

Top 10 Marketing Books of 2014

By Geoffrey James Geoffrey James , a contributing editor for Inc.com, is an author and professional speaker whose award-winning blog, Sales Source, appears daily on Inc.com. His most recent book is Business Without the... Full bio @ Sales_Source Contributing Editor, Inc.com @ Sales_Source

My previous posts have identified the [Top 10 Business Books of 2014](#) and the [7 Most Thought-Provoking Books of 2014](#). In this post, I turn to marketing, where it's been a very good year, with numerous groundbreaking titles. Here are the year's best:

1. *The Art of Social Media*

Subtitle: *Power Tips for Power Users*

Authors: Guy Kawasaki and Peg Fitzpatrick

Why I Like It: Anything that [Guy Kawasaki](#) writes is automatically of interest, since he's one of the most creative and original thinkers in the business world. In this case, though, Kawasaki (with the help of a co-author) has really outdone himself. Rather than another 60,000-foot view of social media, he's collected a series of practical tips that you can apply immediately to get your message out and acquire new customers. Absolutely a must-read for any marketer.

Best Quote: "The biggest daily challenge of social media is finding enough content to share. We call this 'feeding the Content Monster.' There are two ways to do this: content creation and content curation. Content creation involves writing long posts, taking pictures, or making videos. Our experience is that it's difficult to create more than two pieces of content per week on a sustained basis, and two pieces are not enough for social media. Content curation involves finding other people's good stuff, summarizing it, and sharing it. Curation is a win-win-win: you need content to share; blogs and websites need more traffic; and people need filters to reduce the flow of information."

2. *Growth Hacker Marketing*

Subtitle: *A Primer on the Future of PR, Marketing, and Advertising*

Author: Ryan Holiday

Why I Like It: This book points out that many of the mega-brands of today haven't spent much of anything on traditional marketing. Instead, they figure out how to reach customers who "sell" other customers on using the product. While I'm not certain that the techniques Holiday espouses will work in every (or even many) business situations, the book is worth reading simply to understand how companies like Dropbox and Twitter suddenly burst out of nowhere.

Best Quote: "With the collapse or crumbling of some behemoth industries and the rapid rise of startups, apps, and websites, marketing will need to get smaller--it will need to change its priorities. When you get right down to it, the real skill for marketers today isn't going to be helping some big, boring company grow 1 percent a year but creating a totally new brand from nothing using next-to-no resources. Whether that's a Kickstarter project you're trying to fund or a new app, the thinking is the same: how do you get, maintain, and multiply attention in a scalable and efficient way?"

3. *Spin Sucks*

Subtitle: *Communication and Reputation Management in the Digital Age*

Author: Gini Dietrich

Why I Like It: Back in the day, the job of a PR group was to put "spin" on reality to make it more palatable or exciting. This book explains why that no longer works in an environment where the internet makes everything public knowledge. The book also describes how to use the unvarnished truth to "humanize" yourself, your products, and your company.

Best Quote: "Lie or spin the truth, and you will be found out. People will take you to task. Your organization will suffer from decreased sales, lower stock prices, and a tarnished reputation. The digital Web has forever changed the way we communicate. It's changed the way we all do business. And it has forever changed the way we, the PR professionals, perform our jobs."

4. *The Power of Visual Storytelling*

Subtitle: *How to Use Visuals, Videos, and Social Media to Market Your Brand*

Authors: Ekaterina Walter and Jessica Gioglio

Why I Like It: Marketing professionals have a tendency to think in terms of "messaging," which consists of a verbal or textual expression of a static idea. Even when they use graphics, those elements tend to be static, like logos (many of which are simply a representation of a textual message). While there has been a lot of talk recently in the sales world about storytelling as a way to engage customers, the stories in question are nearly always assumed to be verbal or textual. However, we live in a society where far more people understand stories in terms of visual images rather than text, especially on the internet (YouTube, Pinterest, Tumblr, etc.). This book explains how to construct a story in a graphical manner so that it appeals more quickly to more people.

Best Quote: "Research proves that there's a scientific reason why people respond to visuals more strongly and quickly than text alone, but content for content's sake just won't move the needle anymore. Companies and brands need to strive for more by embracing the art of visual storytelling. Understanding who you are as a brand, what you stand for, and what goals you're trying to achieve in tandem with what your customers are looking for from your company can be crafted into a powerful, creative visual story."

