

How Brands Grow: Part Two

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This is a follow-up to “How Brands Grow” by Byron Sharp published in 2010. I reviewed that book for IJMR at the time and was interested to see how this new book built on the marketing science/research work reported on book one. Similar to the first book, it attempts to challenge the reader to recognise the fundamental errors in contemporary marketing thought. It also uses empirical data collected over the years by the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, from a wide cross-section of industries and countries, to critique the fundamentals of buying behaviour and brand performance and attempts to demonstrate how some of the key concepts can be applied. The authors claim that the book is aimed at two markets: readers of the first book who want to learn more and marketers operating in emerging markets, services, e-commerce and luxury markets.

It starts by revisiting the ‘Double Jeopardy Law’ from the first book which states that brand loyalty is directly related to market share- as market share goes up, loyalty goes up. This book emphasises that this is the case for all markets and products/ services, so brands should be focusing on customer acquisition rather than spending time on retention activities aimed at defecting customers. There is also a repeat of the argument that companies should place more emphasis on light occasional brand buyers, rather than heavy buyers, if they are to sustain or grow market share, as they say this group makes up the majority of all purchases. So by the end of chapter three, I wasn’t totally sure what the added value of this book was over the original one.

However, the following two chapters on “Building Mental Availability “ and “Leveraging Distinctive Assets” are probably the most valuable in the whole book. The authors introduce the cues that buyers use to think of options to buy. Many of these are not new such as purchase situations/contexts, core benefits, country of origin but the chapter reminds the reader that consumers do not just have on consideration set when purchasing items but take account of many different context-specific evoked sets. Being aware of this enables a brand to develop “ a distinctive asset palette that can be used across media, in different ways to create a consistent neurologically rich set of branding options”

Following this chapter, there is a pretty basic chapter on reach and media selection, which may be beneficial for someone new to media planning but it doesn’t really introduce anything new or innovative. The same could be said about the next chapter on “word of mouth” which seems to a very superficial and somewhat dated view of word of mouth. It doesn’t really get to grips with online review sites and electronic word of mouth. Many small boutique hotels have been able to compete directly with the big hotel chains simply through positive word of mouth on travel review sites. The chapter seems to concentrate more on offline purchases and word of mouth rather than the significant impact of electronic word of mouth on online purchases or bookings.

There is a chapter on building physical availability which emphasises a multi- channel approach with an emphasis on “presence, relevance and prominence”. This is followed by a chapter on online

shopping which highlights some key points for brands selling through this channel. Neither of these introduce much that is new or controversial. The final two chapters reiterate the “Double Jeopardy Law” and some of the earlier concepts of the book into two other contexts, the first being for totally new brands and the second being for luxury brands. The new brands chapter reemphasises the well-known fact that new brand launches are risky but is relatively limited in its practical advice as to how to limit that risk. The conclusions of the luxury chapter are also rather obvious, for example that it takes time to build a reputation for extreme quality. It might be better reading “Meta-Luxury: Brands and the Culture of Excellence” by Manfredi Ricca and Rebecca Robins, if you really want to understand luxury brands.

So overall, the book is a mixed bag, it has a couple of good chapters on building mental availability and leveraging distinctive assets, but as with all sequels, it doesn't quite live up to the first book. I also feel that if it is aimed at attracting readers in the services, e-commerce and luxury markets, that these readers will feel short-changed. However, if you enjoyed the first book and want more of the same mental stimulation, then it give it a go.

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