

Purple COW

Transform Your Business by Being Remarkable

Seth Godin

'Challenging ... smart thinking and lots of
great examples. A must read' *Marketing*



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PURPLE COW

**TRANSFORM YOUR BUSINESS
BY BEING REMARKABLE**

Seth Godin

PORTFOLIO

In Memory of Lionel Poilane, Remarkable in Every Way.

PORTFOLIO

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*“Tastes like chicken”
isn’t a compliment.*




*“Nobody laughs at
old jokes any more.”*

Mo Godin



*You are a post-consumption consumer.
You have everything you need,
and most everything you want.
Except time.*



*“Marketing is too important to be left to the
marketing department.”*

David Packard



“Everything that can be invented has been invented.”

*Charles H. Duell, 1899,
U.S. Commissioner of Patents*

Not Enough *Ps*

Marketers for years have talked about the five *Ps* of marketing. (There are more than five of them, but everyone has their favorite five.) Some of them include:

- Product
- Pricing
- Promotion
- Positioning
- Publicity
- Packaging
- Pass-along
- Permission

This is the marketing checklist: a quick way to make sure you've done your job, a way to describe how you're going to go about getting people to buy what the factory just made. If the elements are out of whack with each other (for example, puréed meals that you market to senior citizens but taste like baby food), then the marketing message is blurred and ultimately ineffective.

Marketing isn't guaranteed to work, but the way things used to be, if you got all your *Ps* right, you were more likely than not to succeed.

Something disturbing has happened, though. The *Ps* just aren't enough. This is a book about a new *P*, a *P* that is suddenly exceptionally important.

The New *P*

The new *P* is “Purple Cow.”

When my family and I were driving through France a few years ago, 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. They may be perfect cows, attractive cows, cows with great personalities, cows lit by beautiful light, but they’re still boring.

A Purple Cow, though. Now *that* would be interesting. (For a while.)

The essence of the Purple Cow is that it must be remarkable. In fact, if “remarkable” started with a *P*, I could probably dispense with the cow subterfuge, but what can you do?

This book is about the why, the what, and the how of *remarkable*.

Boldfaced Words and Gutsy Assertions

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.

Remarkable marketing is the art of building things worth noticing right into your product or service. Not slapping on marketing as a last-minute add-on, but understanding that if your offering itself isn't remarkable, it's invisible.

The **TV-industrial complex** was the symbiotic relationship between consumer demand, TV advertising, and ever-growing companies that were built around investments in ever-increasing marketing expenditures.

The **postconsumption consumer** is out of things to buy. We have what we need, we want very little, and we're too busy to spend a lot of time researching something you've worked hard to create for us.

The **marketing department** takes a nearly finished product or service and spends money to communicate its special benefits to a target audience. This approach no longer works.

I believe we've now reached the point where we can no longer market directly to the masses. We've created a world where most products are invisible. Over the past two decades, smart business writers have pointed out that the dynamic of marketing is changing. Marketers have read and talked about those ideas, and even used some of them, but have maintained the essence of their old marketing strategies. The traditional approaches are now obsolete, though. One hundred years of marketing thought are gone. Alternative approaches aren't a novelty—they are all we've got left.

This is a book about why you need to put a Purple Cow into everything you build, why TV and mass media are no longer your secret weapons, and why the profession of marketing has been changed forever.

Stop advertising and start innovating.

Before, During, and After

Before Advertising, there was word of mouth. Products and services that could solve a problem got talked about and eventually got purchased.

The best vegetable seller at the market had a reputation, and her booth was always crowded.

During Advertising, the combination of increasing prosperity, seemingly endless consumer desire, and the power of television and mass media led to a magic formula: If you advertised directly to the consumer (every consumer), sales would go up.

A partnership with the right ad agency and the right banker meant you could drive a company to be almost as big as you could imagine.

After Advertising, we're almost back where we started. But instead of products succeeding by slow and awkward word of mouth, the power of our new networks allows remarkable ideas to diffuse through segments of the population at rocket speed.

As marketers, we know the old stuff isn't working. And we know why: because as consumers, we're too busy to pay attention to advertising, but we're desperate to find good stuff that solves our problems.

The Greatest Thing Since Sliced Bread

In 1912, Otto Frederick Rohwedder invented sliced bread. What a great idea: a simple machine that could take a loaf of bread and ... slice it. The machine was a complete failure. This was the beginning of the advertising age, and that meant that a good product with lousy marketing had very little chance of success.

