MARKETING

Purple Cow

by Seth Godin

In a crowded market, average products are invisible; only the remarkable get talked about and bought.

BEST POINTS FROM THE BOOK

01 **Remarkable literally means worth making a remark about.**

Drive past a field of brown cows and you stop looking within minutes. One purple cow and everyone reaches for a camera. If nobody would remark on your product, it is not remarkable yet.

02 **The TV-industrial complex is dead, and ads cannot save an average product anymore.**

The old loop - build something ordinary, buy mass ads, win distribution, repeat - broke because consumers are post-consumption: they already own nearly everything they need and have learned to ignore interruptions.

03 **The opposite of remarkable is not bad. It is "very good."**

"Very good is bad" is one of the book's closing slogans. Very good products are everywhere and offend no one, so they spread nowhere.

04 **Safe is risky. Boring is the real danger.**

Companies fear criticism, so they sand off every edge and ship brown cows. Standing out guarantees some critics; fitting in guarantees being ignored - the best the timid can hope for is to be unnoticed.

05 **You cannot paint a product purple after the fact. Remarkable has to be built in.**

Dutch Boy did not out-advertise rival paints - it redesigned the can with an easy-carry, drip-free pour spout, and sales soared. That is why Godin says marketers are no longer just promoters; they are designers.

06 **Do not market to the masses. Win the sneezers first.**

Ideas travel along the adoption curve: innovators and early adopters try new things and sneeze them to the cautious majority. You never reach the middle of the curve without first winning its left edge.

07 Hunt for otaku: people whose hobby is almost an obsession.

Otaku is more than a hobby and a little less than an obsession - the urge that makes hot-sauce fanatics drive across town for a new burn. Find a market where that passion already exists, build for it, and ignore the rest.

08 To find your cow, go for the edges.

List your product's attributes - price, speed, size, service, simplicity - and push one to an extreme: the cheapest, the fastest, the most exclusive. Then test which edge your sneezers actually care about.

09 Compromise turns cows brown: a product for everybody is a product for nobody.

Designing for the center of the curve means trimming whatever might offend - and whatever might thrill. Godin's rule: differentiate your customers, delight the passionate group most likely to sneeze, and ignore the rest.

10 Milk the cow, then breed a new one. Cows do not stay purple.

Today's sensation is tomorrow's standard feature. While a cow earns, win your fans' permission to hear about the next one, hand the old cow to another team to extend, and reinvest in a fresh cow.

11 Your career obeys the same law: be a Purple Cow, not a resume.

A mass-mailed resume is just personal advertising, and it gets ignored the same way. Remarkable people with remarkable projects get recruited - often into jobs created for them.

THE BOOK, IN SHORT

Godin starts with a story: driving past fields of cows, his family was thrilled for about twenty minutes, then the cows became invisible. A purple cow, though, would be remarkable - and that, he argues, is the only marketing that still works in a world drowning in choices and advertising.

The old system, which he calls the TV-industrial complex, let companies make average products for average people and buy attention with mass ads. That loop is broken. Today's consumers are post-consumption - they already own nearly everything they need, face more choices than ever, and have less time than ever - so the classic Ps of marketing, from product to promotion to permission, are no longer enough. The new P that matters is the Purple Cow.

Remarkable products spread because they are built for the right first audience. Borrowing Geoffrey Moore's adoption curve, Godin shows that ideas move from innovators and early adopters to the cautious majority, and the carriers are sneezers - enthusiasts who try new things and tell everyone. The best sneezers have otaku, a passion that is more than a hobby and a little less than an obsession, so Godin argues you should find a niche where otaku already burns rather than watering a product down for the indifferent middle.

The book is hard on caution and compromise. The opposite of remarkable is 'very good': companies fear criticism and extremes, so they design for the center, sand off every edge, and produce exactly the brown cows nobody sees. The alternative is to go for the edges of some attribute and bake the remarkable thing into the product itself, the way Dutch Boy redesigned the paint can instead of buying more ads - in the new world, marketers are designers, not promoters.

And a cow never stays purple. Winners milk a hit while building a permission asset - fans who have asked to hear what is next - then reinvest in a new cow instead of defending a fading one. The closing challenge is personal as well as commercial, applying to your work and even your career: you are either remarkable or invisible. Choose remarkable.

DO THIS WEEK

Pick one product, service, or offer of yours. List its main attributes, then choose ONE and push it to an edge this week - make it the fastest, simplest, cheapest, most generous, or most exclusive version in your market. Show the result to five people from the niche you most want to reach. If none of them would remark on it unprompted, sharpen the edge and test again.

Seth Godin, first published 2003. A short landmark marketing book; for founders and marketers tired of shouting louder and ready to be worth noticing.