business at the speed of now

FIRE UP your people,
THRILL your customers,
and CRUSH your competitors

by John M. Bernard
Praise for *Business at the Speed of Now*

“Bernard recognizes the magic of being able to say yes to the customer. He describes how existing systems and processes stand in the way of yes, and lays out what it will take to unleash your people and organization so they can give your customers what they want, when they want it.”

—Leo Hopf
author of *Rethink, Reinvent, Reposition*

“John Bernard, with masterful precision and grace, defines what we know is happening in business today but may have trouble defining. Through strokes of his pen, he clearly articulates what needs to be considered and weighed and defines clear steps to the future, while honoring the past and embracing the Now with full force. Bravo John for capturing the essence of what needs to happen in business Now!”

—Nicole Lipkin
PsyD, MBA, author of *Y in the Workplace: Managing the “Me First” Generation*

“John Bernard has a magical ability to inspire, motivate, and lead organizations. He is the rare mentor we all seek, whether one-on-one or in front of a thousand people. He shows you how to see the gold nuggets in the muddy water of your business and gain astonishing productivity from the most average employee.”

—Mark Cleveland
Serial Entrepreneur

“John McKay, the great coach of the USC Trojans, once responded to a question about his team’s execution: ‘I’m all in favor of it.’ He should have spent some time with John Bernard and learned how to manage the Now. John (Bernard, that is) has fixing things in his blood. He may have been only five years old when Coach McKay uttered those words, but I have no doubt that John Bernard could have turned that whole season around. John is a teacher, but first he is a student. He has an uncanny knack for figuring stuff out, flipping it upside down, and making it work better, faster, and most importantly, producing results. I know. I hired him as a consultant many years ago at Nike.

This book is a must read for anyone who has a management job to do. Just do it.”

—Bob Harold
Chief Financial Officer (former), Nike
“To me there is nothing more critical than engaging our 120 talented dentists in creating an extraordinary, patient-focused practice. By implementing the NOW Management System we have achieved across-the-board results beyond anything we had imagined.”

—Dr. John Snyder
CEO, Permanente Dental Associates,
Kaiser Permanente Health Plan

“The customer satisfaction challenges we faced were costing us a lot and we couldn’t figure out how to resolve them on our own. Mass Ingenuity brought us a clear, logical, and effective approach, so that we could quickly make improvements and sustain them. Our investment in Mass Ingenuity has proven to be an outstanding decision.”

—Ellen Steele
VP, Customer Service, The Standard

“Early in the process of implementing the management system, you could see the silos of the organization melting away. A clear focus on our purpose developed and we were able to move forward in ways not possible before.”

—Scott L. Harra
Director, Department of Consumer and Business Services, State of Oregon

“Mass Ingenuity is a company that is easy to brag about. Wow, what a positive change it made in our company and the people who worked there. After owning a business for more than 25 years, with Mass Ingenuity we were supercharged and invigorated with the excitement of a new business! Our relationship with Mass Ingenuity not only catapulted our company into the future with innovative new thinking and great results, it brought many employees great personal growth. A wonderful by-product of the system was a tool that visually proved to our prospective and current clients that we were the right supplier for them. The results were priceless!”

—Marti Lundy
CEO and Cofounder (retired), Moore Electronics

“To stem the tide of lost market share, we needed an external perspective to help us look closely at our whole process for scheduling appointments. Mass Ingenuity brought us the skills and perspective we needed to hit our goal. We moved our time-to-first-appointment from 6.7 weeks to 2.8 weeks, and we have sustained the improvement. This opened the door for program growth, one that had been closed for 10 years because of this chronic problem.”

—Ray Chesley
Director, Strategic Initiatives,
Dental Operations, Kaiser Permanente
“I have known John Bernard for over 15 years, having worked with him on continuous improvement strategies at Columbia Forest Products. *Business at the Speed of Now* is John’s crescendo regarding survival in the coming economy. I thoroughly endorse this new work; John is a master of hurdling the theoretical and making things practical and deployable.”

—Brad Thompson
President and CEO, Columbia Forest Products

“John is a gifted presenter. He speaks with clarity and passion about change and transformation. He articulates the frustration many have been feeling about work and the work environment but are unable to put into words. John’s enthusiasm for change and passion for success is infectious. His message is inspiring and energizing.”

