

Inside World Inc.

Author Bruce Piasecki: Big Business is the New Government

Interview by Steven Casciola



David Frazier, Bruce Piasecki
& Rachel McCracken

The world as we know it has changed both locally and globally. And it's happened very fast. In Bruce's Piasecki's national-bestseller, *World Inc.*, he theorizes that big businesses are now more powerful, and carry more political influence, than national governments. And he deals specifically with the issues of how businesses will both profit, and help, societies to advance.

It's a noble and beautiful message written by a doctor who is a top energy and environmental consultant to companies such as Toyota, BP, Chevron, DuPont and Dow Chemical. In *World, Inc.*, he shows the reader how businesses and their products address social issues such as the environment, energy, poverty, global conflict, etc. Even better, he offers realistic solutions that are doable, beautiful and empowering

Dr. Piasecki's message is one of global citizenship and personal responsibility. He discusses how a new triad of financial, social and environmental values have become the cornerstone of increasing profits and a healthier, more sustainable, future, and how big business will be judged by "social responses." If you are ready to become a conscious consumer in this new global equity culture, to celebrate a life that is beautiful and to be a player, then read on.

Steve Casciola: Let's start with a brief synopsis of the book and what's happening on the website for it.

Bruce Piasecki: The book is about how the need to go green is being developed like a tidal wave in society at the same time companies are going global due to the aid of the Internet and other type of visual media. We're experiencing this in our own worldincbook.com webpage, where, if you analyze the back-end users, there's now 4,000 people a week, and each week it's growing exponentially.

We have an interview posted on worldincbook.com that aired on Bloomberg Television about money and politics. We also have a CNN World News clip about how you use energy in your car, your computer, and in your own home. What we're finding is this is the first time a book has become international almost overnight. It is now coming out in a Korean edition, an Italian edition, a Japanese edition, a Greek edition, etc. With my prior books (Ed. Note: *World Inc.* is Piasecki's sixth book), it would often take years to get a foreign rights edition. This has all happened on the webpage just in the last eight weeks.

Corporations and Consumers

SC: As I understand it, the whole premise of the book is based on the idea that businesses have become more powerful than governments.

BP: Right. My book starts with three underreported facts, and one of the most stunning underreported facts is that

if you looked at the 100 largest economies in the world, 51 of them are now corporations. When I was a student in school we would try and understand how to influence the world by reading *The Wealth of Nations* (Ed. Note: this is five books contained in two volumes); now, perhaps, one of those books should be called *The Wealth of Business*. We also used to read the *Federalist Papers* to try and understand how government works. My book is focused on how the consumer can gain leverage on the new power of business and what the personal fulcrum is in terms of lifestyle, and in terms of choices that people can make on that personal fulcrum.

SC: You just said something important: How the consumer can gain power? Oftentimes the conscious consumer feels sensitivity towards what's happening on a global basis, but also feels powerless at times. So what's the dramatic shift? What's it based on?

BP: Well, the first thing I'd like the readers to know is that I am honored that Patricia Aburdene, the best-selling author of the Megatrends series of books, has honored me by writing an introduction to the book. She is famous for having articulated what a "conscious consumer" is. So the 62 million North Americans that are part of the marketplace—the people who would, say, buy a Prius because it's a high-efficiency, very aerodynamically stylish car—Patricia Aburdene has noted the trends.

But it's not only those early adopters. It's also the luxury markets and the money markets that are creating this tidal wave, so the consumer actually has leverage on all of them through socially responsible investing, and leverage over Wall Street that is doubling and tripling its consequence on the earth.

The consumer has influence over the kind of car or style of house that they buy. They may want to buy a home with radiant barriers on their roof that have the same comfort and quality as the air-conditioning inside their house, but because of the radiant barrier, they use one third as much air-conditioning. So what my book is about is how the best firms in the world, firms like Toyota and HP (Hewlett-Packard), are putting their money and products behind the new, vast needs of this new century.

The consumer plays a vital role in that because in the past there was a fair amount of despair and helplessness. The public knew that regulation was too slow to catch up with the spinning need of issues as large as clean air or clean water or climate change. My book offers new grounds for hope, and an explanation as to how product, money markets, and conscious consumers are forcing a change that's five-to-fifteen times larger in its tidal wave than the realm of regulations.