5. *What Great Brands Do*

Subtitle: *The Seven Brand-Building Principles That Separate the Best From the Rest*

Author: Denise Lee Yohn

Why I Like It: As a general rule, I'm not always sure that small businesses benefit from studying the branding strategies of the behemoths. That being said, this particular book makes a real effort to present those strategies in a way that can be applied in more typical business and branding scenarios.

Best Quote: "I've heard people define a brand as a company's name, logo, image, advertising, aura, personality, look and feel, attitude, reputation, or trademark. But the fact is that none of these are your brand. These are manifestations, symbols, or expressions of your brand--and by limiting the definition of your brand to this external, surface level, you fail to realize its full business value. As you examine the principles that drive the world's greatest brands, you will see the correct, complete view: A brand is a bundle of values and attributes that define the value you deliver to people through the entire customer experience."

6. *Decoding the New Consumer Mind*

Subtitle: *How and Why We Shop and Buy*

Author: Kit Yarrow

Why I Like It: While this book is about marketing to consumers, even business buyers are influenced by the principles that it describes. What I found most interesting was the way that it used research to delve into the thought processes of people when they're shopping and buying.

Best Quote: "Social and cultural considerations have always influenced how we shop and what we buy, and especially how we use products to connect and communicate with others. It's no surprise then that a decade of especially swift and stunning sociological changes would have a profound effect on how and why people shop and buy."

7. *Hello, My Name Is Awesome*

Subtitle: *How to Create Brand Names That Stick*

Author: Alexandra Watkins

Why I Like It: This book should probably be required reading for anybody starting a new business. It's got plenty of examples, most of which are both amusing and instructive. More importantly, it provides a simple system for evaluating a brand name: Does it make you smile? Or does it make you scratch your head? BTW, I have personal experience in product branding, so I'm 100 percent certain this book should be in your library.

Best Quote: "How do you react when you see or hear a name you like? You smile. We enjoy names that surprise us, entertain us, and make us feel smart because we *get* them. Names that make us smile are infectious. They are the ones we talk about, tweet, and repeat because we like other people to smile, too.... Imagine if before people were even customers of yours, they loved your product or company simply because they loved the name. Maybe they'd even pay to buy a T-shirt with the name on it. That's the power of a name that makes people smile."

8. *Global Content Marketing*

Subtitle: *How to Create Great Content, Reach More Customers, and Build a Worldwide Marketing Strategy That Works*

Author: Pam Didner

Why I Like It: This book is the flip side of *The Power of Visual Storytelling* and the other tactical books in this list. There's no question that content is important (although getting less so, due to information saturation), so if you're going to provide content, you must ensure that it's strategic and has the right effect on your current and potential customer base.

Best Quote: "In today's content-rich world, the ability to connect different ideas and experiences is a prerequisite for marketing. Everything else such as planning, tools, and processes follows. Look for seemingly unrelated ideas and patterns. Internalize how the various ideas may or may not work for you, then customize the reworking of different ideas through trial and error. You may not get it right the first time, but that's OK! Through your attempts and experiments, you'll discover what resonates with your audience."

9. *Hooked*

Subtitle: *How to Build Habit-Forming Products*

Authors: Nir Eyal

Why I Like It: Much of what's written about marketing assumes that marketing and branding are about creating something new. This book explains that in many cases people buy products and return to brands simply out of habit. Effective marketing should therefore seek to establish habit rather than simply achieve prominence.

Best Quote: "For many products, forming habits is an imperative for survival. As infinite distractions compete for our attention, companies are learning to master novel tactics to stay relevant in users' minds. Today, amassing millions of users is no longer good enough. Companies increasingly find that their economic value is a function of the strength of the habits they create. In order to win the loyalty of their users and create a product that's regularly used, companies must learn not only what compels users to click, but also what makes them tick."

10. *Unconscious Branding*

Subtitle: *How Neuroscience Can Empower (and Inspire) Marketing*

Author: Douglas Van Praet

Why I Like It: In this blog, I've repeatedly written about the practical application of neuroscience to make you a better manager and salesperson. This book goes way beyond this sort of tactical application and explains what happens in customers' minds when they're exposed to media, visuals, textual content...and virtually everything that goes into making a brand successful. It's a must read.

Best Quote: "Today, cognitive neuroscience is proving that humans make decisions irrationally, perception is illusory, and our minds are designed for self-deception. As creatures who pride ourselves on being honest, level-headed, logical, objective thinkers sharing our uniquely human capacity for free will, these truths are hard to accept and even more difficult to apply. The fact is, we humans live our lives on autopilot and we don't even realize it."