

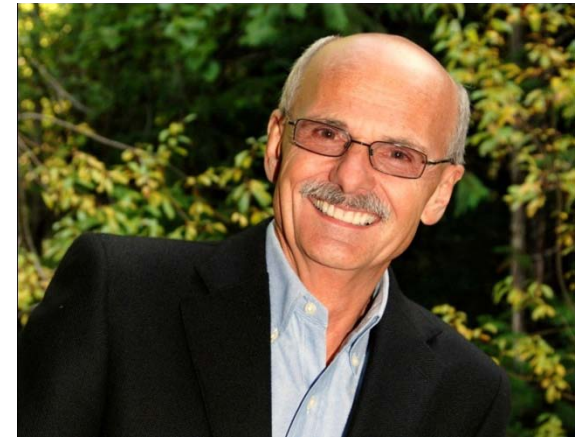
Is Differentiation the same as Business Survival

Guest was Roy Osing author of [Be Different or Be Dead](#)



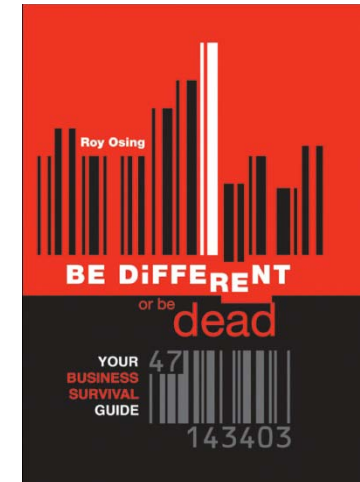
**Business901 Podcast
Transcript**

Through the executive skills and experience of [Roy Osing](#), Brilliance for Business is the **ONLY** organization that provides practical and proven ways to enhance your business performance across all critical business functions to ensure you thrive and survive in the long run.



Roy is an experienced Business and Marketing Consultant and the former Chief Marketing Officer & Executive Vice President for TELUS, Canada's second largest Telecommunications provider. He is also the author of the book '*BE DIFFERENT or be dead: Your Business Survival Guide*'. He is an experienced senior executive leader who has led a variety of organizations to achieve extraordinary levels of performance. Roy's insights are both practical and proven, not "text book" prescriptive. They come from a rich executive leadership background in driving change in highly complex and multi-faceted businesses faced with constant and enormous competitive challenges. In addition, through his consulting practice, he has effectively helped start-up companies and small to medium sized organizations achieve strategies to build performance and sustain a **BE DIFFERENT** competitive position and 'immunize' them from failure in the future.

My book is designed to help organizations successfully navigate through the turbulent waters ahead and build a profitable future. It offers you the real deal: performance enhancement and business building practices based on solid business principals that have been successfully implemented in the real world across the major functions of *Strategy creation, Marketing, Sales and Serving Customers*.



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Joe Dager: Thanks, everyone, for joining us. This is Joe Dager, the host of the Business901 podcast. Participating in the program today is Roy Osing, the principal of Brilliance for Business and author of "Be Different or Be Dead." Roy, I saw your book, and it very much intrigued me just by the title. Could you tell me the essence of what the book is about?

Roy Osing: Sure. Joe, by the way, thanks very much for having me on. The essence of the book, quite frankly, is this. If organizations cannot find clear, and compelling and unique reasons why people should buy from them, then, quite frankly, they won't buy from them. Organizations are then in significant jeopardy. I think we can see that in the recent economic circumstances that we found ourselves in throughout the world. Organizations need to be different. If they're not different, they're going to have a horrible time succeeding and even surviving.

Joe: I agree with that, but what if it is difficult to be different? How do you go about that when you're, let's say, a dry cleaner's?

Roy: Well, what I try to do in my book is provide some practical and proven ways that businesses can go about that, and I talk about it in fundamentally four categories. One is opportunities to be different in terms of the way you create your strategy for your organization. Second is how you can be different from a marketing point of view. Third is how you can be different from a serving customers point of view, and I talk about serving customers rather than customer service. Lastly, how you can be different from a sales perspective.

There's no such thing as a silver bullet in the journey to be different, but there are a lot of small, practical steps that can be taken that in aggregate really will cause an organization

to move in a direction that, quite frankly, is going to be difficult to replicate. It's not about price. This is anything. We're talking about value differences here, not price differences.

One example is, for example, in the marketing area. Most businesses flog products, and there's nothing wrong with that except that it's not different. What I try and advocate in my work is the need for marketers to get their heads around the fact that they're in the value creation business, not the product flogging business.

