

Book Reviews

Edited by Dr Stephanie O'Donohoe
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The Thank You Economy

Gary Vaynerchuck (2011)

Collins Business, £16.99

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I first came across Gary Vaynerchuck about three years ago, when Edward Boches, the Chief Innovation Officer at Mullen, raved about Winelibrary.tv. It struck me initially as something quite inventive: the use of video distributed online about wine (and other passions) that sparked a conversation in which the brand continued to participate. Perhaps more tellingly, all this conversation built and drove a highly successful business in an increasingly commoditised category. But time and experience have led me to believe that what new technology means for business is less of a revolution and more of a return to what can perhaps be best described as old-fashioned values.

As a result, Gary's book, *The Thank You Economy*, is a welcome read and offers a refreshingly common-sense point of view on how business needs to change in the context of social media. It's a fun read that relies more on a diverse range of case studies to make its point – business has changed and businesses need to think and act small if they are to thrive in the hyper-connected and conversational world we now live in.

I think Gary makes two important points in the book. First, social media really isn't something new that changed consumer behaviour. It simply amplifies who we are as social animals. People were already feeling sick and tired of being ignored by business and treated as mere consumers. So the first big takeaway is that success comes from treating people as people, not as consumers – to treat others as you would wish to be treated.

Second, the book makes a very strong case for the stupidity of treating social media as a medium and bolt-on to what you do as a business. Success will not come from thinking about what your Facebook page should be, but rather from how you can make your business social to the core. It's about acting as many corporations and business started: as a small-town business. As a result, you'd think this stuff would come naturally to a Marks & Spencer or Wal-Mart, but a century of blunt and narcissistic mass marketing has educated them out of their original humanity.

This move towards the social business may have occurred only over the last five or so years, but it's only going to become more social. Platforms like Google+ suggest even greater potential for technology making business personal again. As a result, this book is a must-read.

The Thank You Economy is a great argument for why businesses themselves need to be social. Its 'show, don't tell' style gives plenty of ammunition and food for thought, not least in the ROI potential. It also, like all great social ideas, allows you to draw your own conclusions. And the conclusion I drew was that high-tech should create more old-fashioned businesses – ones that have the human and personal touch. It's about doing business *with* people, not at them.

Gareth Kay

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China 2.0: The Transformation of an Emerging Superpower ... and the New Opportunities

Marina Yue Zhang with Bruce W. Stening (2010) John Wiley & Sons (Asia) Pte. Ltd, £19.99

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The era of China 2.0 is upon us, as massive shifts in China have transformed the country and the people, leapfrogging technologies and outpacing western thinking towards the country. Dr Marina Zhang, a native Chinese with decades of experience in the West, brings a unique perspective in English-language China business literature. She documents these changes, specifically regarding the use of telecommunications and social networking, which have changed the

social dynamics of China and given a new voice to Chinese.

Dr Zhang attempts to show how young Chinese have embraced Web 2.0, the two-way-street interactive side of the internet, which has availed them new opportunities for expression, dialogue and involvement. While we have seen how social networks have galvanised the Middle East, the potential of billions of people (or at least the almost 500 million online 'netizens' in China) finally having a voice in a restricted media environment should give pause to business people, researchers and politician.

The second chapter shows how technology has leapfrogged in China, knocking down 'Chinese walls' and empowering the public. This chapter does well in setting the background and explaining the tools available to Chinese netizens, as well as the censorship tools used by the government to keep tabs on taboo topics. The third chapter gives an overview of black-, white- and blue-collar classes in China. Dr Zhang writes at length about the importance of using interactive web tools and crowd sourcing to develop rich tools for consumers – although without giving any concrete examples of how this is actually happening in China.

The remaining four chapters describe China's form of capitalism, political structures, attitudes towards nationalism and reaction to the financial crisis. These chapters may disappoint well-read China readers or practitioners with China experience. Chapter 4 describes China's mix of capitalism, including private, state and international capitalism. Chapter 5 introduces

China's political regime, with an overview of the Communist Party of China (CPC), problems of wealth inequality and party accountability. The final two chapters consider China's role in the global economy, fears of China as an emerging superpower, Chinese nationalism, and China's reaction to the financial crisis. Personally I wished that Dr Zhang could have gone into more detail at micro levels about how this change has affected and changed the everyday lives of Chinese.

The book suffers from an identity crisis: it oscillates between historical background of political and economic systems, amazement at China's ability to change and rapidly modernise, generalisations about both China and the West, pride at Chinese accomplishment such as the Beijing Olympics, along with suggestions on how to do business in the new China. Chapters 4–7, while interesting background material, do not seem to further or give substance to the book's main tenets of China going through massive social upheavals and the power of the internet.

The author's examples of successful Chinese companies – Lenovo, Haier, etc. – are already well documented and cited throughout both general news and other China business books. I hoped that Dr Zhang could give the readers more undocumented case studies – her oft-repeated examples of the Beijing Olympics and the anti-French protests of Carrefour were well covered and analysed by the media.

