

THE SHOWCASE

OUTBOUND

A MARKETING SCI-FI PODCAST

TV GUIDE PITCH - A strange salesman visits a struggling shop owner to present an AI-powered showcase which promises to turn business, and the whole town, upside down.

Showcase - A business down on it's luck meets a traveling salesman with a tempting offer. An empty showcase, powered by AI and dark marketing energy, that shows every passerby exactly what they want most in the world. Causes greatness and grief and pushes an entire town to the point of self destruction and ruin; all over an empty box.

CAST -

Narrator - Cheryl

Wagner -

The Salesman - Mike Whelan

Concerned Shopper 1 - Lexy

Coroner's Asst. - Janee

NARRATOR - (*small town sfx - twilight*)

Soaked in the setting sun, perched on a hill, tucked away from the main road, the quiet town of Conversion, Maine is closing down for the evening.

Tweaking into an orange glow, the streetlamps of Main Street flip on, and a Closed sign in Wagner's corner store has just flipped over - - maybe for the last time.

(dog barking, door closing, lights buzzing, insects)

You see, business has been - tough this year, for everyone in Conversion. I know because, I'm the welcoming committee!

And there hasn't been a whole lot of welcoming lately.

But we are thankful for what we do have.

Deal with the life you've been given, and don't go wishing for more than that. I know that sounds tough - but really - think about it -

If you could have everything you wished for?

Would things get, better?

Or worse?

(car pulling in, stop, door - knocking)

Well, old man Wagner, and the whole town of Conversion, are about to find out....

Wagner - *(muffled from inside - walking to front door)*

"We're closed! Can't people read the damn sign?"

The Salesman - Mr. Wagner?

(mic inside store)

W - I hear you, I hear you. *(opens door)* You saw the sign, right? We just closed.

S - *(smiling intensely)*

Good evening, Mr. Wagner! I did notice the sign.

W - So....if this is about a bill or your from the bank, we'll just have to pick this up tomo--

S - haha, no, no, neither of those things, Mr. Wagner.

No.

I'm here with a proposal. A marketing opportunity.

W - Right? Like I said, I have to get the shop ready for tomorrow and

S - Ready? Mr. Wagner? For who? (guffaw) Business has been less than slow lately and I know there's no one to run home to -

W - Now look? I don't know you, and I've never seen you -

S - you've never seen - what I'm going to show you, Mr. Wagner.

If I can go to my car, retrieve The Showcase, and have just ten minutes, I'll be sure it's worth a lifetime of value for you and your store....

(pause)

W - Well - alright - what's the worst that can happen?

S - (clasps hands) My sentiments exactly! I'll be right, back.

OB INTRO - *You're about to enter another dimension, a vertical beyond that which is known to marketers. It's a spreadsheet as vast as space and a billing model, timeless as infinity. It lies between buzzwords and brilliance, between farce and finance, and it spans from the depths of our ignorance, to the summit of our awareness of the Four Ps. This is a place of marketing imagination. It's a place, we call, OUTBOUND.*

Narrator - Now, I can't tell you the price of tea in China, and I don't know anything scientific about learning, but what I do know, besides whiskey, is that the problems in Conversion, Maine, started the moment that Salesman arrived in his foreign car - and more specifically, when that Showcase appeared in Wagners window.

The night it was delivered, The Salesman and shop owner stood looking at it, gleaming in the window -

It was clear glass, shaped like an old telephone booth, with a shiny corvette red frame and top.

Lit up the whole street.

From the moment that showcase arrived - - you couldn't take your eyes off it.

(inside store)

W - Well...it's nice, but it's still empty. When does your robot stuff start working? I don't *need* better merchandising, I need *better merchandise*. Mister.....?

S - Mr. Moloch. (pause) What are these "needs" Mr. Wagner? (walks around)

We want things - we desire things - needs?

I can SHOW you what you need - (flip switch - fire-up)

The Artificial Intelligent Manifestation Interface doesn't just "start working" - it has to code and interpret buyer desire. It needs to be fed. I'll turn switch it to INGEST. (*click-whir*)

W - So it eats now? This empty box is looking kinda pricey, Mr. Moloch.

S - (chuckle) No Mr. Wagner, it doesn't eat - and the costs of stocking it with merchandise will be non-existent.

Because - the showcase will remain empty, always - (music sting)

The Showcase is just the vessel - the contents on display, is sourced and uploaded by those that look into it. Anyone that passes by this window - will see, in the showcase, the exact thing they want most in the world.

They place an order with you - the item arrives at your store by post, usually the next day. And that's that.