It wasn't until about twenty years later—when a new brand called Wonder started marketing sliced bread—that the invention caught on. It was the packaging and the advertising (“builds strong bodies twelve ways”) that worked, not the sheer convenience and innovation of pre-slicing bread.

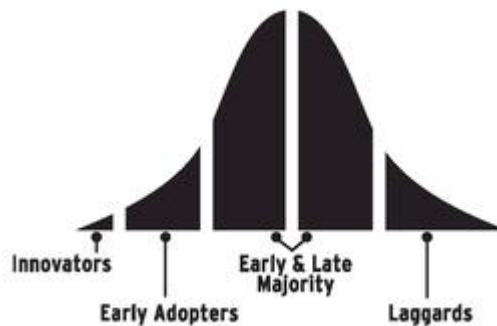
Did You Notice the Revolution?

Over the past twenty years, a quiet revolution has changed the way some people think about marketing.

Tom Peters took the first whack with *The Pursuit of Wow*, a visionary book that described why the only products with a future were those created by passionate people. Too often, big companies are scared companies, and they work to minimize any variation—including the good stuff that happens when people who care create something special.

Peppers and Rogers, in *The One to One Future*, took a simple truth—that it's cheaper to keep an old customer than it is to get a new one—and articulated the entire field of customer relationship management. They showed that there are only four kinds of people (prospects, customers, loyal customers, and former customers) and that loyal customers are often happy to spend more money with you.

In *Crossing the Chasm*, Geoff Moore outlined how new products and new ideas move through a population. They follow a curve, beginning with innovators and early adopters, growing into the majority, and eventually reaching the laggards. While Moore focused on technology products, his insights about the curve apply to just about every product or service offered to any audience.



Moore's **idea diffusion** curve shows how a successful business innovation moves—from left to right—and affects ever more consumers until it finally reaches everyone. The x-axis, along the bottom, shows the different

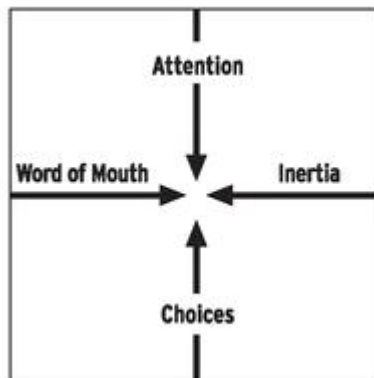
groups an idea encounters over time, while the y-axis shows how many people are in each group.

In *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell clearly articulated how ideas spread through populations, from one person to another. In *Unleashing the Ideavirus*, I pushed this idea even further, describing how the most effective business ideas are the ones that spread.

And finally, in *Permission Marketing*, I outlined the ever-growing attention deficit that marketers face. I also discussed how companies win when they treat the attention of their prospects as an asset, not as a resource to be strip-mined and then abandoned.

At many companies, most of these proven ideas have been treated as novelties. My friend Nancy is the head of “new media” at one of the largest packaged-goods companies in the world. Guess what? She’s in charge (she’s a department of one) of all of these new ideas. “New media” has become a synonym for “no budget.”

Instead of accepting that the old ways are fading away (fast), most companies with a product to market are treating these proven new techniques as interesting fads—worth another look but not worth using as the center of their strategy.



The squeeze play. Marketers can't get the word out because jaded consumers refuse to share their attention. Customers rely on their tried-and-true suppliers or on their network of smart friends instead of studying the ads on TV.

Why You Need the Purple Cow

Forty years ago, Ron Simek, owner of the Tombstone Tap (a bar named for the cemetery next door), decided to offer a frozen version of his pizza to his customers. It caught on, and before long, Tombstone Pizza was dominating your grocer's freezer. Kraft Foods bought the brand in 1986, advertised it like crazy, and made billions. This was a great American success story—invent a product everyone wants, advertise it to the masses, and make a lot of money.

This strategy didn't just work for pizza. It worked for almost everything in your house, including aspirin.

Imagine how much fun it must have been to be the first person to market aspirin. Here was a product that just about every person on earth needed and wanted. A product that was inexpensive, easy to try, and immediately beneficial.

Obviously, it was a big hit.

Today, a quick visit to the drugstore turns up: Advil, Aleve, Alka-Seltzer Morning Relief, Anacin, Ascriptin, Aspergum, Bayer, Bayer Children's, Bayer Regimen, Bayer Women's, BC, Bufferin, Cope, Ecotrin, Excedrin Extra Strength, Goody's, Motrin, Nuprin, St. Joseph, Tylenol, and of course, Vanquish. Within each of these brands, there are variations, sizes, and generics, adding up to more than a hundred products to choose from.

