

Book Reviews

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Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies

Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff (2008)
Harvard Business School Press, £16.99
DOI: 10.2501/S0265048708080347

Man is a naturally gregarious animal.

It is the very essence of human beings: doing things together defines us. It's why we have such large frontal lobes: modelling human behaviour in groups is recursive and quite amazingly complicated. I have to consider how what I do affects you and how that affects her and how that affects you and I, and so on, ad infinitum, a *mise en abyme* of cause and effect endlessly reflecting back on each other. It's why we have language: it allows us to more effectively act in groups, making us better at hunting than all that's red in tooth and claw.

One of the most interesting aspects of the emergence of the suite of communication technologies that sit under the banner of Web 2.0 is the erosion of the boundaries to group formation: groups can appear almost instantaneously and be made up of people from all over the world. The technology facilitates group formation and makes the groups both visible and powerful.

The primacy of the atomised

individual that has characterised western society thus far is being slowly replaced by an understanding of the collective. As a result, a number of books published recently have looked at the power of internet-enabled groups. *Here Comes Everybody* by Clay Shirky looks at the cultural changes being wrought by people working together outside established organisational structures. Mark Earls' *Herd* looks at the influence that other people have on our behaviour. *Crowdsourcing* by Jeff Howe looks at how companies have been leveraging these groups by outsourcing business functions via an open call.

Into the midst of these comes *Groundswell*, by Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff, two Forrester analysts who expanded a Forrester report into a guide for managers desperately seeking guidance in a world they no longer understand.

Despite hammering the word *groundswell* slightly too often in the first few chapters, and the endless references back to their social technographics survey (a version of which you can access on their website, <http://www.forrester.com/Groundswell>), there's a lot to recommend about the book.

It demonstrates a clear understanding of how things have changed, and provides a simple primer for all social

media technologies although, as it points out, it's not the technologies that matter so much as the emergent behaviours they engender and the relationships they enable. It has an excellent framework for developing strategies to respond to and leverage the groundswell, reminding you to understand your audience before considering the technologies. It features lots of interesting case studies, from classics such as Jeff Jarvis's Dell Hell to the more obscure, such as Bell Canada deploying social media internally to harness better its own employees' brainpower.

As the authors point out, you need to know about this stuff. It's not going to go away and it is going to affect your business. The very nature of advertising is changing in response to an audience that can create and propagate ideas. You really want the groundswell to embrace your communication. Paid-for media is only a way to begin a conversation that needs to continue in social media, where attention is earned not bought. The ideas that replicate via social media generate endless free impressions for the brand and demonstrate the cultural resonance of the idea at the same time. Every agency needs someone who understands this. Ideally everyone should understand this, but that will take time.

I saw a young lady on the street reading the book while I was preparing to write this review and asked her what she thought. Her eyes lit up. She described it as an epiphany and had resolved to become the 'groundswell champion' within her organisation, which is certainly a good idea.

However, to really understand social media, it's not enough to read a book: you need to live it.

So, if you've you have never blogged or used a wiki or poked someone on Facebook or pulled an RSS feed or tagged something on del.icio.us then, by all means, read *Groundswell*. But once you have, or even before you finish, start participating with actual social media, try out the new behaviours, build relationships with real people online, and learn by doing.

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Managing creative people: lessons in leadership for the ideas economy

Gordon Torr (2008)

John Wiley & Sons, £14.99

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People interested in advertising and creativity in advertising should read this book. Gordon Torr is a real creative person (usually calling an agency's department 'creative' is either a vain hope or an empty promise) who has thought deeply about his work.

He has gone beyond his experience to explore the literature. At the least, you will learn a lot of history, art, heavy science, management, economics and advertising. Of course, he ends with his own prescription for ‘managing’ creative people. But it is based on others’ solid work as well as his own. Most important, it is illuminated by his passionate love for advertising creativity and scorn for those who try to teach people how to be creative.

The book centres on two questions: ‘Who are these creative people?’ and ‘In what kind of environment might they flourish?’

Torr says that people are creative or not. Others may be intelligent or talented or problem solvers, but that is not creativity. Creative people are different from most of the rest of us. They are passionate about work. They work best alone. Eccentric about dress or the press of daily time, but meticulous about work, driven and yet expecting the flash of novelty. That flash may come from unexpected sources. And they need recognition; this kind of work is quite lonely. This could explain the importance of awards for creativity. Torr draws heavily on the work of Amabile here and afterwards.

The environment needed for creativity (without guaranteeing it) is a demarcated area to work in, without the interference of account people or clients. They will need protection so that they can perform their work without the strictures of bureaucratic *ordnung*. A good environment is usually non-competitive (Amabile again). They will need patrons to provide the necessary time, income and encouragement

to carry out the work. And they must have a vibrant outer world, the buzz of which is a fertile source of inspiration. That environment will include many different kinds of people (including immigrants and gays), and be politically stable but ever changing. Think of 16th-century Florence or New York in the 1960s.