W - Sounds great. What's the catch? You skimming something off the top?

S - I wouldn't need to, if the deal suited you? We could keep it between us? No "formal" contracts.

W - You serious?

S - I never lie Mr. Wagner.

Truth is - You'd actually be doing me a huge favor giving the tech a trial run, taking it through the paces before I move to larger markets.

Your cash register could use the workout as well...

Narrator - (outside - night)

And that's when I saw them shake hands, the Salesman placed a manual on the checkout counter, put his hat back on, got in his car, and drove away. (*music plucks up*)

In the days following the Showcase's arrival, the people of Conversion were...not converting.

They smirked, laughed, and simply didn't understand how an empty box could help Wagner's failing store.

It seemed like Wagner himself didn't understand his new purchase, hourly cursing it as it sat there in the display window, a small light on it flashing red. (beep)

And then, one morning, that light turned steady green - and as I walked past, I saw something amazing in the Showcase.

A bottle spun in mid-air - twirling with the label facing out - I couldn't believe it - A Glenfarclas single malt - I hadn't seen this brand since, or tasted something of that quality for, how long?

I leaned in to read the label - 1961! And as I sat there, questioning how this was possible, others started to approach the window, murmuring their appreciation for the whiskey.

(small crowd increase SFX)

But then, I started listening closer, and, no one mentioned the bottle, or the vintage - in fact, no one even saw the whiskey, but saw something else entirely!

This one saw an heirloom, that one saw a tactical rifle, while still others saw travel packages, rare birds, and other items that made them gasp; "How is it possible?" "Oh, could we afford it?" "It's perfect!" "Can you imagine?"

(door bell cling, cash register rings, business is booming, music is plucky)

After that day, things started to pick up at Wagner's CornerStore. Weeks went by, and everyone that walked by Wagner's window stopped - and gawked - and walked right in there to place an order.

Yes sir, business was booming. Wagner found himself a lady friend, started dressing in finer clothes, and what's even more amazing - you could see the whole town start to change. Trendy fashions were popping up, Buick's were replaced by Bentleys, everything filled with sweet promise, like there was sugar in the air.

But it wasn't all good news -

(door bell cling - someone walks in - mic on counter)

Wagner - Why Mrs. Rose? It's nice to see you - How are the kids?

Concerned Shopper - Skip the pleasantries, Kurt, and explain to me why you have an abused dog in your window? *(music builds)*

W - A - what?

CS - Oh come on! A dog, that's near death, is sitting in that showcase, on display!!

The people out *there* -

- the way they were looking at him?

It's disgusting!!

(phone ringing)

W - Eve, I am - so - sorry about this, it is a relatively new piece of equipment - lemme see what I can

(phone ringing)

CS - It seems like you'd be able to do A LOT, judging by all the Business you've been getting lately.

W - Of course, can you - hold on, Eve? *(picking up phone)*

Telephone - Yes, can I speak with the owner?

W - "That's me!"

T - Hello Mr. Wagner, It's Melissa Wood, with the city coroner's office?

W - "...coroner's office?"

T - Yes sir - *(guiltily)* I was at your store recently, I bought those jade earrings?

W - Oh yes, yes - this is about...the earrings?

T - No, no, no - um - this is an unusual call, so you'll have to forgive how it sounds - we gotta a guy over here, claims he saw his recently deceased wife in your shop window, *(music stab)* and the only way I got him to calm down was saying I'd call you - do you know an Edna Stevens?

W - "no - uh - I've never heard of her."

T - That's what I figured - I'm not sure what to do then, I told him I went to your store just the other day and that if there was a chance you had a two-week old corpse in your store, I woulda known about it but he's here and he's upset and i'm not sure what to say other than I'm sorry *(fades out)*

(crowd sound increases - doorbell cling)

CS - Mr. Wagner! Are you going to do something about the dog?

Or do I have to call the authorities!?!?

Narrator - Man, the crowd at Wagner's started to grow - you could see how agitated people were becoming - *(riot SFX)*

After nightfall, there was a clear division in the crowd - between those that wanted to defend The Showcase, and those that wanted to destroy it.

A spontaneous collection of rifles, guns, and shovels had now formed a defensive perimeter around the store, held in the hands of men and women alike that had been enriched beyond their wildest dreams, all staring down the livid and angry protestors with a "I wish you would" look in their eye -

Now picture inside the darkened, barricaded store, through slats of wood - Wagner is frantically thumbing through the manual, overwhelmed by gibberish terms and phrases - *(flipping pages)*

W - "Desire Settings - Intention/Attention Ratio - Ethical Horizons" Ahhh! *(picks up phone, dials)* (leaves voicemail)

"Mr. Moloch! It's Kurt Wagner, in Conversion. I need to talk to you immediately about the showcase, things have gone - a little whacky - please call me back!"