SC: That's very, very, interesting. Now, let me bring it down to the reader. How do I know I'm a conscious consumer?

BP: A couple things. A conscious consumer is someone

who wants to think about the consequences of society, of what they just bought. To make it concrete, people can buy a product and think about its consequences, and that's why the word "conscious" is there. So if the price of gasoline is rising to three or four or five dollars a gallon, a conscious consumer is someone who says, "Is there some product that has the same performance characteristics, the same comfort and luxury, but actually is better on the price of oil?"

World, Inc. is anticipating that that is going to be the major discriminating mark in how people and businesses run in the new century, because I believe the urge to go global in style and fashion, and the urge to go green, are moving very fast. It articulates the framework for the average reader and the consumer as to how to prevent destructive collision and result in creative fusion.

All-in-One Philosophy

SC: Well, certainly on a business level the collision is going to be more dramatic, but what does that mean in a person's own psyche?

BP: There are three facts that shape world. The first fact is that these large economies are corporate rather than national. The second fact is that for the first time in U.S. history, and the first time in the world, 81 percent of the people on earth—which is every four out of five people you meet—will be living within 75 miles of the city. Globalization has happened so fast that the economy of the entire new century has become urbanized and swifter and faster, and so there is a kind of global style.

There is a definition of world beauty that I write about in one of the chapters of the book called "HP And The Vast Universe Of Consumer Delights." I write about HP's entire philosophy, working in 181 countries at once. There are only roughly 200 countries in the whole world, and HP works in the majority of them.

What they began at that time was called the All-In-One Campaign, to compress computing and electronics into a smaller space for a smaller world, across all of the nations. Now, no government is asking them to do that, but they saw that consumers wanted that. So the move towards, for instance, an iPod is an exact example of that kind of all-in-one miniaturization.

In that same chapter I also analyze their "You" ad campaign. If you go to any magazine today anywhere

in the world you'll see a series of three colorful pictures that look a little bit like *Vanity Fair*. The first image will be of a world citizen, someone who has the skin tone and the beautiful features of someone who is non-Western. The second image is of another person who's smiling and just a click away. And it says, in the middle of it, "You." And then the third image is simply the letters "HP."

When I brought those ads home to my 11-year-old daughter, she said, "I know what HP does." So the new style is global. The new imagery is about a vast universe of consumer delights, and so I reflect in my book about why that is real, now, in New York City, in Chicago, in Dallas, and also in Singapore and in Bangladesh. I try and write about how the world has gone global and gone green at the same time.

There are a lot of people reviewing my books who say that this is in the tradition of Thomas Friedman's *The World Is Flat* and Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*.

SC: Well, that's pretty hefty company that you're playing in there.

BP: Yeah, yeah. It's wonderful.

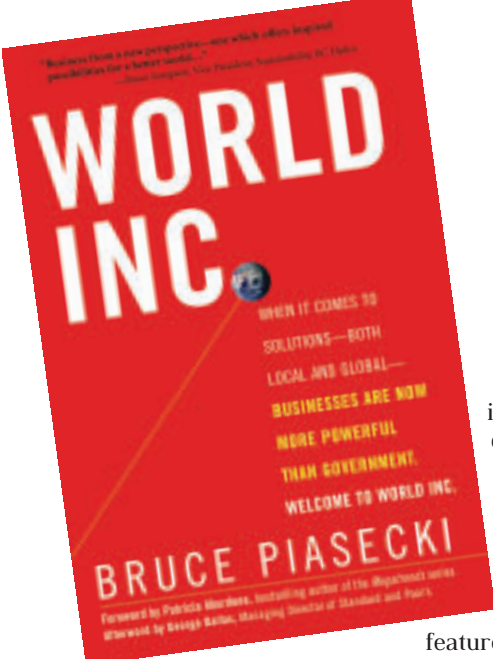
SC: Twice, now, you have alluded to world beauty. I guess the concept of beauty on a world scale, or reversing world beauty, in essence, is changing right before our very eyes. If so, what does that concept of world beauty mean?