Go create holistic offers based on the overall requirements of people and market those so that they tend to be in the systems integration business as opposed to the product features and benefit business.

The reality is there are not too many people actually in the offer creation business. That's what makes it different. That's one example of what an organization could do tomorrow, and it's not all that difficult. It's just that people don't hit on it as something that needs to be done.

Joe: When you say "the offer creation." Can you take that a step farther? Can you give me an example or say that? I know that you quote Alaska Airlines in your book. Is that an example that you could use for me?

Roy: Sure. Let me give you a more recent example. My wife and I just spent a wonderful time in Athens, and the Marriott Ledra in Athens offers, as part of their stay package, something that they call their business package. It contains a number of elements. It contains free Internet service. It contains access to the mini bar in terms of certain refreshments and a few other things. In other words, what they've done is they've taken a number of value components, and packaged them and branded it as something different. They're not selling the individual things; they're selling some overall value that obviously

business people appreciate and makes you recognize the Ledra, in this particular case, as something different.

So as opposed to flogging a particular product with features and benefits, it's a matter of packaging value and then marketing that package as opposed to the individual components of it.

I think another great example, by the way, is Apple, and I've talked a lot on my website and blogged about the kind of challenges that RIM and the BlackBerry have got relative to Apple. Apple's done, in my mind, an amazing job of essentially packaging, in a customized way, applications that satisfy the very different needs and expectations of their customers.

I still see RIM and the BlackBerry in the product mode, and I think that's going to be a problem for them because I think Apple is doing a very, very good job.

Joe: Oh, I think it is. It's all about the apps. Nobody talks about the product. I mean the product can have all these terrible features to it, and everybody's talking about the apps.

Roy: Exactly. It's the application. It's the application that brings the product to life. It's not the essence of the technology, and yet there are so many companies today, Joe, that are focusing on that technology as opposed to what it can do for people in a holistic way.

Joe: I find that very true. I like the different topics that you explored in your book. The Only statement is one of them, the birth of differentiation. How do you instruct a company to work on that, to come up with that? How do you get them to say, gee, this is who we are? So many companies try to be so generic so that they are everything to everyone. How do you get them to really focus on that Only statement?

Roy: Well, first of all, you're so right. I talk about avoiding the tendency to be aspirational because, unfortunately, aspirations may make you feel good, but they don't really achieve anything because they're not specific enough. What I'm trying to do with the Only statement, and a great example of that, by the way, is a company that will claim it provides the best customer service. Well, nobody really knows what that means. So what I'm trying to do through the Only work is get people to think really, really specifically about: what is it, in detail, that you can provide to the customers you're targeting that nobody else can? I try in the book to give a bunch of examples of companies that have actually done it.

Is it easy to do? No, absolutely not. It's very, very challenging because if you get a team of executives in a room, quite often there will be 50 percent of them that disagree with what somebody else proposes as the Only statement. That in essence is a significantly beneficial part of the work because it gets people talking together. It gets people to actually discuss their organization in terms they haven't before.

The way I do it is literally get people in a room and say, OK, what we're going to do is we're going to drive out how we are specifically unique relative to the other people who are competing for our customers.

There's a chapter in the book called "Look in Every Nook and Cranny." There are opportunities throughout the business to differentiate yourself, but you just need to take people through it and ask them the right questions.

There's an educational institution in Canada called Queen's University outside of Toronto, and it's done a masterful job of creating an Only statement. It's all about providing personalized educational services that students want.

Can you imagine an educational institution that is actually looking at students as individuals who have specific needs and varying the educational package to satisfy those? That's amazing, and they've capitalized that on their Only statement. It's in my book, and I've blogged about it too if people wanted to take a look at that. It's fun work.

Joe: Now can you really get that Only statement staying internally within a company, or at some point in time do you have to go externally and get the customer feedback?

Roy: Well, you have to obviously test it. It's a very good question you asked because in my book I talk about once you've got your Only statement composed, don't get mesmerized by your own work. You need to go out and test it. It would be really, really not appropriate to first of all come up with something that you think you're the only one about that doesn't matter to customers. The second thing is, if it matters to customers and they don't believe you, that's equally as bad.

So you're absolutely right. You come up with it. Hopefully you've built it around your knowledge of what your target customers' needs, expectations, wants and desires are, and then you go and ask them. You say, "Is it relevant to you? Is it truthful?"

If the answer to those questions is "Yes, it is relevant. You've addressed the high priority need for me. Yes, it's true."

You actually do that on a day-to-day, consistent basis, then you've completed your work. Now you can start to move on and actually start to talk about your Only statement in the way you describe what your business is all about.

