

SUMMARY PURPLE COW

SETH GODIN



Summary of “Purple Cow” by Seth Godin

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Learn how to transform your business by daring to
be different and becoming remarkable.

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Introduction

For years, marketers have discussed the five Ps of marketing, they include: product, pricing, promotion, positioning, publicity, packaging, pass-along, and permission. This is the marketing checklist that companies go to.

Marketers see the product just built on the factory line and then determine how they are going to market it to the consumers. It used to be that if you got all your Ps right, then you were more than likely going to succeed. I mean, this strategy has worked for some of the greatest companies in America like Coca-Cola and Wal-Mart. However, in today's climate, the Ps are just not enough. Luckily, there's a new P, "Purple Cow." The essence of Purple Cow is that you must create something remarkable. You see, "Something remarkable is worth talking about. Worth noticing. Exceptional. New. Interesting. It's a Purple Cow. Boring stuff is invisible. It's a brown cow."

So discover why you need to put a Purple Cow into everything you build, and why TV and traditional marketing are no longer the secret weapons for success. Learn how marketing has changed forever, and lastly, learn how to "Stop advertising and start innovating."

Advertising Is Changing

Picture your daily life. Think about your commute to work, how many ads do you see? Think about scrolling through social media, how many ads do you see? Think about watching television, how many ads do you see?

Truthfully, you are being bombarded with *thousands* of ads per day! So much so, that you've probably automatically learned to ignore and "tune-out" the advertising unless it directly applies to you or features a product that you already want or need. So what does this mean for advertising? It means that traditional advertising no longer works.

Just 40 to 50 years ago, when a company wanted to advertise their product, they turned to big television and newspaper ads to directly reach the masses. Today, however, we've created a world where most products and advertisements are invisible. For example, when Seth Godin was once in the lobby of a nice hotel, he decided to conduct a little experiment on the people who were reading newspapers. He asked these people to name two companies with full-page advertisements in the paper. The result? No one could remember.

Today, advertising works like a funnel. Imagine wanting to bring a pain reliever to the market. When a consumer visits a drugstore, they have endless options, including Advil, Aleve, Bayer, Excedrin, Motrin, Tylenol, and dozens more depending on the pain they are experiencing. This means that when you advertise your product, you're going to have to work through the funnel. First, you'll need to find consumers who are in the market for a pain reliever. Then, among those people, you'll need to find ones that aren't happy with the current options they have. And out of those, only a fraction will listen to your ad and believe your proposition. Finally, only a fraction of those will even commit to buying your specific medication.

In other words, you just went from an audience of everyone to an audience a fraction of that size. Even worse, not only are these people hard to find, but they're also incredibly picky. Just twenty years ago, this problem was

not as prevalent. Consumers had a lot more time and far fewer choices. For example, just a few years ago, yoga books were scarce. All a publisher needed to be successful was to provide a good yoga book. So if a consumer wanted to learn how to deepen their yoga practice, they would simply go to the book store and choose from the 4-5 options available. Today, there are more than 500 books on yoga. In other words, competition is fierce.

Become a Purple Cow

Since today's climate is far different than it was just twenty years ago, companies must now create marketing strategies and advertisements that go beyond the traditional. So, let's take a look at the history of advertising to see the major changes over time. In fact, the history of advertising can be broken up into three categories: before, during, and after advertising.

Before Advertising is the oldest form of advertising in which consumers first recommended products directly to one another, also known as word-of-mouth advertising. For example, if a particular merchant provided a great service or offered an outstanding product, people would recommend them which resulted in more and more business for that merchant. During Advertising is the era in which advertising was at its most effective. The market was not overly saturated like it is today, meaning that marketers would simply spend more money on advertising and immediately see an increase in sales and profits in return. And as they gained more profits, companies would spend more on advertising, thus continuing the cycle.

Finally, we have After Advertising which is the era we are currently experiencing. Today, we have largely reverted to a word-of-mouth model due to an overly saturated market that many consumers do not trust. In today's climate, we need the trust of someone to refer a product in order to commit to a purchase. Of course, word-of-mouth can now be experienced on a larger and quicker scale through social media networks like Twitter and Facebook. This new era of marketing means that not only do companies need to be able to solve a customer's problems, but they also need to grab their attention. But how? By simply becoming a *Purple Cow*.