What it comes down to is that creativity is something that comes from the body and brain together. (I think Torr would reject Descartes’ idea that the body and brain are separate entities.) Some people have that ‘something’; most do not. Creative people are not to be ‘managed’; rather they should be left to work in a separate, quiet work environment nestled in a city full of lights and buzz. It helps if there are others who appreciate their work.

The book is much richer than this brief squib can describe. This guy is smart and undoubtedly creative himself. The book is the work of an individual. And, yet, his conclusions explain many of the complaints and needs of other truly creative people.

I see two flaws in the book (the first of which is central to Torr’s argument). Torr denies ‘creativity’ to anyone who isn’t creative. Wait a moment. There are times in which *many* people are creative once in a while, who for a second or two have the flash. Perhaps not with the regularity he describes, but nearly every one is briefly creative at times. Torr would dismiss this as problem-solving or an extension of talent or skill. Don’t deny us, the uncreative hordes, of our tiny moments of glory.

The very minor flaw touches academic readers. Despite the array of

resources on which he draws, Torr hasn't peeked at the work of academic marketing researchers. There is some rich stuff there, much of it without too much jargon. Some of it has appeared in this journal. But this is only a quibble.

Summary: the book is worth reading. You may accept much of it; you *will* reject some. But it will be a dizzying ride over hills, through tunnels, and sometimes on a rollercoaster. Try it.

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Branded Entertainment – Product Placement and Brand Strategy in the Entertainment Business

Jean-Marc Lehu (2007)

Kogan Page, £25

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Jean-Marc Lehu's *Branded Entertainment* dispels the notion that product placement is 'one thing'. In a comprehensive, accessible and detailed review of academic and industry sources, Lehu shows that the placement business is complex and varied in its practices and sweeping in its scope, including novels, plays, computer games, the internet and indeed all entertainment and communication forms, as well as the old placement staples of movies and television. Not only that, but the sheer weight of examples shows that entertainment and brand management act in a mutually dependent cycle that is, in many cases, embedded in the crea-

tive development of entertainment vehicles. Incidentally, this leaves the practice far beneath the radar of government regulators.

So, this book is salutary at a time when the UK's television broadcasting regulatory body Ofcom, and even senior ministers such as Culture Secretary Andy Burnham,¹ seem to be very confused about what product placement is. Canute-like declarations that British television should not sell its integrity by allowing paid-for placements look thoroughly naive in the light of Lehu's insider explanation of the creative, financial and brand management imperatives driving the rapid diversion of advertising budgets away from spot advertising into engineered brand presence in mediated entertainment. Brand placements that jar on the viewer are usually the result of flawed brand strategy or poor liaison between the studio, prop masters, writers and brand representatives, and tend to attract scathing comments from reviewers and audience bloggers. Many of Lehu's examples of classic placements were, in contrast, hardly noticed as placements, being intrinsic to the dramatic scene. Industry wisdom holds that, regardless of what post-exposure recall or brand attitude scores seem to suggest, the best placements are the ones that are part of the storytelling.

The virtue of this book is that it brings so many academic sources and practical examples together in a well-written and highly readable form. Its emphasis is managerial and it does not

¹ http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/minister_speeches/5192.aspx, accessed 28 August 2008.

offer new theorisations on the topic. The discussion on ethics and regulation is a little thin, and the book is filled out with some extended interviews with industry experts, which are insightful but subjective. Neither does the book discuss socio-cultural accounts of brands in entertainment. Arguably, branded entertainment is the very epitome of cultural branding, and consequently it needs an intellectual entry point from the liberal arts and critical social sciences.

But the managerial and descriptive emphasis of the book reflects the managerial bias of most published academic work on product placement. Lehu concedes that no one really knows why seeing brands in entertainment vehicles seems to be such a resonant and compelling experience for so many consumers. The rise of dramatic realism in movies and television since the 1960s means that brands are necessary for dramatic verisimilitude. Even today, the majority of brands in entertainment vehicles are

there at the wish of the director, not the brand. Of course, this is part of the appeal, as what can be more authentic in the media age than for a brand to be an icon in an iconic movie? Lehu describes the sophisticated attempts the industry has made to quantify the benefits of placements, but, as with the entertainment business itself, there is something in product placement that defies logical explanation because it is more art than science.

As an academic reference book and a source of managerial insight into today's brand management scene, Lehu's book stands out in the field. It is essential reading for product placement and advertising researchers, brand managers, advertising and communication professionals, and indeed for anyone with an interest in the fascinating history of creativity's incestuous relationship with commerce.

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John Griffiths

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It's strange how picking your best books feels more like a little bereavement. You become aware of how of the books that are being put to one side have become trusted friends. And, having run a website for seven years now, which has featured on average one book review a month, there are plenty to choose from. It's just that the best

has to be put ahead of the very fine – of which there is plenty these days.

