.

The magazine is failing because of declining revenues and subscriptions.

[NPR reports](#) that 80% of the magazine's staff has been terminated. Sports Illustrated front covers were iconic, featuring the most memorable moments in sports over the past 70 years.

Many high-profile observers have criticized the publication in recent years for politicizing the sports world, most specifically in its legendary swimsuit edition that photographed beautiful women frolicking on exotic beaches.

Regardless of your political views, this statement from industry observers is accurate: **Sports Illustrated** placed its reputation and future at risk when replacing attractive women with a plus-sized model on the swimsuit cover one year and a trans woman the next.

These observers felt the reward was not worth the high risk of alienating the loyalty and financial support of the male subscribers, readers, and advertisers who were more interested in sports than politics.

Fletch's Take: In today's polarized political world, you should ask yourself whether to conduct business as usual or whether the risk of taking a political stance and potentially alienating your customers is worth it. If you lose more audience than you gain, that answer is likely "No."

Sad Closing: We'll Miss the Schwan's Trucks

Yet another 70-year-old brand is facing extinction, although for a different reason. **Schwan's**, which revolutionized the food industry with customized home delivery of frozen foods, has fallen victim to the overcrowded delivery space.

Now conducting business as **Yelloh** in a rebrand, the company has failed to maintain its position as a leader in the frozen food industry and is closing 90 delivery centers.

[DeliveryRank](#) does not list **Yelloh** among its top ten delivery brands, which are, listed in order: **Blue Apron, Factor, Hello Fresh, Home Chef, Green Chef, Fresh & Easy, Bistro MD, Tempo Meals, Home Chef Family, and Every Plate.**

The proliferation of home deliveries by such entities as **Walmart, H-E-B, Tom Thumb, plus Amazon**, has pushed out Schwan's/Yelloh in the very field it once dominated.

Fletch's Take: How are you currently protecting and re-imagining your legacy profit centers to ensure they remain relevant and that your customers remain loyal to you? Singer/songwriter Bob Dylan had it right: **"The times, they are a-changin'!"**



Smart Solution: Artistic Fort Worth Parking Garage

Kudos to **Brian Crowell**, founder of **Maverick Development Group** for creative innovation. [The Star-Telegram](#) reported that his **Willow & Wise** multi-family development in Near Southside needed to create a façade that would conceal the deck of its parking garage.

Brian and his team engaged a Pittsburgh, PA, company that created a kinetic façade that would create ventilation on each floor. The façade's pieces reveal a different pattern each time the wind blows, thus creating a constantly changing appearance.

Fletch's Take: Innovative solutions arise when you ask: "What if?" instead of "Why not?"



Smart Post: SocMed Shows Forlorn Diner Owner, Drives Sales

Social media is extremely powerful and even the simplest post can help turn a business around.

[USA Today](#) reports that a customer took a photo of an Oklahoma hot dog joint owner standing at his front window as he hoped for customers to show up on a slow day. That customer shared the post on social media and the results were impressive.

Traffic at **Spiral's Hot Dogs and More** turned around from dismal numbers to showing double-digit increases over the previous year. All due to a single customer caring enough to capture a vulnerable moment and share a post.

Fletch's Take: As the contemporary Christian song from many years ago sang, "It only takes a spark to get a fire going!" And you and I can create that spark of encouragement and support in the lives of others when we choose to become involved.

Tiebreaker: Four Words Make You a Superior Leader

[Inc. Magazine reported](#) that four words can elevate the respect and reactions you receive as a leader. The article shares your relationships will improve and everyone working around you will become happier and more productive.

Sounds simple enough, right? All you have to do is use...

Well, these are words that humble you and express gratitude. I get it – that first part about humbling yourself may be a challenge but consider how much happier and more productive you and everyone in your office – and those working from home – will be.

Adam Grant and Francesca Gino conducted a research project that evaluated simple expressions of appreciation and praise. Their first observation: Merely saying “thanks” or “thank you” is not enough.

The four magic words are: **I am very grateful.**

- **I am very grateful** for your hard work
- **I am very grateful** for your positivity
- **I am very grateful** for how you mentor others

Fletch's Take: I agree with their findings that when people in positions of authority – the leaders – humble themselves and express sincere gratitude, they earn respect and loyalty. They didn't give promotions or raises; all they did was express appreciation. How brilliant!



I am very Grateful