And that's the other power of the Only statement. If businesses are looking for, or any organization, Joe, is looking for the elevator speech on what you're all about, the Only statement is exactly what you need.

Joe: Now, you also talked about dumbing your strategy down, and simple is good. I think that the number one reason people typically lose jobs, especially professional organizations, is because of lack of clarity. The customer is unsure of what is going to be delivered to them, the results and the outcomes. And so they have a tendency to side with a brand, because you failed to be crystal clear about what outcomes you were going to deliver. Is that part of your "simple is better" and "simple is good" strategy, or am I misreading that a little bit?

Roy: No, I think it is absolutely part of it. I mean, businesses need to be... That's one of the things that the Only statement helps do is it helps crystallize how you're going to uniquely compete in business. The simplification process that I talk about in my book addresses the fact that quite often businesses will, first of all, not create a strategy, because they think it takes too much time and it's too expensive. And in some cases that's true, and simply provides my own process for doing it.

I've been successful actually helping organizations create their strategy in three days with the experts in the room. And this is not a mammoth, expensive, time-consuming consulting process. This is all about getting the people in the business that have the intellectual property about what's right, and asking them the right questions.

And I frame the questions in three ways, and the process is really simple. It starts out with the question, "How big do you want to be?" And that's all about what your growth goals are. Do you want to grow your talk line revenues, for example, at 10 percent a year for the next three years, or do you want to grow them at 50 percent?

The aggressiveness and character of the strategy is clearly dependent on your growth goals. And so I start out with the numbers, and the numbers drive the entire strategic development process.

And so, "How big do you want to be?" is the first question. "Who do you want to serve?" is all about you have a choice as to which customers you go after, and it's all based on latent potential to satisfy your growth targets, and the skills and competencies of the organization. And I always say there's no such thing as a bad customer; it's just that some are better than others. And so let's get really clear on who we want to serve. And the third question is, "How are you going to compete and when?" And that's all about that Only statement, Joe, that you brought up earlier. Let's talk about how you're going to differentiate yourself from your competitors.

And then what I do is simply take the answers to those three questions, and I create a strategic game plan statement for the organization. And then we break that down into objectives and accountabilities.

So we're actually able to do that over a three day period. And people generally don't believe you can do it, but when I get them through it, because I'm not a facilitator, I get involved in their contents, and I know what questions to ask, and I know when they're blowing smoke at me, and I don't let them get away with it.

And so, yeah, we can do it in three days. That's dumbing it down, I mean, and it's not spending copious amounts of time. You know, you're never going to have enough information. You take the information that you've got, you make decisions on it, and you go do something with it, right? It's not plan, plan, plan, plan, plan; it's plan, execute, execute, execute, execute. That's my philosophy anyway.

Joe: Sure, and I think that too. I think you make small incremental steps. You just keep planning and executing and planning, executing. In the end you have to do that, because if you sit there thinking you're going to create a plan in three days, or four or five days, and it's all going to work for you, you're barking up the wrong tree.

Roy: I talk about a concept called "planning on the run," which is a bit of a contradiction in terms to a lot of people. But what I mean by that is you get the strategy just about right and you execute it pristinely, and I will bet 99 percent of the time you're going to beat the pants out of anybody else out there who's probably spent too much time on the plan. And so I'm all about execution, and I'm also all about learning from your execution and tweaking your plan as you go. And so the process of planning on the run is all about, you know, you plan, you execute, you learn, you adjust, you execute. And you just keep going through that process.

And your strategy actually gets better because of what you learn from executing it that you never knew when you conceived it, because nobody's got the ability to see the future, and nobody's got the ability to actually predict how the plan's going to turn out.

Although I will tell you, I've never seen a strategic plan that actually worked the way it was conceived. It just doesn't. The world won't let you. It keeps changing on you, and so you need a planning process, right, that works within that set of dynamics. And I call that "planning on the run."

Joe: Now you talk about serving customers rather than providing customer service. What do you mean by that?

Roy: Well, what I'm trying to do is get across the notion that the customer should drive the business. The business shouldn't decide what it is that they're going to do to customers. And so it's all about who's in the control position. Customer service is generally a mix of what we think will satisfy customers, what the costs associated with those are, what the policies and internal regulations are. And then we ask the frontline people to adjudicate that when they have a customer contact.

What I'm trying to get across is the serving customer model puts the customer in the control position, and we literally create an organization to serve them in terms of who we put in front of them, in terms of the rules and policies we have, etc., etc., in terms of the flexibility that we allow.

