Business book reviews: What Great Brands Do

What Great Brands Do

Denise Lee Yohn (Jossey-Bass, $27.99)

Brands are unique. They are product differentiators. They influence buying decisions. What makes a brand successful? "The systematic management of the business around the brand," Denise Lee Yohn writes.

Through experience with Burger King, Jack-in-the-Box, Land Rover and Sony, Yohn found seven defining brand-as-business principles of great brands:

1. Start inside. A brand isn't about what you say; it's about what you do. Brand-building requires a customer-centric culture that communicates the meaning of the brand in terms of customer expectations to employees. Employees become advocates of your customers' experience.

2. Avoid selling products. Instead, link products to emotions. Think of Nike's "Just Do It" ads. They feature people, their motivation to stay fit and their emotional rewards. The company's annual growth rate for the last 10 years was 9.6 percent.

3. Ignore trends. Being part of the herd diminishes your brand's value. It leads to what Yohn calls "er-positioning." To differentiate your brand, you're bett-er, bigg-er, cheap-er, fast-er, etc. "Er-positioning" tells customers that "your brand has comparative value rather than having its own inherent value."

4. Don't chase customers. "A strong brand identity attracts the ideal customer." Identify your best customers; do what you must to keep them.

5. Sweat the small stuff. Opportunity hides in every point of customer contact.

6. Commit and stay committed. This deals with core ideology: "This is who we are; this is what we stand for." Compromising ideology leads to the slippery slope of brand decay.

7. Never have to "give back." When you make social responsibility part of your core ideology, you're giving every day — not giving to make a PR splash.