

# Alternate Introduction

**In 2005, Google quietly launched** a line of “smart drinks” that only a small percentage of their users ever heard about. The company’s well known mission has been to organize the world’s information, yet as they accurately described on their product page for the new product: *Google Gulp* – the usefulness of this mission was being limited by the intelligence of the person using it ... in other words, you. What if there was a drink that could make you smarter and allow you to use Google more efficiently at the same time? Thus Google Gulp (with Auto-Drink) was created. The description from the product website read:

**Think a DNA scanner embedded in the lip of your bottle reading all 3 gigabytes of your base pair genetic data in a fraction of a second, fine-tuning your individual hormonal cocktail in real time using our patented Auto-Drink™ technology, and slamming a truckload of electrolytic neurotransmitter smart-drug stimulants past the blood-brain barrier to achieve maximum optimization of your soon-to-be-grateful cerebral cortex. Plus, it’s low in carbs!\***

The product came in four varieties, including Sero-Tonic Water featuring a “refreshing blend of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors” and Beta Carroty with “cancer-fighting carotenoids.” The site and description was everything you would expect from a Google product launch, except that the product seemed too futuristic to be true. It turns out, the most important element of this launch announcement was something never mentioned on the site ... the date.

It was April 1, 2005 – known to the rest of the world as April Fool’s Day and time for another of Google’s famous hoaxes. The year before, Google had launched the Google Lunar/Copernicus Center and promoted upcoming job openings at their fictional lunar station. In 2006, they created Google Romance

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\* <http://www.google.com/googlegulp/index.html>

which would allow you to find your soulmate, which they defined as “a search problem.” Clearly, Google likes to joke around. Yet they have also used their reputation for having fun to challenge the conventions for how to launch real products. When Gmail was first announced with a then unheard-of 1 GB of storage, people thought it was a hoax and later learned it was real.

Usually product launches and important announcements are one moment in marketing that seems anything by a joke. Yet for Google, making these jokes and sharing their personality is part of the brand. It is irreverent, entertaining and demonstrates the important point that Google is not a traditional place to work. Google stands out.

The sad truth is that most companies today would never allow this type of moment of personality to happen. Blame endless legal reviews or a corporate culture of fear if you like (we’ll talk more about these barriers later in the book), but whatever the reason, most companies are adept at removing any sense of individuality or human connection from how they communicate. We commonly describe these companies as faceless. They are large inhuman blobs that do not listen or ask for our feedback, have incomprehensible policies, and use automated responses instead of real people to address our concerns.

These faceless organizations are all around us. As consumers, we can spot them right away, and we universally dread our interactions with them. Think about the last time you had to endure a 10-minute series of robotic questions from an automated call center in order to speak to a real person. There are dozens of videos on YouTube of customers who tried to cancel their service and couldn’t, spent hours on hold, or were somehow otherwise treated like a number instead of a person. The media loves to tell these tales of corporate stupidity too, publishing them with headlines like “Woman Gets 300-Page Bill for iPhone” (a real headline from a USA Today article in August 2007).

(CONTINUE READING AT “PERSONALITY MATTERS” ON PG. 2 OF THE BOOK)