



MARKETING STAR



Seth Godin: Author, Speaker, Blogger, and Marketing Visionary

[By Anique Gonzalez]

Marketers are liars... The only way to be effective with customers is by gaining their permission to market to them first... Purple cows are of the utmost importance in all business endeavors... So says author and marketer Seth Godin. While the latter statements may at first glance appear to be random and unproven avenues by which to achieve any type of business accomplishment, Godin has made a name for himself by showing that approaching business decisions with this attitude is the only way to succeed in this ever-evolving and increasingly challenging corporate landscape.

Godin, author of 11 books, graduated from Tufts University with degrees in computer science and philosophy, and later went on to obtain his MBA in marketing from Stanford. After working as a brand manager in the 80s for Spinnaker Software, he later founded his own online marketing company, Yoyodyne. The company, which aimed to teach high-level clients such as AT&T and Volvo how to approach and market to clients only after gaining their permission first, was eventually bought by Yahoo! in 1998.

This belief, that marketers must gain permission before marketing to potential customers, is based on the assertion that the consumers of the present have much more power than consumers of the past. According to Godin, in the past 50 years the number of products available to consumers has skyrocketed, making them realize that they hold the power in the marketplace. Consequently, previous marketing techniques that relied heavily on advertising have stopped working because consumers are no longer paying attention.

In order to combat this trend, then, marketers must obtain consent from consumers before they send them their messages. This permission, it is thought, in tandem with the fact that the product or service is remarkable, will generate positive word of mouth. And as for that "remarkable," Godin means that the product or service not only lives up to the expectations of consumers but also has additional offerings that are included as well. Brands that achieve this are "remarkable,"

and are what Godin terms "purple cows," or products that stand out.

Godin elaborates: "Purple cow describes something phenomenal, something counterintuitive and exciting and flat out unbelievable. Every day, consumers come face to face with a lot of boring stuff — a lot of brown cows — but you can bet they won't forget a purple cow."

Interestingly, Godin first gained popularity with his book about permission marketing, *Permission Marketing: Turning Strangers Into Friends and Friends Into Customers*. "By talking only to volunteers, permission marketing guarantees that consumers pay more attention to the marketing message. It serves both customers and marketers in a symbiotic exchange," he says.

After serving as vice president of permission marketing at Yahoo! for a time, Godin founded Squidoo in 2005. The site makes it possible for anyone to create their own web page based on whatever topic they are familiar with or enjoy. This is then used to recommend and promote other content related to the specific topic on the Internet.

Today, Godin still oversees Squidoo, authors a blog, and has released eleven books espousing his marketing principles and beliefs, each one a tremendous success. *Purple Cow: Transform Your Business by Being Remarkable*, for instance, was a *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* bestseller; *Unleashing the Ideavirus* continues to be the most popular ebook ever written; and *All Marketers Are Liars: The Power of Telling*

Authentic Stories in a Low-Trust World was listed on the Amazon Top 100.

The success of Godin's companies, his books, and his career can be directly attributed to the fact that he has approached his business endeavors in the same way he believes that all marketers should. He has acknowledged that gaining the attention of consumers cannot be expected and that their power supersedes that of marketers, and thus has tailored his promotions accordingly. He understands that marketers need to be more than honest in their communications with consumers — they need to tell stories that people want to hear. "Successful marketers don't talk about features or even benefits. Instead, they tell a story. A story we want to believe," Godin explains.

Finally, Godin has strived to create buzz in the marketplace by only creating remarkable products and services. After all, this is the only way to get consumers to talk about a product. If, and only if, consumers are invested in the idea that is represented by a given product or service, will they be willing to promote it amongst themselves, aiding its success. "Once an idea is in the hands of people who care about its success, it may be lucky enough to benefit from digitally augmented word of mouth. I call this an ideavirus. Modern ideas spread online and off, and this is faster and more effective than the old-fashioned centralized way of selling," he says.

Above all else, however, Godin "believes that it's possible to enjoy your job, to do the right



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thing, to be transparent, to give more than you get, and to be successful, all at the same time.”

ON THE NET

Seth Godin

Permission Marketing: Turning Strangers Into Friends and Friends Into Customers

He not only believes it, but has proven that it is true.

Seth Godin's Blog

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