

## BOOK REVIEW

# THE CONTAGIOUS COMMANDMENTS TEN STEPS TO BRAND BRAVERY

Author: Paul Kemp-Robertson and Chris Barth  
Penguin Random House UK, 2018  
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### OVERVIEW

The changing consumer is a major catalyst for change in the marketing and advertising industry. In these times of disruption and transformation in markets, it is important to find a creative guideline for marketers to keep their brands relevant to the consumer. The book, *The Contagious Commandments, Ten Steps to Brand Bravery*, is an interesting choice, recommended by top names in the advertising industry, such as Mark Tutssel, Executive Chairman and Chief Creative Officer of Leo Burnett Worldwide. It has also been featured in major marketing and advertising events such as the Global Marketer Week (2015), ADFest Asia 2019, and Cannes Creative Leaders Program (2019). In addition, The Independent newspaper, dubbed it a manual for change, for advertising agencies and brand owners.

Co-author, Paul Kemp-Robertson, is

the co-founder of Contagious, a business intelligence resource, which aims to consult clients to create campaigns that will spread like wildfire. It is the goal of Contagious to assist their clients in the development of a competitive edge that would navigate them through the challenging marketing landscape. The book takes on the same mission as the company behind it, in providing recommendations on how to create compelling campaigns that are infectious and contribute to the bottom line of the firm. Kemp-Robertson, is a well known figure in the advertising industry. Prior to the founding of Contagious, he worked for the leading advertising publication Shots, before joining Leo Burnett as worldwide director of creative resources. Chris Barth is lead strategist at Contagious. Before joining Contagious, he wrote for Forbes, where he produced the Steve Forbes' "Intelligent Investing" interview series.

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## REVIEW

In *The Contagious Commandments, Ten Steps to Brand Bravery*, the book presents a guideline for developing brands in this age of disruption. The authors explain that contagious ideas must be creative and inspired by sincere empathy with customers. The book's ten chapters have been divided into two parts – creating culture (5 chapters) and making it happen (5 chapters). The book is developed based on the authors' decade long experiences in writing, speaking, and thinking about changes in marketing. The authors have distilled a “set of principles and provocations to make brands fit for the future” (p.8).

As aforementioned the book has 10 chapters, starting with the first step in brand building, *Having an Organizing Principle* and ending with the critical aspects of turning ideas into reality, *Be Brave*. In each chapter, the authors draw on their experience by elaborating on case studies, relevant academic and scientific research, and an *Expresso Version* section at the end. This section is the “essence distilled into a short, sharp hit” (p.10) for readers to get the gist of the chapter in just two minutes focusing on the core ideas and key takeaways. The *Expresso Version* also features diagrams, checklists, and questions to facilitate understanding, as well as helping to apply the concepts and put them into practice. For instance, in Chapter 4, *Align with Behavior*, the authors explain that consumer behavior could be better understood by breaking it down into actions, values, and interests. Each aspect is followed by two questions, which “focus on two things: what

customers are doing, and how a brand can help them to do those things” (p. 110). In addition, the authors include a list of recommended further reading (pp. 267 – 270), which the authors recommend as providing the strategic insight necessary to compete in the world of marketing.

The chapters in the book can be presented as follows:

Part I, *Creating a Culture*, starts with the basic steps in brand building – developing a vision, ensuring a customer focus, understanding the consumers, aligning the brand with consumer behavior, and being socially responsible. The emphasis of Part I is the development of strategy, thus the *Expresso Version* section ends with a checklist. For instance, at the end of Chapter 1, *Having an Organizing Principle*, the checklist includes whether the organizing principle or vision is authentic, unique, and relevant (p.38).

Part II, *Making it Happen*, covers the crafting of the implementation of the strategy. It starts with the advice to learn quickly from mistakes, focus on customer experience, open co-creation opportunities with customers, strengthen trust, and embrace creativity bravely. As a result, the *Expresso Version* section ends with questions that help marketers to develop implementation plans. For instance, at the end of Chapter 7, *Prioritize Experience Over Innovation*, the *Expresso Version* concludes with three questions to initiate the development of customer focused experiences. One of the questions is “How can you invite people to feel or live your products or service?” (p.188).

## COMMENTS

The authors make a compelling case on how branding must transform offers to better serve consumers. Throughout the book the authors stay true to their focus on creative communication, and having empathy with consumers. For instance, in Chapter 1, *Have an Organizing Principle*, the authors cite the case of the Beer Bottle Sand Machine in New Zealand as a solution to reducing sand mining, which disrupts ecosystems by recycling beer bottles. In Chapter 3, *Ask Heretical Questions*, the authors present the case of the turnaround campaign of Domino's Pizza, where the brand responded to a video scandal of the brand, by showing angry fans who came back to love the company after tasting the new pizza developed from their complaints. In Chapter 6, *Join the 5% Club*, the authors also present a discussion, covering both sides of the argument regarding the creation of innovation labs (pp. 146 – 147).