If you're confused, don't worry I'll explain it with a story. Godin remembers a time when he and his family were driving through France. On their drive, Godin states "we were enchanted by the hundreds of storybook cows grazing on picturesque pastures right next to the highway. For dozens of kilometers, we all gazed out the window, marveling about how beautiful

everything was. Then, within twenty minutes, we started ignoring the cows. The new cows were just like the old cows, and what once was amazing was now common. Worse than common. It was boring. Cows, after you've seen them for a while, are boring... A Purple Cow, though. Now that would be interesting."

Not Taking Risks is Riskier than Taking Risks

In our post-advertising world, the internet has become one of the noisiest places, oversaturated with companies trying to advertise their products. Because of this, you need to truly be remarkable in order to stand out. In other words, you need to be a purple cow among the ordinary black-and-white cows. So how can you become remarkable? Simply by being willing to take risks and try something new.

You see, if you make a product that looks like all the others, your product is at risk of becoming “invisible” among a sea of look-alikes. For instance, let’s take a look at the Buick. “The Buick is a boring car. It’s been boring for almost fifty years. Few people aspire to own a Buick. The Buick isn’t easy to criticize, but it’s also not very successful, is it?” In other words, Buick has failed to redesign and take risks and as a result, they’ve suffered in sales. Another boring company is drugstore.com. They simply run a boring website that sells boring products like toothbrushes. Their problem is that there is no Cow there. As a result, very few new customers visit their site to buy their products.

Herman Miller, however, dared to be different. Before Miller, desk chairs were invisible, they all looked the same and many manufacturers simply made safe and easy choices which resulted in a dull, boring market. In 1994, Herman Miller introduced the \$750 Aeron chair and took a radical risk. First, the chair looked different, then it worked differently, and lastly, it cost a lot of money. It was a Purple Cow. When people saw it, they wanted to sit in it, and when people sat in it, they wanted to talk about it. The Aeron chair was no ordinary chair at all.

Creating something different paid off for Herman Miller. Owning an Aeron chair became a status symbol, it sent a message about what you did and who you were. Since 1994, millions of Aeron chairs have been sold and the chair is now in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Godin states that “Herman Miller realized that making a safe chair was the

single riskiest thing they could do.” Additionally, a risky business move is what Godin calls Follow the Leader. Think about how birds fly in formation. The birds that follow the leader have an easier flight as the leader breaks the wind resistance, giving them a smooth ride. Unfortunately, many people think they can do the same in business.

The problem with this strategy is that people never create something remarkable, they never end up as the leader. Even worse, if they choose the wrong bird to follow, they lose. For instance, the record business has been dominated by a few major players for years. They simply follow each other's lead with similar pricing, merchant policies, contracts, and packaging. They simply stick with the pack to avoid criticism. Suddenly, the market changed as technology boomed and ruffled some feathers. No record label had ever needed to take the lead before, so they didn't know how to deal with change. The lesson of the Cow is this: Safe is risky.

The Bell Curve of Consumers

Once a company has a product that they know will do well, they must learn how to target their customers. There are five groups of customers: Innovators, Early Adopters, Early Majority, Late Majority, and the Laggards. Regardless of the industry you are in, successful new products and services follow a similar pattern, a bell curve. First, they are purchased by innovators. These are the people who like having something first, they may not even need the product, they just want it.

After innovators are the early adopters. These are the folks who will actually benefit from using the product and are eager to stay ahead of the rest of the population by seeking out new products and services. This audience is both sizable and willing to spend money. After the early adopters, you have the early and late majority. These consumers don't necessarily need or crave a new product or service, but if enough of their peers try it and talk about it, then they will follow suit and are likely to hop on the bandwagon. This group takes up the largest part of your consumer base; however, there is something important to consider about this group. These people ignore you and your marketing. They are not willing to invest their time listening to you about a problem they don't find significant. Don't feel bad, they ignore innovators too!

Lastly, the final group of consumers is the laggards. This is the group that is finally "getting around to buying a cassette deck when the rest of us have moved onto buying CDs... They don't use something new until it's so old that what they used to use is obsolete, impractical, or not even available anymore." So if you want to market your product successfully, you might be thinking that you'll need to market to the early and late majority, right? I mean, that makes sense, they are the largest consumer group. Unfortunately, this would be a big mistake.