—Fariborz Pakseresht
Deputy Director, Oregon Youth Authority

“Mass Ingenuity’s management system has had a dramatic positive impact on my organization. The implementation of the rollout was very well organized, engaging our leadership team to embrace and leverage the planning tools well beyond my initial expectations. Though still early in the deployment of the system, we are more focused, better informed, and fact-based in our decisions. I am pleased with our progress to date and have great ambitions for widespread deployment throughout our global operations.”

—Harve Bellos
President and CEO, Paccess Global

“This is a book every CEO who’s paying attention to the forces that most threaten his or her business must read. Every CEO wants his or her organization to be managed in the Now. I have known John for many years, and the respect he has among high-technology executives is well deserved, because of his pragmatic, common-sense perspective and counsel on how to build great companies.”

—John Harker
Chairman and CEO (former),
InFocus Systems

“This is the book that we have been looking forward to—simple and to the point. It takes complex management theories and practices and presents them as common sense, so you can make them common practice in your organization.”

—Ted Barber
Director, Operations,
The Coca-Cola Company
“Business at the Speed of Now” is grounded using sound feedback and measurement principles. John offers a road map on how to deploy these time-tested axioms in today’s fast-paced and rapidly changing world. He provides managers with ideas and techniques that resonate with today’s techno-savvy workforce. This is not a one-size-fits-all book, but a flexible approach aligned to your strategy. This is your strategy implementation manual.”

—Lawrence P. Carr
PhD, Professor, Babson College

“Running a large, complex company and aligning every employee to what you are trying to get done is hard but essential work. John’s book hits right at the heart of the challenge every CEO faces, getting everyone focused and executing effectively on what matters most.”

—Rick Wills
Chairman and CEO (former), Tektronix

“The speed of business today is incredible, and those unable to stay ahead of information overload and analysis paralysis are dead. John is shedding light on a new system of management that allows all employees to act ‘in the moment’ with clarity and common purpose. This is a powerful concept that will redefine our understanding of management and success.”

—Ralph Quinsey
President and CEO, TriQuint Semiconductor

“John has reached into his deep well of transformational experience to build a management system that helps any organization simultaneously address the fundamentals of running its business while working breakthrough concepts to take it to the next level. At the same time, it aligns the organization from top to bottom, so that you can realize the full potential of Lean and Six Sigma through an engaged workforce. He peppers his talks with rich stories that any of us can relate to, bringing his system alive in ways that only a bruised and scarred practitioner can.”

—David Almond
Director, Office of Transformation, Department of Administrative Services, State of Oregon
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JOHN M. BERNARD
To my wife, partner, and primary cheerleader, Lannah. Thank you for your endless encouragement and tireless patience.
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Acknowledgments

When this journey began I did not realize that it takes a village to write a book. I owe a great debt of gratitude to all the villagers who made it possible.

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I offer special thanks to Patricia Snell, who read and reread every chapter with a keen eye toward stronger storytelling and a tighter presentation.

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Surrounded by such strong allies, friends, supporters, and believers, I kept on working, even on those days when I felt like the village idiot.
Introduction

Outreach and building community with readers is the single most important thing you can do for your book these days,” said Random House editor Anne Groell in Laura Miller's April 11, 2011 article in The New Yorker about author George R. R. Martin. Over the years, Martin, author of A Game of Thrones, the first in his multivolume fantasy series A Song of Ice and Fire, has followed his editor’s advice. Using Facebook, Twitter, and an active website, Martin won the hearts of millions of fans and sold a whopping 15 million books worldwide.

While Martin employed social media tools to build a vast audience for his work, he also found that they can wield a double-edged sword. When he failed to deliver a much-anticipated fifth volume in the series, he suffered painful cuts from that sword. Martin’s once-loyal fans, angered by repeated delays in the publication of the next book, launched a scathing cyberspace assault on him. The disaffected readers saw themselves as customers, not just fans, and they believed that gave them the right to complain about poor service. Martin’s online community manager, Ty Franck, referred to the angry readers as the “entitlement generation.” “[Martin] thinks they’re all younger people, teens and twenties. And that their generation just wants what they want, and they want it now. If you don’t get it to them, they’re pissed off.”

