



NEW BOOKS IN REVIEW

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THERE'S NO BUSINESS THAT'S NOT SHOW BUSINESS: MARKETING IN AN EXPERIENCE CULTURE, Bernd H. Schmitt, David L. Rogers, and Karen Vrotsos, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Financial Times Prentice Hall, 2004, 267 pages, \$24.95.

PRICELESS: TURNING ORDINARY PRODUCTS INTO EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCES, Diana LaSalle and Terry A. Britton, Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2003, 182 pages, \$27.50.

THE ROLE OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

The rise of experience and entertainment in all aspects of U.S. culture has led to a growing emphasis on customer experience. The landmark book on this topic, *The Experience Economy*, by Pine and Gilmore (1999), argues that economic value has evolved in phases, from producing commodities to producing goods, services, and, finally, experience. Several books have followed in Pine and Gilmore's footsteps, examining the commercial value of the concept of creating and managing the consumer experience from different perspectives.

In this review, we present two such publications on the topic. We acknowledge upfront that the target audience for the books inarguably is the practitioner. From an academic point of view, the books do not make any theoretical or empirical contribution to marketing literature. However, the real-life examples and insights are stimulating, and thus they can serve as eye-openers for new research avenues and new contexts.

There's No Business That's Not Show Business, by Bernd H. Schmitt, David L. Rogers, and Karen Vrotsos, is an extension of Schmitt's (2003) earlier work in the area. The authors are all principals with the EXGroup, a consulting firm that helps firms "create experiences." The book attempts to demonstrate how elements of show business can be incorporated into a firm's internal and external marketing activities to improve communication effectiveness with targeted customer, partner, and employee segments. The authors' main sources are their experiences and opinions as well as trade magazines, the popular press, and Web sites. The underlying premise of the book is that business as usual will not suffice anymore and that companies must move beyond it to reach out to and engage their customers with a show-business mentality. The authors define show business as an experience for customers who have four specific qual-

ities: entertaining, engaging, boundary-breaking, and value-creating.

There are four major sections in the book. Part I examines the different types of shows, from live events to creative show spaces and experiences. The authors provide best practices for each type of show. Part II focuses on the strategic tools available to show business and discusses ways to understand and engage the customer, to effectively use public relations and customer relationship management, and to measure shows' return on investment (ROI). Part III presents discussions on how firms can put on a show for employees and business partners. The authors call these "internal shows" and present them as an integral part of aligning the employees with the brand. In this section, the authors also present several leaders whose persona, ethos, and myths have shaped their companies' experience. Part IV concludes by demonstrating how show business is transforming today's organizations, industries, and culture at large.

The book has several limitations. First, the authors' efforts to conceptualize customer experience through a "model of show-business brand relationship" do not go far enough. The model is not a clear abstraction of the phenomenon that the authors are trying to present. The concepts and implied relationships are often mutually inclusive and not clearly delineated. Second, the authors' assumptions that advertising's role is diminished and that show business is the cure to all marketing problems are not justified. Surely, there is a role for show business in business success, but it is not a guaranteed panacea, nor is its applicability universal across all industries. Third, some of the intended goals of the book are not met. For example, Part II promises to examine the strategic tools and to show "how to measure a show's ROI," but the discussions fall short of this goal. Finally, the overly generous use of anecdotes and biological sketches detracts from the book's main focus. Fewer stories and more substantive discussions with specific prescriptions would have increased the contribution of the book.

On the positive side, we found the book to be stimulating and fun to read. The authors cover a wide range of industries and provide many insights that defend their case and that highlight the importance of show business in today's business arena. The discussions might instigate several research questions in the areas of brand management, retailing, marketing strategy, and consumer behavior. For example, what antecedents correlate positively with engagement? What types of engagement are consumers open to, and

why? How are communication boundaries defined by the consumer, and what are the implications when they are broken? Additional areas might explore the discipline of organizational behavior given the potential changes in the interpersonal dynamics within and outside the organization.

Priceless, by Diana LaSalle and Terry A. Britton, also focuses on the importance of customer experience. Although the book is similar in many ways to *There's No Business That's Not Show Business*, LaSalle and Britton focus on the *value* side of the experience. The authors' goal is to answer a question that they deem as essential for any business success: "Why can't the MasterCard commercial be true and everything we buy lead to something priceless?" Thus, over a period of months, they engage in fieldwork, questioning consumers and chronicling stories about their experiences with products, services, and consumption contexts. The premise of the book is that a product's status of being priceless is not impossible to achieve, and indeed the book is written "to show the way." The book is organized into two major sections: The first part is devoted almost entirely to understanding customers and the concepts of value and experience. The second part attempts to demonstrate how firms can deliver value through experience.

Almost nothing in the book is new to marketing academics. The necessity to understand consumers and to deliver value is at the core of the marketing concept. Indeed, the authors borrow heavily from the marketing and consumer behavior literature as well as rely on quotes from academic experts in the area. Most of the conceptual issues, models, and terminology that the authors use are rooted in marketing journals (e.g., *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, *Harvard Business Review*) and other business publications. Part I does a good job of introducing the concepts of consumer and value experience; however, Part II does not adequately deliver its promise. Instead of showing how to create priceless products and experiences, the four chapters in Part II simply provide a series of anecdotes about companies and

their offerings. The "Priceless Roadmap," a short section composed of three or four bullet points at the end of most chapters, includes general recommendations, not specific strategies.

A strength of the book is that it is well organized and well written. The examples are interesting and stimulating. When we read about the various routes that companies take to excel in their offerings to consumers, several potential research questions came to mind. For example, what research methodologies help elicit customers' desires if they do not know how to articulate them? Are there any new value dimensions that have not been identified in previous research? As products and services become increasingly distinguished through the addition of value to practical use, what impact does this process have on consumers' evaluations of quality? How can researchers engage the consumer more actively and willingly into the "experience" process?

In summary, although neither book is compelling in its conceptual and empirical rigor, both contain enough examples and insights to stimulate the much needed academic research in the area of customer experience. Both books have useful and, in particular, timely messages for marketing researchers.

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