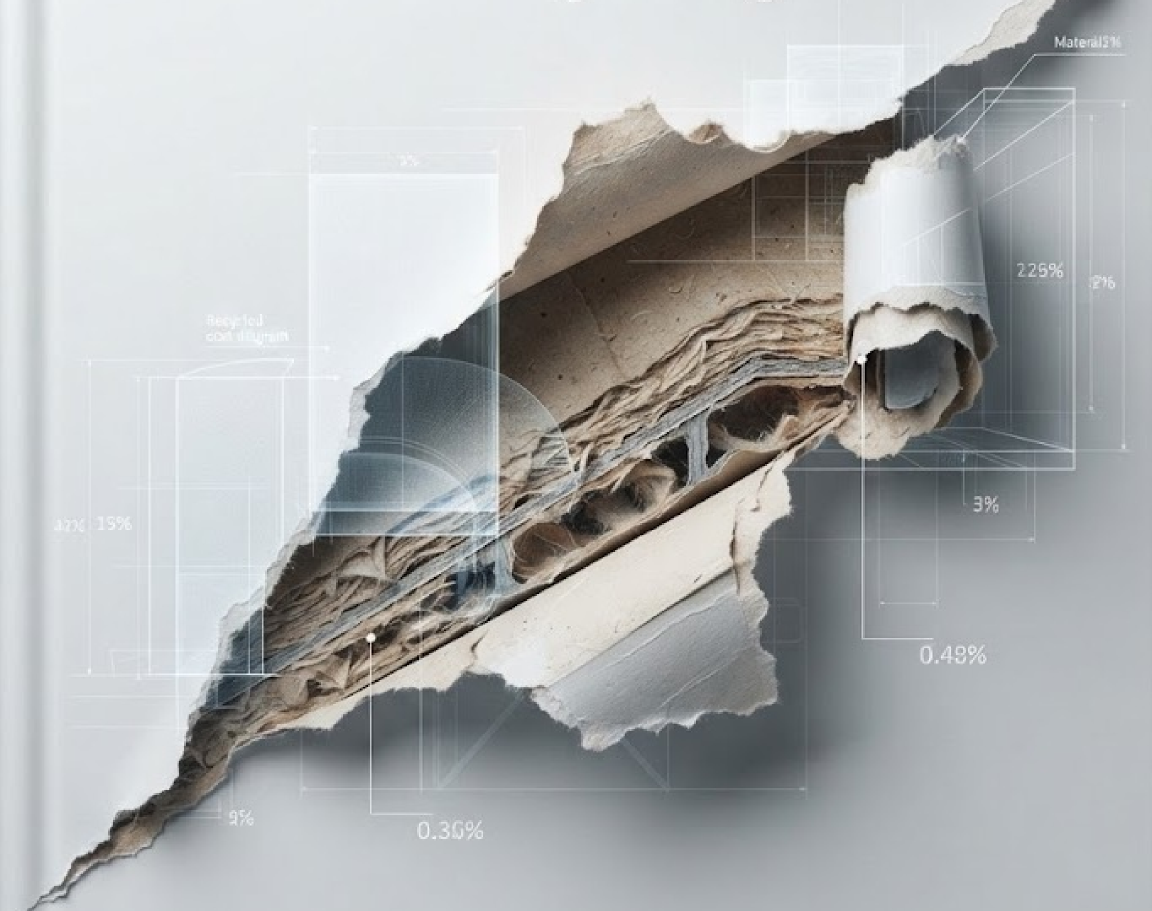
DIRECT MATERIALS

The Toilet Paper Is Only the Beginning



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The Toilet Paper Is Only the Beginning

Ferdinando Frega

Every consumer has the right to buy.

Every seller has the right to sell.

Every producer has the right to decide the quality of their product.

Three rights meet in the marketplace every day—and almost never speak to one another. They pass, change hands, and disappear into the checkout line. In that silence, the only person left unprotected is the consumer: the person paying.

The consumer pays a price, but the price rarely explains itself. Is it proportional to what is being purchased? Is it fair? Is it real? Or is it simply the cost of keeping an entire machine alive?

With everyday goods, the question becomes impossible to ignore.

Let us assume—because a market this crowded should demand it—that quality is already high. Let us assume the product works, meets standards, and does what it promises.

Then what really determines the price?

THE PRICE IS NOT THE MATERIAL

The first thing driving the retail price is not always the material. It is not necessarily quality. It is often the value of inventory, the cost of moving and storing it, the money tied up in warehouses, the advertising needed to defend a name, and the return expected by a few people at the top.