However, the attempt to provide numerous case studies to clearly illustrate the points in each chapter from as many angles as possible, reduces the depth of understanding of each particular case. For instance, in Chapter 10, *Be Brave*, the authors explain the case of BrewDog, a rebellious craft beer company (pp. 256 – 257). However, beyond the case write up, there are no references that can assist readers, who are interested to find out more about the brand. Interested readers would be required to do their own Google Search to find out more.

The strength of the book lies in the effort taken to simplify concepts and

develop practical guidelines for marketers. Marketers can use the *Expresso Version* as a planning tool in brand building, marketing strategy development, and implementation. For instance, in Chapter 10, *Be Brave* the authors provide the Fit for Future Now diagram, calling marketers to be brave, take the risk to defy conventions, and stand out from the crowd (p.258).

Another strength of the book is in the comprehensiveness in presenting snapshots of the advertising and marketing industry. To illustrate their points the authors draw on their experience, interviews with experts, research from leading universities, books, and popular culture. For instance, Chapter 5, *Be Generous*, opens with “vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity, relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money”, quote blasting Goldman Sachs by the *Rolling Stone*, magazine (p.111). This quote hooks the attention of readers on to the main idea of the chapter that it is not just the dollar value that matters. The authors want the focus to be on solving the “pain points” or facilitating the moments of joy in the lives of consumers. In Chapter 7, *Prioritize Experience Over Innovation*, the authors quote research from Cornell and the *Journal of Experimental Psychology* to illustrate the importance of experience in leading to preference for a brand.

### **Why it is better to read**

The book provides a good review of changes in the advertising and marketing industry over the past ten years. The

cases, research, and other references date from 2009 to 2018.

Firstly, the authors make a compelling case of how branding must transform offers. The work is compelling because the examples cited are from major brands like Airbnb, Domino's Pizza, Adidas, Nike, and many more in the same league. The countries from which the cases are drawn run the gamut from the US, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Thus, it can be said that their call for a change in brand building strategy is not a phenomenon limited to any certain market, but a trend that is sweeping across the globe. The guidelines they propose have been developed from a know-how that spans multiple markets cutting across different cultures, and thus is a tool which can serve marketers across the globe.

Secondly, the authors clearly explain each of the concepts for each chapter, followed by case studies, and a summary at the end of the chapter (*Expresso Version*). The authors present the content in an easy to understand logical manner. In their own words the authors wrote "To aid the time crunched reader, we have presented each commandment in two versions: latte and expresso" (p.10). They also provided frameworks, tools, and diagrams which makes it easier for marketers to implement their recommendations.

Lastly, the authors have written about the important trends that are shaping the world. The ideas presented in the book are thought provoking, and are important for marketers, who need to navigate the disruptive future. The book provides inspiration for marketers to strive to improve their businesses to

better serve their customers, inevitably making the world a better place.

## CONCLUSION

This book would help to set marketers in the right direction for shaping their company in the face of the rapid changes of the future. The authors do this by pointing out the important changes in consumer behavior and the corresponding responses of brands that have successfully transformed their offerings. As the authors point out that brands must "identify the pain points in the customer journey, and provide solutions, services, facilities, information or experience to solve or ease them. This is a different, more empathetic mindset to the traditional advertising approach that adopts an almost militaristic approach to communicating a message to consumers; which probably explains why words like campaign, target, bombard, guerilla, penetration, and stealth are common in the standard marketing dictionary." (p.7).

In a way reading this book would help marketers save time and remain abreast of the top industry stories in the past decade. The book provides many examples of how successful brands broke through their problems and became revitalized.

Although the emphasis of the book is on branding, it also provides advice on how brands should budget and plan for research and development, while not forgetting the importance of people in the organization.

At its best, this book provides a good comprehensive guideline for marketers, who want to transform their

organization. It does not dwell on theories but carefully cites research to back up the arguments posed. As explained by Ian Wilson, Senior Director of Global Digital Marketing Development at Heineken, the book provides a guideline on how to create communications that capture the imagination of consumers.

At the very least, the book is full of interesting case studies that would inspire marketers of the need to change. For those who enjoy reading about the developments in advertising and marketing, it is an interesting read. In addition, for those who want to learn more, they can follow up on the case studies presented in the book or look up the Contagious website for more interesting trends and updates.

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