Instead, it's best to target the early adopters. These are the people who are more likely to discover a new product or service, even better, they'll talk

about it and help get it off the ground. Take the digital camera for example. In the beginning, the only people who used digital cameras were “gadget-heads” and “computer geeks.” They were tricky to use and the quality still wasn’t that great. Over time, however, manufacturers fixed these problems and digital cameras quickly began to replace film cameras. This wasn’t a result of great ad campaigns; instead, it was a result of early adopters who successfully talked about the cameras and sold them to their friends.

This is why being remarkable is so important. “First, it makes it far easier to attract the left side of the curve (innovators). And second, it makes it easier for these early adopters to persuasively sell their peers on the rest of the curve.” So what about your product will make others want to spread the word?

The Key to Creating a Purple Cow is Marketing

So what's the foolproof way to create a Purple Cow? Unfortunately, there is no secret formula, ritual, or incantation that you can use to ensure that you'll create a Purple Cow. There is no plan. Don't be too discouraged though, Godin does believe in a pretty simple system that is as good as any. He says to "Go for the edges. Challenge yourself and your team to describe what those edges are, and then test which edge is most likely to deliver the marketing and financial results you seek."

To begin figuring out what your edge is, begin by reviewing your product, pricing, and packaging and determine where your competition is. Sure, it might be remarkable if your spa offered free services, but clearly that won't last very long. JetBlue figured a way to get over the edge of both service and pricing while still being profitable. Starbucks did it as well by redefining what a cup of coffee meant. In other words, "It's not the tactics or plan that joins the Purple Cow products together. It's the process organizations use to discover the fringes that make their products remarkable."

One way to figure out your edge is to utilize the power of a slogan. Today, a slogan is a script for the early adopter to use when she talks with her friends about it. It's essentially telling your consumer, "Here's why it's worth recommending us," and the best part? The script guarantees that the word of mouth is passed on properly. For instance, take a look at The Leaning Tower of Pisa which is visited by millions of tourists each year, but why? Because it's a leaning tower, that's its slogan! There's nothing to complicate the message, it's simply a leaning tower in the middle of a lawn. It's easy to tell someone about the Leaning Tower. It's much harder to tell people about the Pantheon in Rome. You see, the Pantheon is beautiful, breathtaking, and historically significant, yet it sees just one percent of the crowds that the Tower in Pisa gets.

Slogans can also have no words, like Tiffany's blue box. There are no words but people know that the blue box stands for elegance and quality in which "price is no object." Each time someone gives it as a gift, they are spreading the word about the brand. These examples prove that marketing isn't something that is "done *to* a product. The marketing *is* the product and vice versa." And over the years, marketing has changed. In the past, marketing was more about communicating the values of a product after it had been developed and manufactured. Today, however, marketing is the act of inventing the product. Marketing is at every step of the process: inventing, designing, producing, pricing, and selling.

Companies that create Purple Cows like JetBlue, Starbucks, and Hasbro are run by marketers. For instance, the CEO of JetBlue once made the critical decision to get his head of Marketing involved in product design and training. Because of this, everything they do adds value to the consumer, which is impeccable marketing. So what if a company is failing? The problem lies in the managers simply running a company, not marketing a product!

Selling to Your Target Consumer

It may come as no surprise to hear that it's easier to sell a product that people are buying and talking about. Godin made this blindingly obvious realization a few years ago; however, many marketers still don't seem to understand! For example, Butterball once introduced a fast-baking pot pie that could be found in the freezer section of your grocery store. While this sounds good in theory, the problem is that many people are not in the market for a new way to feed their families. Even worse, Butterball introduced the product with TV commercials running on the Food Channel. That's right. The channel people watch to learn how to *cook*, not heat up frozen food.

According to the funnel we mentioned earlier, there will be few consumers who even watch this commercial and even fewer who will tell their friends about this meal. What problem does this glorified TV dinner solve? Unfortunately, Butterball missed the mark in creating a product that solved people's problems and created an unremarkable product. Instead, you should start with a problem that you can solve for your customers. Then, you can come up with a solution that is so remarkable, the early adopters will happily respond and promote it! A great example of this is an Altoids' campaign. Altoids realized that young adults who weren't smoking were looking for something to do with their mouths and fingers while at work.

