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**HOW THE COMING SHIFT FROM
INFORMATION TO IMAGINATION WILL
TRANSFORM YOUR BUSINESS**

ROLF JENSEN

The Dream Society

**How the Coming Shift from Information
to Imagination Will Transform Your Business**

ROLF JENSEN



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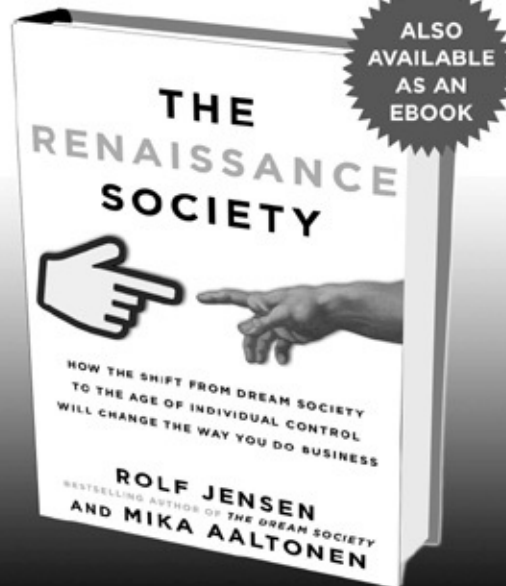
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**STAY AHEAD OF THE TRENDS
AND ON TOP OF YOUR GAME.**

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Introduction

Since *The Dream Society* was published, we have entered a new century. It has given us wars, periods of high growth, and a prolonged recession. The most important trend for the long term, however, is that a new global world order is taking shape. Does *The Dream Society* still have a relevant message for us? My answer is yes, and this message is even more relevant today. Let me illustrate it with a small but true story.

A friend of mine, his wife, and his teenage daughter were enjoying a vacation in a cottage. After a few days, his daughter said, “Let’s go to the town and visit the stores.” My friend replied, “What do you need?” His daughter said, “How would I know when I haven’t been there!” To my old friend, shopping was about real needs, like buying a coat when it is cold. To his daughter, shopping was a lifestyle—it was for inspiration, for fun, for buying into another lifestyle or another persona. The old world met the new one.

This is what *The Dream Society* is about.

Most books about the future of business and society are about the short term. *The Dream Society* is not. Its idea is based on a long-term trend: because of economic growth, the consumer can afford to buy with her heart. Function is taken for granted; it becomes a by-product. What we pay for is the style and its contribution to our self-portrait. It is not about the T-shirt; it is what is written on it that counts and that determines its price. Your electronics become a lifestyle statement, as do your coffee and your clothes. Your stuff becomes a story that says, “This is who I am.”

This is a long-term trend indeed. During 99.9 percent of the history of *Homo sapiens*, we have been extremely poor. Luxury was only for kings and aristocrats; they could afford more than the necessities of life, and they could flash their wealth and lifestyle. We are watching a great shift: from having not enough or at best enough to having more than enough for the vast majority of the population in the mature economies. This “more than enough” is spent on products and services that offer more than function—that have design, a story, and a heart. We have all become kings, queens, and aristocrats.

In the old world, work was something that you needed to do in order to feed your family. The best would be if you could live without working at the assembly line. In the new world, while work is still about the money we earn, it is now not only about that—work has become more social, more engaging, and more challenging. It is a part of our lives, not just an unavoidable evil. *The Dream Society* is about this societal transformation, too.

Is this long-term trend irreversible? I think so. A recession may delay it a bit, but as

soon as growth returns (and it always does), we likewise return to the trend.

I have been accused of being an optimist, and this is not merely an accusation, but a fact.

I do not apologize. In the art of peeking into the future, we cannot avoid emotions. Studies of the future are not science in the same way that physics is—there is room for different views. To me, the future is a fascinating subject, and it is the most relevant one, since this is where we shall spend the rest of our lives. We all need ideas about the future; we cannot accept that the years ahead of us are just a black box, an empty space, or a big unknown.

One trend in the study of the future is the optimistic one, like *The Dream Society*; the other is the pessimistic one. The pessimistic studies claim that in the future, we may not have enough food for a growing world population, we may not have enough raw materials, and we may not act in time to create a more sustainable globe and stop climate change. We may fear wars, terrorism, and crime. We may even fear epidemics and social unrest. Last, but not least, will economic growth in the mature economies return? Up to a certain point, we can try to disprove these fears with statistics, but basically, the fundamental issue is a matter of belief about how to meet the future.

I think we should meet the future as a good friend, a friend that we would like to know better. If we meet the future as an enemy that is a threat to us, then we are forgetting our history. There have always been challenges facing us—and actually, some of them have been bigger than those we face at present. We must believe in our ability to deal with the current challenges just as we have done in the past. A society without a positive attitude toward the future—one that does not believe that the challenges can be met and the problems can be solved—is not a healthy society. The future must not be seen as an enemy.

As mentioned earlier, we have been through an unusually long economic downturn. It can be compared to the Depression after 1929, although the social consequences this time are less severe. Will economic growth return? Well, after every recession in history, growth has returned. It will happen this time, too—unless we lose our belief in the possibilities open to us. They are numerous in a global market in which millions of people in Asia are leaving poverty and entering the middle class. Africa south of the Sahara is still poor, but recent figures tell us that poverty in Africa is not permanent and that a period of economic growth is beginning. The amount of money spent globally on research and development has never been higher, and new ideas are spreading faster than ever. The possibilities for a better life for the vast majority of the 7 billion people on this earth are at hand. Let me conclude with a quote from an eternal optimist, Sir Winston Churchill: “A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity—an optimist sees an opportunity in every difficulty.” Let’s learn from his wise words.

Rolf Jensen
Copenhagen, January 2013

Acknowledgments

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