(doorbell cling)

"What the - - oh, Mr. Moloch? I was just leaving you a - message....?"

Moloch - *(happy laugh)* I happened to be in the area!

W - Well, you need to take this Showcase away -

M - *(offended)* I'm sorry?

W - I appreciate everything, but take a glance outside - this isn't what I signed up for.

M - I'm confused, Mr. Wagner - Isn't this what you wanted?

W - Not like this - I appreciate everything - but no thanks!

M - Well, alright then - I'll just go out there - and let everyone know, we're closing the shop down?

W - (scared) No - don't do that - they'd kill me - Just take the case.

M - So you're prepared to lose all this?

W - My store isn't going anywhere!

M - You can say that again! Without this showcase, where would you be?

W - Regardless - where this has gone - it's wrong.

M - It's business. You want to throw away an empty box that's made you millions? Because of a few unhappy customers? (*pity*) Be sensible.

W - (*long pause, change mind*) Can you then please help me change the algorithm or AI settings so people don't see - dead things in the window? That's not good business!

M - (*hand on his back, rubbing*) Mr. Wagner - this - "AI" isn't necessarily new, in some ways, it's ancient - and I'm afraid it's very unchangeable -

The Showcase runs on desire - people end up seeing what they want, most times that's a material thing -

but sometimes, the thing people want most, is to change the way things are.

The way I see it, Mr. Wagner, (*grabs coat and hat*) we're not here to show them what they want, but to show them, (*taste the air*) whatever they want to see.

Oh - good news, I signed a contract for New York and San Francisco - I'm sending out a fleet of these puppies, tonight - I guess - I could take yours back?

(*riot sfx outside*)

W - NO! - No - i mean, what choice do I have?

M - It's not about choice Mr. Wagner - it's about freedom. Being free to show and see the world differently, and desire that vision. The Showcase gives this town, and every town, that freedom - it's a bit, rocky at first, but after a while, the algorithm finds you well.

(*doorbell clings opens, riot sfx louder*)

It always does.

(*door closes*)

OUTRO - "*We are each our own devil, and we make this world our hell.*" Oscar Wilde may have written that line in London, England, but he easily could've written such words in Conversion, Maine, while watching the torch wielding mob descend on Wagner's corner store, specifically to destroy an empty box in the display window. A Showcase, powered by desire, profitable beyond imagination, pushing one town after the next, into that proverbial territory of terror we know, as OUTBOUND.

OUTLINE - Small local business is struggling, the owner is lonely and desperate - visited by a strange vendor, selling a display case that runs on artificial intelligence. This display case will show whoever is passing by, exactly what they want. They can place an order, then the items arrive in the mail. Guaranteed results.

He signs a few papers, puts his thumb on a scanner that stings him. No money? No down payment? What if this doesn't work?

"Let's talk after the trial period,"

He sets the showcase to RECORD - it scans everyone that passes - for two days, nothing happens - it flips green.

Things start turning around. A relationship starts with a girl. Then, the calls come in.

Why would he put abused animals on sale? How much is that diamond necklace? What's with the severed heads? I can't believe you sell THIS AMAZING THING!?

To those with pure souls and little ego or avarice, like kids and animals, they see what they WANT TO CHANGE want in the case. So really horrible things along with PRICELESS artifacts <- that's what all the ego driven folks see.

All the while - the shop owner is the only one that can see there is NOTHING inside the showcase. There's always nothing.

He looks through the Users Manual. Desire Settings - Intention/Attention Ratio -

Tries to correct it with marketing, without explaining that the showcase is doing what it wants, kinda out of his control - "some of you may view this shop in a negative light, some of you may hold a very favorable view of the merchandise, but in the end the shop is good for the town." The mayor is in support - sees an old baseball card in the window -

Profits and complaints increase. Things are kind of getting violent - folks are defending the store from other townspeople who are trying to burn it down -

Keeps flipping through the Manual. Sees the Warranty - calls in - vendor shows up -

"Isn't this what you wanted?"

"Not like this - I appreciate everything - but no thanks"

"I'll just let everyone in the town know, we're closing the shop down"

"No - don't do that, they'll kill me."

"So you're breaking your contract? Over what? An empty box that makes you millions? Be sensible."

"It's wrong"

"It's business."