Many consumers didn't even realize this was a problem! Altoids spoke directly to this market and created a tin that made it easy to share. Early adopters picked up this product and shared it with their friends, making Altoids one of the most profitable candy introductions ever. However, it's important to remember that in today's world, customers are choosing which advertisements they respond to. They are choosing which ads they listen to and which ones they ignore. Therefore, showing your ads to the customers who are most likely to listen to your message and want to buy your product is key!

This is where Google Ads comes in handy because it allows you to target a specific consumer based on what they are looking for. The ads are then targeted to offer a solution for whatever problem the consumer has. However, simply targeting ads to your target consumer isn't enough to create a successful Purple Cow. Additionally, creators of a Purple Cow must measure their marketing strategies as well. Every product, every interaction, every policy is either working or not working. And companies that can measure and then quickly change and optimize their strategy can grow faster and quicker.

For instance, Zara, the fast-growing retailer that began in Europe changes its clothing line every three or four weeks. They carefully watch what is selling and what's not and then evolve their lineup faster than their competition could ever hope to. At the end of the day, "if you measure it, it will improve."

The Fear in Becoming a Cow

Now that you've learned what it takes to become a Purple Cow, why is it so hard to be Purple? While some might argue that there are simply too few great ideas, this answer is nonsense. "The Cow is so rare because people are afraid." You see, throughout our childhood, we are taught to play it safe and follow the rules. As kids, we line up in straight rows, work hard, and avoid standing out, falling behind, or even running ahead. If we do these things, we avoid failure. The problem, however, is that this pattern is dangerous, and those rules? Those rules ultimately lead to failure.

In today's climate, the marketplace is crowded and oversaturated, meaning that fitting in is failing. "Not standing out is the same as being invisible." Unfortunately, we are too scared to stand out. For example, a fourteen-block stretch of Amsterdam Avenue in New York contains seventy-four restaurants. The problem? These restaurants are boring. While they may provide cuisine from about twenty to thirty cultures, none are as remarkable as the other amazing restaurants that New York has to offer. But why? Well, it's quite simple. After spending all that time and money to open the restaurant, few entrepreneurs are prepared to take another risk.

In other words, we believe that if we stick with the crowd, we won't be criticized and we won't fail. We'll make an average living by offering average food, but hey, at least we won't get a bad review? This thinking is dangerous. It's important to remember that criticism does not mean failure. In fact, criticism means you are gaining attention and doing something that others aren't. As we've said before, "being safe is risky."

Additionally, many companies fear that in order to be remarkable, they must be outrageous. This is simply not true, in fact, outrageous can be quite annoying. "Ozzy Osbourne is lucky to be both outrageous and remarkable. But a performance artist smearing himself with lard and wrapping himself in felt is just plain weird." In other words, you can still be remarkable without being weird, offensive, or outrageous. Even worse, many

companies believe that if they create a scandal, then they can become different and remarkable. While this may work on occasion, this is not a long-term strategy and you may even attract the wrong kind of attention.

Finally, the greatest fear is that giant corporations will have to change their infrastructure. Say you've built a successful company through traditional TV ads. You've invested in people, policies, distribution, and even a factory. But now, overnight, nothing is working like it used to. Major companies like Motorola lay off ten thousand people while others like Burger King switch ad agencies, yet again. Fortunately for you, CEO Brad Anderson of Best Buy has done what those other major corporations couldn't, he evolved. He said, "Instead of selling what *we* wanted to sell, we sold what people wanted us to sell, and then figured out how to make money doing it."

Best Buy could've invested in more newspaper ads, adjusted their pricing, and even laid people off. Instead, they opted to switch up their strategy. Evolving doesn't mean "changing the biggest machine in your factory. It can be the way you answer your phone, launch a new brand, or price a revision to your software. Getting in the habit of doing the 'unsafe' thing every time you have the opportunity is the way to learn to project - you get practice at seeing what's working and what's not."

Final Summary

In today's climate, the marketplace is oversaturated and crowded. This means that creating something ordinary is on par with creating something invisible. No longer can you expect consumers to respond to your traditional ads in the newspaper, magazine, radio, or television. Now, you must be willing to create something remarkable, you must become a Purple Cow. You must be bold enough to take risks, determine your target consumer, find out where your target consumer is, and keep marketing at the forefront of every decision. The key is to target the early adopters, those who are willing to try new products and spread the word to their friends. In the end, if you aren't afraid to stand out and if you aren't afraid of criticism, then you'll be well on your way to building the next Purple Cow.



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