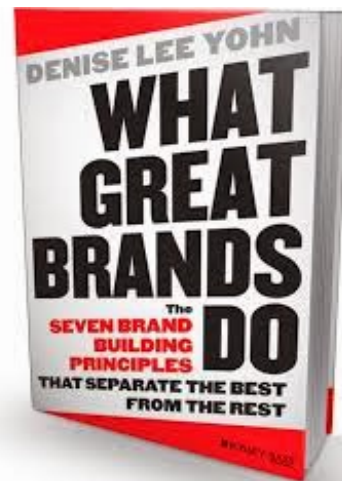


An interview with Denise Lee Yohn, author of **WHAT GREAT BRANDS DO**

Do you know what great brands do?

I first met [Denise Lee Yohn](#) in person when she spoke at the inaugural [CXPA SoCal Local Networking Event](#) in the fall of 2012. She spoke about good brands and great brands, and likened the difference between the two to the difference between failure and success. Great brands reap so many benefits, including: increased sales, higher profit margins, lower costs, greater customer loyalty, and higher market valuation.

Earlier this week, Denise launched her book, [What Great Brands Do: The Seven Brand Building Principles that Separate the Best from the Rest](#). I'm so excited for her to get her message out via this larger platform. And I was honored to be able to ask her a few questions about the book and about her brand-as-business approach. I think you'll appreciate her approach.



With that, let's dive into the Q & A.

Q: Why did you write this book?

A: The value-creating potential of brands needs to be unleashed. Too many companies waste their time, energy, and money on advertising and marketing their brands, only to have their efforts fall short. I wanted to show a different way, a more effective, sustainable way, to build a brand – the way that great brands do it.

Q: How did you develop the brand-as-business approach to brand-building?

A: For over twenty-five years, I've had the privilege of working on some of the world's greatest brands, including Sony and Frito-Lay, and I've researched many others. I discovered that the most valued and admired brands shared certain distinctive, defining characteristics. In *What Great Brands Do*, I describe what I've learned and convey the tools and methods I've developed for my clients to help them achieve brand success.

Q: How is your approach different from traditional branding practices?

A: Most efforts involve creating an image to serve as the “face” of a company – creating a look and tagline to promote a business or launching a new advertising or social media campaign to reinvigorate it. But these activities simply serve to express a brand; great brands execute their brands. They elevate their brands from an external-facing message to a strategic tool for managing the business. They use their brands to shape their culture, focus their core operations, and design their customer experiences. This brand-as-business approach has proven to be far more effective than “branding.”

Q: Why is the brand-as-business approach more important now than ever before?

A: Today's consumers are very savvy, and they're equipped with tools that enable them to see beneath a veneer that a company puts up, so image and reality must be closely aligned. Also, in practically every sector, competition is intensifying and so companies must differentiate themselves in substantive ways and deliver real value to customers. Finally most business models no longer allow for discretionary spending, and shareholders don't tolerate it, so advertising budgets are getting squeezed, but expectations for brand awareness and preference remain. The solution to all of these pressures is an integral brand strategy.

Q: Are many companies taking this integrated approach? What is holding them back?

A: Too few companies have adopted it. Some business leaders think of brands only in terms of messages and marketing tactics because that's all they know. Others are looking for a quick fix and would rather simply change what they say about themselves than change themselves. Still others understand the full business value of a brand but lack the tools and methods to realize it. This book intends to educate the first group, persuade the second, and equip the last.

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Sidebar: I think this sums it up well: *Others are looking for a quick fix and would rather simply change **what they say about themselves than change themselves***. This is when I say: [actions speak louder than words](#). You can advertise all you want, but if the experience doesn't match the message, you've failed. With the Super Bowl coming up this weekend, and people watching it [for the advertising as much as for the game](#), there's a real opportunity to convey a great message and to then actually follow it up with doing great things. Let's see how many succeed.

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Q: Can you name a few companies that epitomize the brand-as-business approach, and why?

A: Starbucks has taken an integral approach to building its brand: starting with making manager and barista engagement a top priority, fostering an emotional connection with customers, and delivering delightful experiences at every touchpoint. The Container Store also stands out for the way it has used its Foundation Principles to create a distinctive customer experience and align and focus everyone who works on the business on delivering it.

Q: Can you share an example of how your approach has produced real business results?

A: Higher profit margins, greater customer loyalty, and lower operating costs are enjoyed by many of the great brands mentioned in my book. One specific example of business results comes from Firehouse Subs, a fast casual sandwich chain. One of the tangible manifestations of its brand-as-business approach is the Public Safety Foundation through which the company donates funds and lifesaving equipment and provides disaster assistance and educational opportunities to public safety groups. Units that have engaged most actively in the Foundation have generated 28% higher sales performance than those that have not. Given results like this, Firehouse's CEO credits the approach with putting the chain at the top of its category's growth and performance.

Q: Who do you hope will read this book, and what can they expect to take away from it?

A: *What Great Brands Do* is for CEOs, COOs, entrepreneurs, and other leaders – people who have the responsibility – and the desire – to grow their organizations. The book challenges the conventional rhetoric about brands and teaches the essential brand-building principles and tools.

Thanks, Denise!

Note: Denise sent me the book, and I look forward to sharing my thoughts about it in the coming weeks.