Having become an author myself, I got to thinking about Martin’s predicament. I believe that the readers of this book are my customers. Whether you run a Fortune 500 company or a brand-new start-up, whether you manage a force of a thousand or merely one other person, and regardless of the type of job or the level at which you work in your organization, you feel a need to learn more about what’s going on in this brave new world of business. You may belong to the entitlement or millennial generation, or you may count yourself part of generation X or a member of the baby boomer club. In any case, your business has needs, and they need attention now. I invite you to tell me exactly what you think of this book. Please join

I wrote this book because businesses must learn how to function more effectively during what is the biggest economic shift in more than a century. The world is moving rapidly from a global economy driven by mass production to one driven by mass customization. The mass production revolution (that was then) made it possible for businesses to deliver the same product to millions of customers. The mass customization revolution (this is now) demands we vary our products and services to meet the unique needs of customers who want what they want now. To do that, business leaders and managers must fire up their people and enable them to seize opportunities and solve problems almost instantly. In the battle for these impatient customers, you must act more quickly than ever before or run the risk of losing out to more nimble competitors. In short, you must do business at the speed of now.

In this new world, three game-changing drivers make it possible for any organization to grow prosperously: social media, cloud computing, and the “millennial mind-set.” Social media quickly creates vast powerful communities by connecting people inside and outside an organization; cloud computing, defined on Wikipedia simply as, “Internet-based computing, whereby shared resources, software, and information are provided to computers and other devices on demand, as with the electricity grid,” provides a cost-effective means for giving workers the resources they need to solve problems the instant they arise; and the millennial mind-set demands that it all happens in the now.

A mass customization economy demands mass ingenuity, mass engagement, and mass action. You must give your people on the front lines the ability, the skills, and the tools to say yes to customers who not only want the next new product or service now, but who also demand unprecedented quality, affordable prices, exceptional service, ethical behavior, environmental and social responsibility, and a handsome payoff on their investments. All at the same time.

During my career as a worker, manager, executive, and business owner, I have built and tested a management system designed for the era of mass customization. In this book I distill the principles and practices that forward-thinking leaders and managers can use to make
their own organizations move faster and, at the same time, be more productive and more profitable. I have applied what I have learned to almost every conceivable type of organization, from a one-man start-up business financed on a shoestring to a multibillion-dollar financial services company where I oversaw nearly 1,000 people and an $80 million budget. In addition to running businesses, I have worked with such companies as Nike, Kaiser Permanente, PacifiCorp, Baxter Healthcare, and Agilent Technologies. With my team at Mass Ingenuity, I have also applied these ideas with great results in private sector businesses, nonprofits, and governmental agencies, including many in the State of Oregon.

To bring to life the principles and practices of doing *business at the speed of now*, in the pages ahead I include more than 60 stories of success and failure. In many cases, the name and nature of a business have been disguised in order to honor the need for confidentiality, or, in some cases, to protect the guilty. In each of these examples, at first mention, I enclose “The Company Name” and “The Manager Name” in quotes rather than give actual names; but rest assured, all of these stories are true.

Each chapter in the book concludes with the NOW Speedometer, a device you can use to measure your organization’s current capability to do *business at the speed of now*. The speedometer will help you assess the dimensions of speed addressed in that chapter.

The map in Figure I.1 provides an eagle’s-eye view of the journey ahead.

Chapter 1, “Thriving in the Now: Prepare for Yes,” explores the revolutionary forces that make “YESability” the ultimate value proposition. This first chapter reveals exactly why organizations must shift from a *then* to a *now* management system.

In Chapter 2, “Making the Shift to Now: Put an End to Then,” you will learn about the “Seven Deadly Sins” of management and how they squander the talent and resources desperately needed to succeed in a now economy. This chapter offers proven ways to counter those sins by creating total employee engagement.

Chapter 3, “Seizing the NOW Opportunity: Drive Growth with Yes,” describes the NOW Management System and shows you how to use such a system to mobilize your people to meet internal and external customer needs in the now. The Three Gears of the NOW
Management System focus on eliminating fear in your workforce, reducing variation in everything you do, and overcoming the constraints in your business that inhibit progress toward your goals.

Chapter 4, “Leveraging the NOW Game Changers: Gain the Speed You Need,” examines the three major forces—social media, cloud computing, and the millennial mind-set—that offer managers powerful tools for accelerating the transition from then to now.

In Chapter 5, “Working in the NOW Business: Create the Context for Speed,” you will see how you can develop the right context for your employees, connecting them to and aligning them with the goals of the business. The chapter emphasizes the importance of viewing management as a system that functions for one and only one purpose: to fulfill the mantra of now: Every Opportunity, Every Employee, Every Time.