Let me postpone the agony by going back to when I was starting out. I don't remember many business books that weren't textbooks of one kind or another. Now books are being written for people in business not people trying to get in. 'Top of my beginners'

list would have to be *The Mind of the Strategist* by Kenichi Ohmae (1991), which I've read at least three times. I was brought up in Japan, so am prone to pick up books marrying American business nous with Japanese artifice. This was my first introduction to value engineering – how you improve products by taking something out that makes learning to use them easier and reduces the possibility of error. I was just starting work as an advertising planner and it was this book that made me resolve to keep going and to find new territories to strategise in once I had acquired a working knowledge in each area. Ohmae's perspective is vast, but his insights are immediately applicable. While I am on the subject of the Japanese I would commend books by Nonaka like *The Knowledge Creating Company* (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1995), which taught me Informatics, and *Relentless* (Johansson & Nonaka 1997), which explains how the Japanese do category marketing.

I've always been drawn to writers who use fiction to make their point and *The Goal* and its sequels by Eliyahu Goldratt (e.g. Goldratt & Cox 1993) is an improbable tale about a man who saves his job, his factory and his company (oh, and also his marriage) by discovering and practising the theory of constraints. When so much business practice is presented in books as linear and rational, increasing productivity by shutting down machines was the kind of counter-intuitive thinking that energised me then, and still does.

While I'm on the subject of fiction, can I plug C.S. Forester and the Hornblower books (e.g. Forester 1989),

which are such a brilliant psychological study of a man wedded to his work – basically Jane Austen for boys, with cannon fire instead of wedding bells to close every tome. I have also become a devotee of Adam Hall's Quiller spy novels (e.g. Hall 2004). Quiller is a self-confessed 'ferret' who is sent down the rabbit hole, whose ability to operate is driven as much by what he doesn't know as what he is briefed to do. There is always a struggle with control and London, and at every stage he has to decide if his own people are really behind him or are about to throw him to the dogs. Perfect bedtime reading if you work in an advertising agency.

My next nomination would be *Wired* magazine; I was a subscriber to the UK edition until it was closed down when the dotcoms crashed in 2000 and I was relegated to reading the US-produced west coast version. *Wired* is the point of reference for US techno-utopians. Through *Wired* I discovered Stewart Brand long before he started writing about virtual communities and the use of mobile phones. And I discovered William 'cyberspace' Gibson and the Neuromancer books (e.g. Gibson 1995). The west coast imagination is important because what the geeks read they try to make happen – some fiction really shapes the world.

Now to the upper slopes and the classics. Classics can go one of two ways. They can change the world so fundamentally that reading them a few years later they become commonplace. They changed the course of a river but now they look like just another part of the riverbed. I think Peppers and Rogers' *The One-to-one Future* (1996)

suffered from this. Extraordinary to recall that they wrote it before email was a mass medium, so they had to demonstrate relationship marketing using fax machines. I suspect that the Chris Anderson's *The Long Tail* (2007) – the big hit of last year (irony fully intended) – will go the same way. Simple and elegant, and too obvious to continue to be revolutionary. But I would commend John Grant's *The New Marketing Manifesto*, written in 2000 long before Web 2.0 and co-creation became a business mantra, but that still has new things to say. It didn't change the world, but neatly anticipated it. I hope he does it again with *The Green Marketing Manifesto* (2007).

Then *The Hidden Power of Advertising* (2001) by Robert Heath – what amounts to a long paper in the dullest cover available only on a website for £40. The closest thing to a landmine in the advertising world because even those who have tried hardest to debunk it have had to rearrange the landscape to make their own viewpoints tenable. The pre/post-Heath fault line seems to me to be a much more important one than the advent of neuro-marketing with its polygraphs and paraphernalia.

Research books tend to stodge – method heavy without much insight into what makes people tick. Paco Underhill's *Why We Buy* (2004) is a glorious exception. He makes the business of ethnography interesting in the way that Desmond Morris made people-watching fashionable. But Underhill also gives away a lot of the methodology behind it as well. The best research book I have read recently is *The User is Always Right* by

Steve Mulder and Ziv Yaar (2006), which explains how to build personas – customer profiles defined by behaviours and goals. Essential for running internet businesses, personas are, I believe, going to become hugely influential as a broader business tool. This book talked me into it. Demographics and attitudes can only take you so far.

Parting shots from the last year: *Analog in, Digital Out* by Brendan Dawes (2006) shows what can be done when an interactive designer is as hot at writing code as generating creative ideas. And I'll close with *Wizard* (2005), as the mercurial Stephen Brown unpacks the Harry Potter phenomenon as a series of linked but unrelated narratives – the most interesting take I have read in a very long time about how to grow great brands. That's me done – now how many friends have I lost?

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