So it's really flipping the chart around to say that the customer's on top, and the whole structure exists to figure out a way, in my world, to dazzle them, because dazzling customers, from an experiential point of view, is the most significant way to create loyalty there is. And that obviously has got economic benefits to any organization.

You need loyal customers, and I'm sure every one of our listeners here can relate to a bad customer experience that they've had in their lives, and how they felt about it after it occurred. And then they can juxtapose that with a dazzling one, and how wonderful that felt. Typically you end up talking well about an organization that dazzles you, and typically you end up buying from them again. And that's the whole notion.

So, that doesn't just happen out of a customer service philosophy. It happens with a philosophy about serving them, you know, being the servant to the customer. There are a lot of organizations who don't believe this, because they think their job is to provide stuff and flog stuff as opposed to serving people. And my philosophy is all about serving people. And by the way, it also applies inside an organization in terms of how leaders deal with their people. You know, are they command and control freaks, or are they servants? And the servant philosophy is a customer obsessed philosophy that it works very well.

Joe: Things move so quickly, we're not out there looking for even the perfect podcast, even the perfect customer experience. We want someone just trying to give us the perfect customer experience, and we're willing to accept the faults of it. Where we are always let down so many times is that part where we see that it's not about serving the customer, it's

about, this is the customer service we provide. I think you say that very well when you turn it around like that.

Roy: Well, a classic example of what you're talking about, Joe, is this whole notion that I call service recovery. And it goes like this: what happens when an organization makes a mistake? Most organizations will simply fix it more or less, right? And then they'll just let it go with that. Well, the problem is when you make a mistake, the customer expects you to fix it. And when you do, they don't really give you a whole lot of accolades, because they expected it to be fixed.

However, if you go a step further and surprise them, dazzle them, blow them away with something that they don't expect, they go, "Wow." And when they go, "Wow," that's what they remember, and they forget about the fact you made a mistake. And the reality is loyalty actually is built more after a successful service recovery than if the mistake never happened at all.

That is counter intuitive but is absolutely the case. Experiences make people happy and happy people typically are more loyal than people who are not getting those good, happy, joyous experiences. And there are companies around that do it well. There are companies around that unfortunately don't do it and to your point, people get lulled into accepting mediocrity and it's a shame. It's a shame on organizations for causing that.

Joe: You have been putting on some seminars. What is the focus of your seminars and moving forward, seminar schedule for 2010 then?

Roy: OK two points. First of all the seminars are based around the book. What I am trying to do in the seminars is prevent what I call a taste what's in the book and in order obviously to experience the full bottle then you have to buy the book. Spend some more time on the practices. I am providing an hour and a half session although I can customize

it into three hours if people want. But, I've been trying to keep it to an hour and a half overview of what's in the book and we go through the key practices and strategies, serving customer sales, and marketing.

And have been very busy in '09, you're right. And we are in process right now of determining what we want to do in 2010. But to me, I want to do a lot of seminars. And I want to do much more from the point of virtual because the geographic issue is a real tough one to get around.

So webinars, podcast kinds of opportunities like we are doing here are certainly things that I want to get heavily into in 2010 and I am in the process of working on that and putting it together and if anyone out there has an idea and is looking for someone to come in and talk about some cool things I would be delighted to chat with them.

Joe: You also have an organizational assessment quiz on your website. What does that entail and what will I learn from it if I take it?

Roy: Thanks for raising that. It's a fun thing. It's a simple little tool that people can use to do to decide where their organization sits on the Be Different or Be Dead continuum. Are you Be Different or are you learning towards the dead side, right? So what it is, it's a series of 40 questions and they are broken down by strategy, marketing, sales and serving customers. You go through and rate yourself on a scale of one to five for each of the 40 questions. Submit your ratings and what happens is it will come back, and it will chart your results in each of the four categories - you get for bars.

The idea is, if the bar is red, it means you've rated yourself on...your average rating has been three or less. If the bar is black, it is more than three out of five.

So the whole notion is take a look at anything that is red and maybe that is where you should start looking if you want to adopt some Be Different practices.

It is a safe way; nobody is going to know of course what you have submitted etc. etc. so it's kind of a self assessment. And I have to tell you it has been very, very well received and it happens to be one of the top two or three pages on my website that people actually go to and experience.

I invite anybody to go try it out, its fun and you will see where you sit and at least you will have some information that will allow you then to take action if the Be Different practices that I advocate make sense to you.

Joe: And where can someone purchase your book yet?

