



NEW BOOKS IN REVIEW

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BRAIN TATTOOS: CREATING UNIQUE BRANDS THAT STICK IN YOUR CUSTOMERS' MINDS, Karen Post, New York: American Management Association, 2004, 187 pages, \$17.95.

PROFIT BRAND: HOW TO INCREASE THE PROFITABILITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF BRANDS, Nick Wreden, Sterling, VA: Kogan Page, 2005, 224 pages, \$29.95.

BRAND SENSE: BUILD POWERFUL BRANDS THROUGH TOUCH, TASTE, SMELL, SIGHT, AND SOUND, Martin Lindstrom, New York: The Free Press, 2005, 256 pages, \$26.00.

IN PURSUIT OF UNIQUE PROFITABLE BRANDS

Brain Tattoos: Creating Unique Brands That Stick in Your Customers' Minds reads like a watered-down academic textbook. It is a scrapbook full of classifications and unadulterated quotations that fail to tie in a cohesive, flowing theme.

The book's back cover describes the author as "Karen Post, The Branding Diva." This raises the reader's expectations sky-high, but words are cheap. If the book is meant to be the proof of the pudding, it disappoints.

Karen Post is a woman who loves herself too much. She is more adept at branding herself than at branding commercial products. She even dedicates a chapter on how she brands herself. Chapter 3 is titled "Brand *Moi*: Your Personal Brand." She writes (p. 32), "Personal branding is vital for ... just about everyone else who wants something he or she doesn't have." Hers is a make-believe philosophy in which a person bluffs his or her way with inspirational hollowness.

The author designs branding tests with simple "yes" or "no" answers and whose scores are categorized arbitrarily in regard to their meaning. For example, to find out if your personal brand is working for you, she offers a "tattoo test: brand moi." It consists of 14 questions. One question asks, "Can you define your dream reputation?" All she wants is "yes" or "no." I answer "yes." Between you and me, my dream reputation is to be a David Beckham, who can curl the soccer ball into the upper corner of the goalpost from narrow free kicks, creating fantastic goals and enjoying the adulation of millions of soccer fans around the globe. Another question asks if I have "addressed a group in the

past three months." "Yes" again. I address groups of students about every three days in my academic job. Another question asks if I have published anything in the past three months. "Yes" again. You are probably reading my latest. Another question asks if I use e-mail with my correspondence. Is there any correspondence left beyond e-mail? "Do you keep a victory file of ... praise letters?" she asks. "Yes" again. I get a praise letter from my department chair every year. It is piggybacked by a similar letter penned by the dean of the School of Business.

At the end of the tattoo test, I scored 9 yeses out of a potential 14. This score earned me her label "A Baby Brand Ready to be Born." There we go, another Beckham in the making—this time from the heart of Connecticut. If only she could shave off two-thirds of my 45 years of age and put me on a strict diet. Right under her "baby brand" label, she ups my spirit with the following description of what my label means: "You have the seeds to grow a strong personal brand. Continue nurturing, amp up your commitment, and add some additional branding fuel to your engine." Throw me a six-pack, honey! And the Courvoisier.

Two other yes/no tattoo tests attempt to determine the potency of consumer brands and business-to-business brands. Each test is four pages in length, and the two tests look exactly alike. Under close scrutiny, the difference between one test and the other is a mere 14 words. Instead of economizing and using a footnote to illustrate the difference for the business-to-business brand test, she runs the whole four pages again. Experiences such as this stall the flow of this tome.

The book derives its "Brain Tattoo" name from the notion that "a brand ... is a psychological impression ... lodged in the mind of a buyer" (p. 1). Charting a one-paragraph historical analysis of branding, Post writes (p. 1), "Cattlemen used to brand with a burned-on visual symbol to differentiate.... Their focus was on the butt, and the process involved some degree of pain." This traditional branding still goes on, as is evidenced by the visual symbols that adorn some of the scantily dressed students in my class. "Commercial branding, on the other hand, directs its effort to the brain" (p. 1), notes Post. This is where Post's book comes in, trying to direct the branding effort to our brain.

Post offers a "tattoo plan" (Ch. 5) for brands. It is her way of saying "marketing plan." When you understand this, you realize that if you want to become a Post disciple, all you have to do is to drop the word "marketing" and other related words from your vocabulary and adopt the word

“tattoo” instead. Thus, from now on, I will educate my students about the four Ps in the “tattoo mix,” I will teach three “tattoo courses” per semester, and I will try to get them to appreciate the importance of “tattoo ethics.” If a new student comes to my office for advice about which courses to take, I will ask “which tattoo courses have you taken up to now?”