If the price were truly only about the material, the answer would be simple: ask a few shareholders to accept a little less. Tell them their households can manage with less. Then give ordinary people toilet paper at a price that feels human.

A fair price for that basic, soft, hygienic pleasure: the simple relief of being clean, comfortable, and—yes—properly pampered.

Why should an everyday necessity cost like a luxury?

Why should a product that serves a basic human need be treated as a privilege?

The line has always been drawn between necessity and desire. In the space between them, private labels and hard-discount stores were born.

At first, the big companies were afraid. Then they copied the model and brought it into their own houses, because their own advertising had created the trap: they taught consumers that a brand meant quality, and that a famous brand meant being the best.

But if a name alone makes someone the best, let us give two billion people the same last name.

> Everybody Gates.
>
> Everybody Buffett.
>
> Everybody Trump.
>
> Everybody Musk.

And then what, exactly, do we do with the original?

That is the joke. And that is where the system begins to crack.

FIVE DEGREES OF DISRUPTION

Degree 1: Expose the Material

Take the flagship product. Open it up. Show what is inside and what it actually costs.

Do not attack the brand. Attack the bill of materials.

> *"Here is the paper: 70% recycled pulp, 30% virgin fiber. Material cost: $0.38. Shelf price: $4.90."*

The consumer can do the math. You do not have to lecture them. You only have to put the numbers in front of them.

Degree 2: Eliminate the Need for Inventory

Do not produce to fill warehouses. Produce for people who have already said yes.

Preorders. Subscriptions. Communities.

If 1,000 people commit to buying two packages a month, you do not have a warehouse problem. You have a list of customers.

The old system carries thirty days of inventory that drains cash, space, insurance, and attention. Its strength becomes its debt.

Degree 3: Remove the Surname

They sell names. You sell the function:

> *"Soft. Three-ply. 300 sheets."*

No family name. No expensive mythology. Just the product and what it does.

You do not need to pay advertising protection money to keep a surname alive. And without constant advertising, a surname is only a surname.

Your butt does not read the label. It knows whether the paper is soft—or whether it scratches.

Degree 4: Reverse the Margin

Their model:

> Material: 10%.
>
> Everything else: 90%—dividends, advertising, distribution, shelf placement, and overhead.

Our model:

> Material: 60%.
>
> Labor: 20%.
>
> Honest margin: 20%.

Print it on the package.

This is not packaging. It is a manifesto.

People are not only buying paper. They are buying transparency. And unlike advertising, honesty does not need to shout the same message every five minutes.

Degree 5: Turn Inventory into Their Problem

This is the final move.

When you sell directly, without building mountains of inventory, their inventory becomes a boomerang. They must discount more aggressively to empty their warehouses. Every promotion eats into the margin. Every full warehouse costs money.

The system begins to burn its own excess.

Private labels once challenged the great companies by offering a lower price. But many stopped halfway. They copied the price and left the structure intact.

We are going all the way.

THE TOILET PAPER IS ONLY THE BEGINNING

The point is not to change toilet paper.

The point is to change the relationship between material, price, and power.

Toilet paper is simply the perfect place to begin because nobody can pretend it is a luxury. Everybody uses it. Everybody understands it. Everybody knows the difference between comfort and sandpaper.

Start with the product closest to the body.

Then move outward.

Soap. Shampoo. Cleaning products. Food. Clothing. The ordinary things people buy repeatedly, often without asking what they are really paying for.

The consumer does not need another promise. The consumer needs a clear invoice for reality.

> What is it made of?
>
> What does it cost to make?
>
> Who gets paid?
>
> What part is useful—and what part is merely inherited machinery?

We do not need to destroy quality. We need to stop confusing quality with a logo.

We do not need to eliminate profit. We need to make the margin visible, limited, and honest.

We do not need another corporation telling us that a product is premium. We need products that can prove what they are.

ONE MORE TURN

Like a child on a carousel, we reach the end and say to the person beside us:

“One more turn. Please. Just one more.”

> The first turn is a cheaper product.
>
> The second is direct distribution.
>
> The third is transparent materials.
>
> The fourth is honest margins.
>
> The fifth is a market that no longer confuses inventory with value.

After that, we keep turning—not because we are trapped on the ride, but because the ride finally belongs to the people who pay for it.

There is no need to change the product. Change the supplier.

Choose the one that gives you more comfort, asks less, and tells you the truth.

And if better suppliers appear, let them compete.

Who would not enjoy changing partners once in a while?

It all depends on what the toilet paper costs.

And if the toilet paper is only the beginning, then the real question is not what we wipe with.

The real question is this:

What else have we been overpaying for simply because nobody bothered to show us the material?

—Ferdinando