Think it's still easy to be an aspirin marketer?

If you developed a new kind of pain reliever, even one that was a bit better than all of those I just listed, what would you do?

The obvious answer, if you've got money and you believe in your product, is to spend all you've got to buy tons of national TV and print advertising.

You'll face a few problems, though. First you need people who want to buy a pain reliever. While it's a huge market, it's not everyone.

Once you find people who buy pain relievers, then you need people who want to buy a new kind. After all, plenty of people want the "original" kind, the kind they grew up with. If someone has found a convenient, trusted,

effective pain reliever, he's probably not out there wasting time looking for a replacement.

Finally, you need to find the people willing to listen to you talk about your new pain reliever. The vast majority of folks are just too busy and will ignore you, regardless of how many ads you buy.

So ... you just went from an audience of everyone to an audience of a fraction the size. Not only are these folks hard to find, but they're picky as well.

Being first in the frozen pizza category was a good idea. Being first in pain relievers was an even better idea. Alas, they're both taken.

Let's consider yoga books for a second. The problem with books about how to do yoga is that there are too many of them.

A few years ago, when yoga books were scarce, all a publisher needed to be successful was a good yoga book. If people had a yoga problem, they'd visit the local bookstore, take a quick look at the three or four books available, and buy one.

Today, though, there are more than five hundred books on yoga. Nobody, no matter how motivated, takes the time to review all five hundred before buying a book on yoga. So if you've just written one, you've got a challenge ahead of you. Not only is there a huge amount of competition, but new books on yoga are useless to people who have already solved their yoga problem. All those folks who visited the store a few years ago and made yoga books so popular *are no longer shopping for yoga books!*

Here's the sad truth about marketing just about anything, whether it's a product or a service, whether it's marketed to consumers or to corporations:

Most people can't buy your product. Either they don't have the money, they don't have the time, or they don't want it.

If an audience doesn't have the money to buy what you're selling at the price you need to sell it for, you don't have a market.

If an audience doesn't have the time to listen to and understand your pitch, you'll be treated as if you were invisible.

And if an audience takes the time to hear your pitch but decides they don't want it ... well, you're not going to get very far.



The world has changed. There are far more choices, but there is less and less time to sort them out.

This wasn't true just twenty years ago. Way back then, consumers had a lot more time and far fewer choices. Our disposable income had fewer ways to get squandered, so if a company came up with a really neat innovation (the cell phone, for example), we'd find a way to pay for it.

Years ago, our highly productive economy figured out how to satisfy almost everyone's needs. Then the game changed—it was all about satisfying our *wants*. The marketing community taught us (with plenty of TV advertising) to want more and more, and consumers did their best to keep up.

Among the people who *might* buy your product, most will never hear about it. There are so many alternatives now that people can no longer be easily reached by mass media. Busy consumers ignore unwanted messages, while your competition (which already has market share to defend) is willing to overspend to maintain that market share.

Worse still, people are getting harder to reach by permission media. Just because you have someone's e-mail address or phone number doesn't mean they want to hear from you! And setting aside the spam issues, even when people *do* want to hear from you by phone or mail or e-mail, they are less and less likely to take action. Your satisfied consumers value these messages less because those messages no longer solve their current problems. Companies have gotten better at understanding what satisfies their consumers (and presumably have gotten better at delivering it), so the bar keeps getting raised as to what product news you can possibly deliver

that will add to that satisfaction. I wasn't being totally facetious when I quoted the former head of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Almost everything we can realistically imagine that we need *has* been invented.

The last hurdle is that ideavirus networks are hard to ignite in markets that are fairly satisfied. Because marketers have overwhelmed consumers with too much of everything, people are less likely to go out of their way to tell a friend about a product unless they're fairly optimistic that the friend will be glad to hear about it. When was the last time someone told you about a new pain reliever? It's a boring topic, and your friend is not going to waste your time. There's too much noise, and consumers are less eager than ever to add to it.

This is true not just for consumer products but also for business and industrial purchases. People who buy for businesses—whether it's advertising, parts, service, insurance, or real estate—just aren't as needy as they used to be. The folks who got there before you have a huge inertia advantage. If you want to grow your market share or launch something new, you have a significant challenge ahead.

Bottom line?

- All the obvious targets are gone, so people aren't likely to have easily solved problems.
- Consumers are hard to reach because they ignore you.
- Satisfied customers are less likely to tell their friends.

The old rules don't work so well any more. Marketing is dead. Long live marketing.