

# Get Back in the Box

DOUGLAS RUSHKOFF



How Being Great at  
What You Do Is Great  
for Business

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On a landscape that seems to be transforming itself with every new technology, marketing tactic, or investment strategy, businesses rush to embrace change by trading in their competencies or shifting their focus altogether. All in the name of innovation. But this endless worrying, wriggling, and trend watching only alienates companies from whatever it is they really do best. In the midst of the headlong rush to think "outside the box," the full engagement responsible for true innovation is lost. New consultants, new packaging, new marketing schemes, or even new CEOs are no substitute for the evolution of our own expertise as individuals and as businesses. Indeed, for all their talk about innovation, most companies today are still scared to death of it. To Douglas Rushkoff, this disconnect is not only predictable but welcome. It marks the happy end of a business cycle that began as long ago as the Renaissance, and ended with the renaissance in creativity and collaboration we're going through today. The age of mass production, mass media, and mass marketing may be over, but so, too, is the alienation it engendered between producers and consumers, managers and employees, executives and shareholders, and, worst of all, businesses and their own core values and competencies. American enterprise, in particular, is at a crossroads. Having for too long replaced innovation with acquisitions, tactics, efficiencies, and ad campaigns, many businesses have dangerously lost touch with the process -- and fun -- of discovery. "American companies are obsessed with window dressing," Rushkoff writes, "because they're reluctant, no, afraid to look at whatever it is they really do and evaluate it from the inside out. When things are down, CEOs look to consultants and marketers to rethink, rebrand, or repackage whatever it is they are selling, when they should be getting back on the factory floor, into the stores, or out to the research labs where their product is actually made, sold, or conceived." Rushkoff backs up his arguments with a myriad of intriguing historical examples as well as familiar gut checks -- from the dumbwaiter and open source to Volkswagen and The Gap -- in this accessible, thought-provoking, and immediately applicable set of insights. Here's all the help innovators of this era need to reconnect with their own core competencies as well as the passion fueling them.

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