

What Great Brands Do

Scott Goodson



There are many ways to tell if someone is a great businessperson.

You can ask them if they believe in brand building. You can ask them if they *live* brand building. But there's another, easier way of establishing whether someone is destined for greatness: You can ask them if they've read the effervescent *What Great Brands Do* by author and speaker Denise Lee Yohn.

Which brings me nicely to "The Seven Brand-Building Principles that Separate the Best From the Best." Who, but a leader -- a CEO, CMO, entrepreneur or marketing student -- would find these insights immediately useful?

Kodak, the once well-respected and highly valued global brand falls from grace and Denise evaluates the demise against her principles. The Body Shop, Zara, Starbucks and Lululemon are evaluated and measured by this merciless brand-fighter too.

"Lululemon does not chase customers. It attracts the customers it wants by staying true to what it stands for," Yohn wrote in her book.

Sean O'Connor, a branding consultant and Lululemon brand ambassador, said, "The stuff costs what it costs. They shouldn't have to apologize for having beautiful stores with beautiful people."

Who isn't drawn to the certainty of who they are and what they stand for? That's the point -- and Denise makes it well.

Yohn, former West Coast marketing leader of Sony, encourages everyone to think of brands as bigger and more important than a mere tool for advertising. They are living, breathing, self-organizing North Stars from which great ideas and products come, and from where discipline keeps people true and focused.

Who on earth do you know who thinks like Denise? Jim Stengel, the former marketing chief of Procter and Gamble; Kip Tindell, chairman of the Container Store; Om Malik of GigaOM; and best selling author John Gerzema -- and yours truly.

Which brings me to chapter three: "Great Brands Ignore Trends." This book is full of profound points of view and some rather heathen insights. The latter includes the anti-traditional idea of a brand being a cultural movement -- something that I have been banging on about for almost 15 years, including in my book *Uprising*. The whole point of this chapter is that brands can connect their "internal culture to larger culture movements to establish authentic relevance and deeper emotional meaning." Yes!

If you are building a company while nibbling on a ciabatta sandwich rather than spending hours in the brand-gym doing medicine ball-clenching exercises, then dig into the paragraph entitled "Challenging Business As Usual", which takes us through the inspiring and wonderful story of Steve Eells and his company Chipotle. You're going to love this. Me? I get goosebumps reading about brilliant, visionary business leaders who want to right a wrong, take on the fast food industry, and in the process build a billion dollar business.

I love Yohn's section about "Anticipating and Advancing Cultural Movements" because it is all about the need for us marketing minded folks to continuously scan the cultural environment for signs of meaningful, long-lasting change that might create opportunity vs going for trends. The former enables us to build sustainable big brand ideas while the latter keeps us chasing the next new thing.

"Cultural movements seem obvious once they've taken hold, but anticipating them requires keen insight and courage. I for one wholeheartedly agree.

This book is chock full of both. Read it. I did. And I recommend it to anyone who wants to create brand heat and product lust.

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