Any book on current technology faces the prospect of quickly becoming out of date. The author's comments about Chinese resistance to

purchasing goods online seems dated, as purchases through Alipay and other online gateway systems are soaring, especially on Taobao (China's version of eBay). The rise (and drop) of group purchase has taken place in the last year, and massive 'astro-turfing' – the practice of paying bloggers and forum moderators to place advertising messages – has swamped the Chinese net.

China 2.0 takes advantage of the so-called China era combined with the online phenomenon of Chinese netizens and the power of the populous. Dr Zhang introduces and documents this development with an insider's accuracy and a certain Chinese viewpoint that is missing from many China business books. However, the chapters on systems and politics may frustrate readers looking for even deeper insight and potential opportunities in this extremely difficult marketplace.

Michael Golden

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The Branded Mind: What Neuroscience Really Tells Us About the Puzzle of the Brain and the Brand

Erik Du Plessis (2011)

Kogan Page, £24.99

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The title of this book makes two interesting promises: a review of neuroscience research carried out to date, and discussion of this research in the context of consumer behaviour and decision-making.

A book covering these topics is highly relevant to anyone working with brands, and is particularly timely given the growing interest in neuro-marketing. Drawing together such a large and complex body of scientific research is undoubtedly ambitious, and this may explain why we felt that Du Plessis doesn't quite deliver on those promises.

In the book, a large number of theories, findings, models and approaches derived from neuroscience are discussed. Du Plessis presents findings from fascinating topics, ranging from artificial networks to emotions and decision making. While the book provides an interesting overview of a number of topics, many are not explained in any detail and others contain inaccuracies and oversimplifications. For example, Du Plessis appears to conflate the ideas of empathy and imitation, when in fact there are many important differences between the two. While a certain amount of simplification is necessary to make science accessible to everyone, Du Plessis's attempt to cover such a wide range of topics may leave readers confused about the literature.

Furthermore, in our view the book does not quite deliver in terms of relating the body of work generated in the brain and behavioural sciences to consumer behaviour and brands; the practical implications of most of the treated topics for understanding consumer behaviour are not clearly stated or empirically supported. In his previous book, *The Advertised Mind*, Du Plessis clearly mastered the art of extracting advertising-relevant information from

the more abstractly framed neuroscience literature. However, this time, the goal of proposing a new comprehensive theory that brings together neuroscience and market knowledge may be too ambitious.

Specifically, he does not explain sufficiently how neuroscience could complement traditional market research methods, such as focus groups and introspective questions. Some neuroscientific techniques are described, but only two studies (Montague's Pepsi Challenge and Lindstrom's 'buyology' experiment) are reported in any detail to demonstrate what they can – and cannot – tell us about the puzzle of the brain and the brand.

A review of the different methodologies available to the marketer today could be useful in its own right, as it would allow for more informed choice and less wastage of resources. Unfortunately, the review included in this book reports several techniques that are – by the author's own admission – unlikely to be useful for marketers (such as single cell recording and transcranial magnetic stimulation), while the account of the methods that are relevant for market research is incomplete. Finally, some techniques that may be particularly interesting for marketers are either not addressed (e.g. electromyography) or dismissed (e.g. skin conductance).

A chapter written by Graham Page, however, partially compensates for this, providing some interesting insight about how neuroscience can successfully be used in today's market research practice. A number of practice-informed tips are given on how

and when to use neuroscience to complement standard market research.

Finally, there is one further important omission in this book – that is, discussion of the importance of well-designed experiments. Du Plessis repeatedly makes the point that one cannot just stick participants in a scanner and hope to end up with any useful insight. This statement is certainly true, but it applies to every single research methodology; it is vital to ask

the right questions in the right way if we want to obtain any useful answers.

Overall, *The Branded Mind* contains interesting insights across a range of topics, and does raise some interesting questions. However, it might leave some readers more confused about the puzzle of the brain and the brand than they were before.

Jane Leighton and Silvia Dakvit
Mountainview Learning

EX LIBRIS

Faris Yakob

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Polonius: What do you read my lord?
Hamlet: Words, words, words.

I've always wanted a library.

(I'm aware that *Ex Libris* technically means from the book of, but it can also mean from the library of.)

A library with musty leather bound books and one of those ladders on wheels.

Not Borges' Babel, just a place to house the bodies of the books I have known and loved.

That's one of the things I love about books in their original conception – they create their own souvenirs, a discarded carapace of content consumed, bones to be picked over and shared, or given away (because whenever you lend someone a book, no matter how largely you write your name on the frontispiece, you know, deep down, that you have just given that book away).

To bastardise Philip Larkin, books are where we live, where we come from. As a teenager, your record collection was perhaps a more telling indication of who you are, but as an adult, your books define you, or who you want to be. This is the gist of this column, I imagine: ask about the books to get directional hints at the mind or the man. Or the practitioner, perhaps more saliently.