Chapter 6, “Working on the NOW Business: Achieve Critical Breakthroughs,” tackles the all-important subject of achieving
breakthroughs. It provides tools for getting everyone involved in planning and executing initiatives, and it connects such popular techniques as Lean, Six Sigma, and process improvement to the need for now action.

The millennial mind-set demands transparency. Leaders pay a lot of lip service to the concept, but Chapter 7, “Creating NOW Transparency: Close the Execution Gap,” shows you exactly how to install it in your organization with formal business reviews.

Chapter 8, “Solving Problems Now: Equip Everyone with the Core Skill,” introduces a powerful Seven-Step Problem-Solving methodology. It follows one company as it wrestles with a puzzling setback. Your people can use this methodology to solve all the big and little problems that pop up every day in their routine work.

Nothing blocks the transition from then to now more than fear. Chapter 9, “Enabling the NOW Workforce: Banish Fear, Build Trust,” details the ways in which you can conquer fear by striking the right balance between order and freedom. In this chapter you’ll learn how to move your people through the Seven Stages of YESability, a key element in the transition from then to now.

The transition will never take place without a new style of leadership. Chapter 10, “Becoming a NOW Leader: Stop Bossing, Start Teaching,” stresses the need to stop bossing people around and to start teaching them. By asking questions rather than providing answers, you demonstrate your own shift from telling people how to solve problems to guiding them to search for their own solutions.

Finally, Chapter 11, “Embracing Change Now: Accelerate the Shift,” draws from the latest neuroscience research to give you practical tools for inspiring people to embrace and accelerate organizational change, without which all efforts to do business at the speed of now would ultimately fail.

In the Conclusion you will find a compact summary of the steps outlined in the book, including a specific plan for continuing to move your organization from then to now.

Enough preamble. As the poet E. E. Cummings so aptly put it, “There’s a hell of a good universe next door; let’s go.”
Katy, two years out of engineering school and a new recruit at software developer “Expedite,” has just arrived at her Silicon Valley cube for a one-week stint on the graveyard shift as a technical support specialist. She has volunteered for this assignment because she’s eager to see what happens on the front lines with customers she would otherwise never meet.

Grabbing her Red Bull, she logs in to Expedite’s new management system designed to satisfy customers at the speed of their need.

Katy barely settles in when her Skype rings. Onto the screen pops the clearly irate face of the chief information officer of TexTech, the huge account in Ireland that Expedite won just last week.

“Six of our production facilities are down,” bellows the CIO, “because your damned software crashed! We need this fixed, and we need it fixed now!” Katy’s heart races. She knows that her actions during the next few minutes will determine whether the CIO decides to stick with the new software or dump it.

“I’ll get back to you in 10 minutes,” Katy promises.

Immediately she sends an internal distress tweet to the software team in Vietnam. In less than a minute she’s on Skype as the engineers in Saigon access relevant documents and data from the cloud. Their real-time conversation includes “tag” searching of blogs, video references, and critical documents. The inference engine suggests the
“best-fit” materials to review. The engineers quickly spot the problem, a recently discovered bug that the application maintenance department in Paris had fixed and validated hours earlier; they immediately make the necessary change in their cloud application.

When Katy Skypes the CIO, not only has he calmed down, he’s thrilled with the swift response. “I didn’t think you guys could solve the problem this fast. You’re amazing!”

As Katy finishes the call with the customer, she picks up her Red Bull. “Still cold,” she marvels. Her smartphone chimes with a text from her boss.

“Checking in. Everything Okay?”

“All good here,” she texts back.

In a traditionally managed organization, Katy would have needed to turn the customer problem over to management, and that would have delayed the solution by hours, if not days. Fortunately, however, Katy works for a company that does business at the speed of now.

By design, conventional management systems prevent both speed and customization at a time when employees and customers alike clamor for both. If your business doesn’t provide it, your competitors will.

Customers increasingly demand a yes answer to each and every question they ask. They want what they want, and they want it now. This turns the world of management on its head. Managers simply cannot keep using a system that creaks along, getting bogged down in protocol or bureaucracy. Companies must evolve or die. Once the need for speed burst into the business environment, it changed the game. Today, competitive success demands a new approach to management, one that enables employees at all levels to solve problems and seize opportunities autonomously and instantaneously.