Nick Wreden’s *Profit Brand: How to Increase the Profitability, Accountability and Sustainability of Brands* scoffs at “such trends *du jour* as e-brands or so-called ‘immutable laws’” (p. 4). Instead, he promises a quantitative side to branding, “a comprehensive metrics-based approach” (back cover). Fusing the first two words of his book title together, he announces on the back cover that “ProfitBrand” shows how to discover and retain “the 20 per cent of customers who generate 80 per cent of profits. Using specific formulas, the book explains how to identify the most profitable customers as well as the unprofitable ones that sap corporate resources” (p. 65).

Yet early on in the book, it begins to sound like another “brand moi” phenomenon. In the conclusion of Chapter 1, in his very first table, Wreden portrays a three-stage breakdown of the “dominant branding strategy” over the years. The first stage, which lasted from 1945 to 1995, was “positioning.” The second stage, which runs from 1995 to 2006, is “1:1 marketing.” From 2006 onward, one year after the publication of his book, the third stage will commence; it will be known as “ProfitBranding”!

However, the reader can never be sure what Wreden exactly means by ProfitBranding. In Chapter 2, he declares that “Trust = ProfitBrand,” but this simplicity is way off target. More perceptive to what ProfitBranding may be is the Australian executive who states (p. 4), “Volume is vanity, and profit is sanity.” Finding it difficult to pin down a definition, Wreden concludes Chapter 4 by observing that “ProfitBrands are built on customer equity, which is roughly (sic) the total lifetime value received from a customer minus acquisition and other costs” (p. 64). He then comments (p. 65), “Customer equity is based on the only immutable law: Without customers there are no profits, and without profits there is no brand.”

However, Wreden warns that not all customers are good for profit. Some customers are just bad. He goes on to quote inside information from T-Mobile that “the bottom 50 per cent [of] T-Mobile [customers] are low value. We are trying to get rid of them. We want to give them to the competition” (p. 70). I suspect that the competition would be happy to acquire half of T-Mobile’s base.

How is customer equity calculated, in search of the golden 20% of customers? Wreden offers seven methods: (1) average customer equity; (2) recency, frequency, and monetary value; (3) customer equity dashboard; (4) average customer equity; (5) fill-in-the-blank; (6) retention-based; and (7) profitability of each customer to the seller. On average, he dedicates less than a page and a half to each approach, making no secret of the disadvantages of each.

These methods should have formed an integral part of his book, and yet he lightly brushes over them in just ten pages. No need for a calculator as you read on.

Wreden emphasizes that a person should find out how the profitable and unprofitable segments were acquired. “Were high-profit customers acquired through telemarketing, while direct mail brought in the unprofitable” (p. 76)? If only segments could be so neatly dissected from one another on the basis of telemarketing versus direct mail.

He simplifies segmentation strategy into three steps. The first step is “segment identification.” This leads to the second step, “match offerings to segment.” The third step is “reshape branding [with] more focused branding efforts on the ‘right’ customers.”

The author ends his book with the following advice (p. 196): “The most important lesson: Listen to your customers. The best, most powerful book about branding ... cannot teach you more than your customers. Your customers will tell you ... how to ProfitBrand”—hopefully, before 2006 is over.

Rather than trying to capture everything about branding in one book, Martin Lindstrom focuses on sensory branding in his refreshingly different book *Brand Sense: Build Powerful Brands Through Touch, Taste, Smell, Sight, and Sound*. He lays out the path on how to integrate the five senses (3S + 2T) for successful branding.

About three-fourths of emotions are triggered by smell. Smell is only second in importance to sight. The author throws in fascinating nuggets about the power of smell. Car manufacturers spray “new-car” aroma into each car before it leaves the factory. Singapore Airlines’s hot towels contain a patented scent that is also used as perfume by its flight attendants.

A brand is a sensory experience beyond the mere sight and sound of the traditional paradigm. A brand integrates five, not just two, senses. This is the breadth of Lindstrom’s sensory branding. Give a dusty clay model to Lindstrom, and he will infuse it with the five senses. At his finger tips, branding theory discovers the Genesis, but with limits. Lindstrom’s book is worth reading. It attempts to infuse a distinct personality into each brand and to capitalize on as many senses as possible.

Writing any book about branding is a formidable challenge. As Philip Kotler observes (p. xi) in the “Foreword” to Lindstrom’s book, “Marketing isn’t working today. New products are failing at a disastrous rate. Most advertising campaigns do not register anything distinctive in the customer’s mind. Direct mail barely achieves a 1 percent response rate. Most products come across as interchangeable commodities rather than powerful brands.” Into the face of this daunting wind sail book authors with branding theories that challenge our sense of helplessness.

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