

# The Elements of Influence

The New Essential System for Managing Competition, Reputation, Brand, and Buzz

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## Chapter 28, Expanded

### The Planted Surrogate

When Partners and Proxies can't or shouldn't be enlisted to do a player's bidding, the Plant emerges as the next, and usually last, surrogate option. This is because Plants are recruited to do things that host players can't do directly. Put in positions that are usually well away from the player, they leave no trace of attribution or influence. They are, as in matters of finance, perceived to be an arm's length transaction away from the host player, though in fact they are bought-and-paid-for operatives of the host, their connection and inherent conflict of interest being deliberately concealed. This, of course, takes surrogacy to a shady extreme, and it often confronts both surrogate and host player with regulatory and ethical quandaries or, at a minimum, basic questions of propriety.

A Plant makes possible an undercover marketing play: A supermodel glides into a hot-spot bar and orders a new brand of vodka . . . precisely as her concealed client, a liquor distributor, has quietly instructed her to do. Everyone watches. *I'll have what she's having*, they gape, and the word spreads, like a virus, of the model's simple play, a Fiat in this case. A Plant can be a sharky competitor, cruising your trade-show booth, his badge hidden from view, asking questions and allowing the presumption that he's a customer. His play, perhaps a probing Ping, is made possible through his anonymity. A Plant is the marketing manager who slips into her competitor's press conference to see what's new. She's running a Pause to see what the competition is doing and, perhaps, to see if her own plays are having their intended effect. A Plant is also the operative who's been placed in a press conference to run a Bear Hug and ask safety-valve questions of a beleaguered official or spokesperson. *This ordeal has been hard for you, sir. How are you and your family holding up? Maybe, too, it's the surrogate who's been coached to run a Preempt by asking the radioactive question. This ordeal has been hard for you, sir. Is there truth to the rumor that your health is failing?*

TABLE A. BASICS OF A PLANT	
<b>Definition</b> 	A trusted and confidential ally—usually disguised or undisclosed to the opponent—who is placed by a player to seed or sense information and movements in a marketplace.
<b>Upsides</b>	Helps a player control its position or agenda by controlling the discussion

<p>██████████</p>	<p>and the decision makers around it.</p> <p>Enables a player to anonymously set (or reset) a premise in a marketplace discussion.</p> <p>Allows a player to react to information, perhaps a rhetorical question, rather than having to initiate discussion.</p> <p>Gives the player access and information that's normally off-limits.</p>
<p><b>Downsides</b></p> <p>██████████</p>	<p>Tacitly endorses techniques of secrecy and deception—a dangerous message to your team and a disaster if you're found out.</p> <p>If a Plant is neither subtle nor legitimate, it can be exposed—sometimes forcing a player to fend off accusations of tampering and bad ethics.</p> <p>Even Plants can go off-message or off-task. You don't have total control over their actions.</p>
<p><b>Related Terms</b></p> <p>██████████</p>	<p>A ringer</p> <p>A shill</p> <p>A stooge</p>
<p><b>Related Play Types</b></p> <p>██████████</p>	<p>Partner</p> <p>Proxy</p>

<p><b>TABLE B. EXAMPLES OF A PLANT</b></p>	
<p><b>Plants to remember . . .</b></p> <p>██████████</p>	<p><b>PETA</b> From 2002 to 2003, an activist for PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), worked inside the testing labs for Procter &amp; Gamble's lams pet food division and secretly chronicled the lab's work on animals. Armed with their insider's video accounts, PETA officials later charged violations of animal rights through 27 destroyed "research associates" and other inhumane practices such as debarking.</p> <p><b>Rumsfeld</b> In December 2004, during a "Town Hall Meeting" with U.S. troops in Iraq, U.S. defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld was tested when a national guardsman asked a question about subpar vehicle armor. Later, an embedded reporter from the <i>Chattanooga Times Free Press</i> admitted to coaxing the unwitting soldier to fire off the rehearsed question.</p>

	<p><b>Evel Knievel</b> In 1967, when daredevil Evel Knievel was getting his - motorcycle-jumping career off the ground, he placed calls to the Las Vegas casino Caesars Palace CEO Jay Sarno, posing each time as a reporter. So <i>tell me about this Evel Knievel's plan to jump your fountains?</i> he probed. Sarno knew nothing but, soon enough, wanted to meet Evel and get the show on the road.</p>
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<b>TABLE C. CALLING AND RUNNING A PLANT</b>	
<p><i>Use this surrogate because . . .</i></p> <p>████████████████████</p>	<p>You can't come right out and say it or do it, but someone else can.</p> <p>A Plant is sometimes one of your only options for creating on-strategy discussions or forcing on-strategy actions.</p> <p>It may be the best way to initiate a play series (e.g., enlisting a Plant to run a Call Out).</p> <p>If you don't seed the marketplace with what you want to talk about, who else will?</p> <p>The Plant can bring credibility, expertise, or access that you don't have. Your competitor is spinning a story that no one but a Plant would dare expose.</p> <p>You want to comment on something the marketplace regards as taboo.</p> <p>It cloaks your moves and motives.</p>

<b>TABLE D. DECODING AND COUNTERING A PLANT</b>	
<p><i>How do I decode this player?</i> <i>(i.e., How do I know it's being used against me?)</i></p> <p>████████████████████</p>	<p>You might not know. A well-placed Plant is hard to detect.</p> <p>Questions are raised that seem out of context, loaded, or rhetorical.</p> <p>The source of a question or statement is not known, not offered, or is difficult to determine (e.g., a conference attendee who's not wearing a badge).</p>
<p><i>How do I counter this player?</i></p> <p>████████████████████</p>	<p>Expose the play. Run a Bait on any suspicious source. Make them repeat or clarify their point. Make them identify themselves—Who are they? Whom do they represent? Why are they here?</p>

	<p>Run a Label. Slap a tag of dishonesty onto your opponent.</p> <p>Run a Pause. If the marketplace wasn't listening to the player, who's to say they'll listen to the Plant?</p> <p>Run a Red Herring. See if you can draw the Plant off-message or off-task.</p> <p>Counter with a whisper campaign, suggesting that your rival is avoiding tough questions or seeding favorable ones.</p>
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