BP: I think what I call a "World Inc. society" and what I call a "World Inc. corporation" and what I call a "World Inc. consumer" are, in essence, one thing, and they have three features in common.

One is the swiftness of information embodied in the example of an HP or an iPod—it's a leading feature of beauty.

The second is immediacy. It's not about long-distance promises. For example, a regulation will often say something like, "By the year 2015 we need to stop the inefficient use of cars." Well, Toyota gave an immediate answer: It took 25 years of regulations to make the average American car go twice as many miles a gallon, to go from 12.5 miles per gallon to 26.4 miles per gallon. Toyota doubled that in three years. The image of the Toyota Prius is the image of the HP all-in-one computer, or the image of the other leaders I write about. The roles of the consumers that I write about—

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“If you looked at the 100 largest economies in the world, 51 of them are now corporations.”

it’s immediate. It’s not about distant promises. It’s about a kind of immensity of the present moment, and I think that’s a feature of beauty right now.

And then the third feature of *World Inc.* beauty has to do with the fact that it’s proving global and diverse.

SC: You talk about nation states, you talk about corporate states, but what about the individual state? I guess the individual state is now becoming a component that can, by the nature of swiftness and the other definitions you’ve given, can integrate itself into these other global physical places, correct?

BP: Absolutely, Steve. So, for example, I’m 52 now, and that’s why it took me 30 years to write these six books that people are paying attention to—in my generation it was predicted that one would live in one or two countries and that they would have two or three different careers.

The expectation now is that you would live in eight to ten countries in a lifetime, with at least seven or eight different careers. And so swiftness, immediacy, and globalization are parts of this *World Inc.* framework regarding individuals. In whatever country you go to they have certain characteristics of a kind of beauty that’s swift and immediate. It’s just a click away.

SC: Now there are these various terms related to beauty that are all kind of linked. Obviously when you’re centered, there’s an equilibrium, a harmony that takes place. That harmony can translate into balance, and balance of harmony and equilibrium help to produce health, and health equates to healing. So it sounds like your ideas can be applied personally or professionally.

BP: Oh, absolutely. If you go to worldincbook.com you can see some of the endorsements. The reason why Charles Osgood says “it’s an eye opener” or the reason why the Siemens, a one hundred billion dollar company, says “it’s riveting” is one and the same. I’m writing about how the near future is now, that it’s swift, that it’s immediate, that we embed our social values in products and how we look.

So I think it’s wrong to simply say that capitalism is in the midst of a profound flattening, because what’s really interesting is that there’s so much diversity.

There are so many bumps and changes as you go around the world, because people are finding different ways to differentiate themselves and to be colorful. Hopefully you convey to your readership that this is a book written in color rather than black and white, and with plenty of personal narratives about the hundreds of leaders I’ve gotten to see. I try and sum up for every reader just what leadership is for them in the new century.

President Who?

SC: We’re in throes of a countdown to a presidential race. It sometimes appears to us here at *Salon City* that the president in you is really the one that has to be recognized, and that people need to take responsibility, and take action like you’re advocating. How do you feel about that?

BP: I love that. That’s why I wrote this book and why I invested eight years in it. I wanted to think of the reader as having that presidential authority, and I wrote about that.

So, for example, I think of everybody who got Adweek recognition. Seven hundred thousand readers of Adweek gave awards to five companies: Timberland Tissue Company; Aspen Snow, which is very concerned about receding snow; Zip Car, which is in many cities; HP; and Toyota. They are called the Ad Executive Awards on Sustainability, and what they’re saying is that it’s now fashionable for you, the reader, to be in the middle of that HP photograph because you’re taking the shot with the HP digital camera and you’re sending it around the world to your friends with your emails. So the notion of the presidential you is very appropriate in this *World Inc.*

SC: Your book exudes a sense of optimism and positivity—one born, I think, from just seeing the truth and the solutions in the truth. Do you agree with that?

BP: I do. And, in fact, it’s a book written to defeat the temptations of despair. It’s a book written to celebrate how this new century is bringing a lot of opportunity to greater and greater numbers of people. ■

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