What books, then, would *you* choose to *define you*? For the English among you, it's very like *Desert Island Discs*: a challenge to represent the inestimable depth and complexity that is you and your subjective aesthetic, in all its glory, in a very small number of cultural referents.

To whit, we should begin, so let's start with something pretentious.

First up I summon forth what is commonly accepted to be one of most

complex of the great works of poetry – *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot. Recently re-released in an excellent iPad edition, Eliot’s postmodern challenge to the reader revels in its obscurity; every line opens up more possibilities and associations, which I have always been smitten by. The idea that a text should create more meanings, not define any absolutely, and allude meta-textually to the culture it grows from, has always been part of how I think about the dense, generative expressions of advertising.

From self-aggrandising high culture, to high culture wrapped in low: comic books.

So much of my understanding of myth and how myth operates in culture is a function of reading about superheroes. That said, from my bookshelf with delusions of grandeur I offer up the entirety of *The Sandman* by Neil Gaiman (http://www.neil-gaiman.com/p/Cool_Stuff/Essays/Essays_About_Neil/The_Sandman_Summary). Widely accepted to be one of the greatest comic book series of all time, and one of the lynchpin works that established literary credibility for the genre, its recombinant intermingling of disparate myth and popular culture, and ability to weave multi-stranded narratives that are both personal and alien, remain unparalleled.

(BONUS: Also read *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud, a wonderful exploration of the literary theory of ‘sequential art’ and one of the possible reasons that Scott ended up writing a comic book about the launch of the Google Chrome Browser, which I may have worked on.)

As a literary-type person, I also harboured a desire to be great novelist. Perhaps I still do, but I don’t think I have yet achieved the right mode for long-form fiction, as much as I regard it and, as I get older, I find myself stereotypically veering towards more non-fiction. That said, I stand by my favourite novel of all time: *Stone Junction* by Jim Dodge, ‘alchemical potboiler’, a postmodern psychedelic journey of discovery around the fringes of society, something that inspires the soul to ask questions and peer behind curtains.

(BONUS: *Stone Junction* also reminds of my favourite novel as a teenager, *Lux the Poet* by Martin Millar, which I had completely forgotten about until last week, because it is set against a backdrop of the Brixton riots in 1985.)

As I get older I find myself growing into all the clichés and reading more non-fiction, especially popular science. The book that began it all was, I think, *Genome: The Autobiography of a Species in 23 Chapters* by Matt Ridley.

It was this book that reminded me that, at one point, I wanted to be some kind of genetic engineer and was obsessed with recombinant processes. Since I have been espousing a combinatorial conception of creativity for some time, I feel I should mention *Ideas Are New Combinations* by James Webb Young, and then probably *Where Good Ideas Come From* by Steven Johnson for good measure.

My brain has always shunned useful information for trivia, and Bill Bryson’s *A Short History of Nearly Everything* is incredibly long AND has so many beautiful bits of trivia crammed into every page it deserves endless re-reading.

A book that had such a great impact on how I think about the brave new digital world and the people in it that I ended up teaching on the author's postgraduate course and writing the preface to the Brazilian edition mustn't be ignored: *Convergence Culture* by Henry Jenkins. Henry is one of the pre-eminent media theorists of our time, both as fan and academic, and his understanding of participatory culture is required reading for anyone hoping to understand behaviour and motivation in communities online.

(Bonus: So are *Here Comes Everybody* and *Cognitive Surplus* by Clay Shirky. I didn't write the preface to those, though.)

Speaking of behaviour, in a business built entirely around the hopeful modification of such, nothing delights me more than our recent adoption of behavioural economics as a cause célèbre. My favourite text is *Stumbling on Happiness* by Dan Gilbert, which charmingly reminds us how bad we are at predicting anything, especially what will make us happy.

(Bonus: Also do read *Predictably Irrational* by Dan Ariely, and *How We Decide* by Jonah Lehrer, and my most recent favourite in this general area, *Everything is Obvious** (*Once you Know the Answer) by Duncan Watts.)

While we should look outside ourselves for inspiration, we should also be aware of the tradition we operate within. To that end, the key texts for advertising are numerous but you should be fine with *Truth Lies and Advertising* by Jon Steel, the only book about planning you need to read, and *The Ubiquitous Persuaders*, by George

Parker, a proper history of modern advertising, which sparkles with love and hatred in equal measure, and the planning blog that started a lot of other planning blogs, Russell Davies's excellent *We Are As Disappointed as You*.

(Bonus: *Consumerology* by Philip Graves will help those of you that suspect all market research is wrong with evidence to support your supposition.)

Finally, the book that has touched me most in recent times, the one that I hear in my head most often when dealing with reality, the one I am most often inclined to send to friends, is called *This is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life* by David Foster Wallace, which I genuinely believe everyone would benefit from reading, and the world would benefit if everyone did.

(Bonus: Also attempt the mountain that is his magnum opus *Infinite Jest*, if only for the gag about sponsoring the years, which leads to dates like The Year of the Whopper and The Tucks Medicated Pad.)

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