Roy: Well you can buy it online practically anywhere. Certainly, you can buy it online through my website which is BeDifferentOrBeDead.com. Bookstores have the book. It is available throughout the world now. We are getting some pretty good distribution. And if anybody ever has any issues on it or problems on it, they can go to my website email me at roy@bedifferentorbedead.com and I will make sure that I've take care of that.

Joe: Now your organization, Borrowing for Brilliance, what is the intent of that organization? Are you consulting in it or what is the purpose of the organization?

Roy: Brilliance f Business was conceived as an organization dedicated to providing practical and proven ways for people to enhance the performance of their organization. Be it business or profit or not for profit. I have done a lot of work with not for profits, and the same principle applies. I'm trying to find a way to help businesses, and I have been doing an awful lot of work with entrepreneurs and startups and small businesses who don't have all the resources they need themselves to enhance their performance.

The book is actually a compendium of the kinds of practices that I put into play when I do consulting with organizations. So I build the solutions around the practices that I advocate in the book.

Joe: When did the book first come out and when did you start Brilliance for Business?

Roy: I was chief marketing officer for Canada's second largest telecom company up until 2002. I left in 2002 and started Brilliance for Business. At that point in time I simply used the things that I learned through my 33 years as an executive with that company. And then started doing seminars on the same material but I was not in the habit of providing handouts in the seminars so people basically told me to go write a book. So I actually wrote the book as a result of what clients and seminar participants told me to do.

So I've written the book. It really is an aggregation of the things that I did when I was in business.

So in November of 2007 I started writing a manuscript and we published in April of, '09. And so the book is essentially six or seven months old at the moment. April 15 it was published, and I am now going into my second printing, which is very, very, very nice for me. I never would have expected...I never planned on writing the book. I planned on helping businesses and the only reason writing the book was an eventuality was because customers wanted it.

It's been nice and as I say we are going into the second printing, which will be out hopefully in the next couple of months or so.

Joe: Is there anything you would like to add before we end this podcast?

Roy: First of all, I hope organization in 2010, people are talking about what's our resolution in 2010 and I guess my approach to this and hopefully you've seen it in some of the tweets that I have posted Joe is that I think first of all businesses particularly but all organizations, need to have a context for the decade before they can ever start to say, "What do I want to do in 2010" or "What do I want to do in 2011." And I hope that the whole notion of creating clear and compelling reasons as to why people should buy from a business is driving that context. And I hope people will jump on this Be Different idea and take it to heart. With that as a context then I think there are four thrusts that I would like to see progress made, particularly in Canada and the United States - neighbors.

And that is, let's figure out how to create strategy that is relevant, unique, and driven. Highly execution focuses. Let's not get lulled into the belief that the plan is the greatest thing. It's not the plan. It's the execution of the plan.

Let's get on to marketers considering that they are in the value creation business. There are not in the product flogging business. It is about value to customers. For people in sales, Suzanne talked a lot about that this morning. For people in sales it is not about flogging products, it is about building deep intimate relationships with people trusting that the function of that relationship will be customers wanting to buy things from you.

And from a serving customer's point of view, let's hope that businesses get their minds wrapped around the fact that people are screaming for good quality dazzling experiences. They want to be treated well. Let's hope businesses are able to address that. And I'm trying to provide some points of advocacy in the book to help people do that. So I would love to see us making this decade, some tremendous gains in the way we approach strategy, the way we create value for customers, the relationship the relationships we build with customers and the experiences we.

Joseph T. Dager

Lean Six Sigma Black Belt

Ph: 260-438-0411

Fax: 260-818-2022

Email: jtdager@business901.com

Web/Blog: <http://www.business901.com>

Twitter: [@business901](https://twitter.com/business901)



What others say:

In the past 20 years, Joe and I have collaborated on many difficult issues. Joe's ability to combine his expertise with "out of the box" thinking is unsurpassed. He has always delivered quickly, cost effectively and with ingenuity. A brilliant mind that is always a pleasure to work with." James R.

Joe Dager is President of Business901, a progressive company providing direction in areas such as Lean Marketing, Product Marketing, Product Launches and Re-Launches. As a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt, Business901 provides and implements marketing, project and performance planning methodologies in small businesses. The simplicity of a single flexible model will create clarity for your staff and as a result better execution. My goal is to allow you spend your time on the **need versus the plan**.

An example of how we may work: Business901 could start with a consulting style utilizing an individual from your organization or a virtual assistance that is well versed in our principles. We have **capabilities to plug virtually any marketing function** into your process immediately. As proficiencies develop, Business901 moves into a coach's role supporting the process as needed. The goal of implementing a system is that the processes will become a habit and not an event. Part of your marketing strategy is to learn and implement these tools.

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