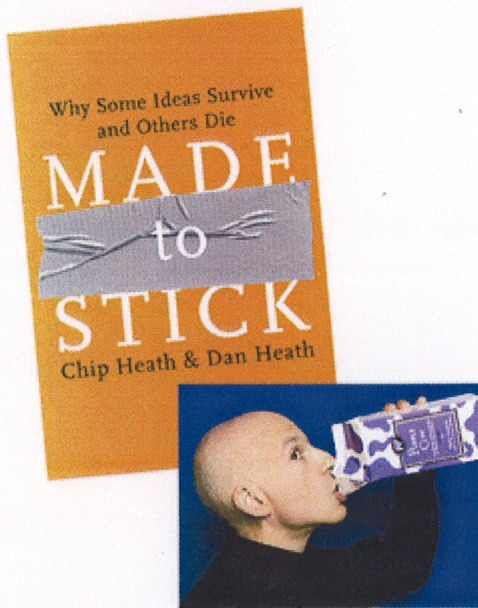


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Developing concepts that stick

Jul 1, 2009 12:00 PM, By Andrea Syverson



No doubt you've seen the business book *Made To Stick* by the Heath brothers, thanks largely to its can't-miss bright orange cover and duct tape. Or you might remember Seth Godin's book *Purple Cow*, packaged for a limited time in a milk carton.

In the sea of boring business books, these two garnered both reader attention and sales. As skillful merchants and marketers, these authors took unconventional approaches to standing out on the shelves and getting their messages heard. It paid off.

Years later, these titles are still going strong. But it wasn't just about the duct tape and the milk carton or about being sticky and clever. It started with these writers knowing what their readers wanted and being sure that their products delivered or overdelivered in every aspect.

Dan and Chip Heath and Seth Godin realized that their books were indeed **products** and that they had to be mindful of each and every aspect of these products **the relevance and quality of the editorial message, the pricing, the promotions, the channels, and, yes, the packaging.** These writers are also masterful merchants.

Products have jobs to do for your customers and for your brand. Being **outcome based** is the job of every merchant. Merchandisers know that it's all about the details behind the product, inside the product and all around the product.

Extraordinary merchants know they must advocate for the brand promise at every product decision point. This outcome-based merchandising stick-to-itiveness is what creates loyal customers.

From A to Z, here are a few examples from across a wide spectrum of product categories that demonstrate a merchant's pertinacity for thinking through what the customer hopes to gain from buying these products.

AS WE CHANGE

Started years ago by two forty-something women for other forty-something women, As We Change is a solution-focused business. One issue top of mind for this age group is diet ♦ not fads concerning money-making bestsellers based on one food group, but real day-to-day practical weight control.

For instance, the company offers a ♦Perfect Portions Diet Dish♦ for \$30 with which you can organize your food accordingly and take it with you to the office or pop it in the freezer. Very practical. Very helpful. Also, very on brand.

AMERICAN GIRL

After the seven-year-old has been given the historical dolls and the modern dolls, the mix-and-match clothes, the accessories and the storybooks, what else could a little girl possibly need? The merchants at American Girl continue to think through everything a young girl might dream about when it comes to play ♦ and real life!

The category that most impresses me is ♦Doll Care,♦ for when a child's doll might need a little TLC. American Girl offers a \$30 Doll Wheelchair and a \$26 ♦Feel Better Kit♦ that contains realistic crutches, ice pack, casts and even sports injury tips for the girls.

CHERYL & CO.

Want to celebrate a friend's birthday but just can't be there in person? Send a festive Birthday Party in a Box filled with over 20 pieces of cake, cookies and candy for only \$39.95. The merchants at Cheryl & Co. know that celebrating special occasions with food brings joy whether you deliver it in person or not. They make it easy.

DELIA'S

Delia's merchants understand that teen girls come in all shapes and sizes, so in addition to organizing the company's jeans by skinny, flare, boot cut and destroyed (yes, already ripped and patched!), they also display them by inseam and take another variable out of the guess work of sizing. Delia's also knows that there are other things on teens' minds besides fashion, and has a whole section dedicated to scholarships. Delia's gets teens.

GOOSEBERRY PATCH

The founders of this company started it from a conversation across their backyard fences in 1984. Gooseberry Patch delivers practical yet charming country store goods to their customers all across America. The two founders are still actively involved in product creation, and they have a loyal following for their cookbooks.

Knowing how unwieldy cookbooks can create clutter in a kitchen without bookshelves, the cataloger has developed just the right size Wire Utility Baskets that hold these Gooseberry Patch cookbooks on a counter top. And with today's customer so focused on value, the company has also started offering two-in-one cookbooks.

HIGH COUNTRY GARDENS

The folks behind this brand are passionate gardeners, and they do an excellent job of sharing both their enthusiasm and expertise throughout their catalog pages and their Website. Both are chock-full of what Tom Peters calls ♦gaspworthy♦ plants.

High Country Gardens does realize that not all their customers can dedicate full-time energy to this avocation ♦ even though they may desire the outcome of a beautiful garden. So it offers products such as preplanned ♦Gardens in a Box♦ or ♦Basil in a Bag.♦ Bite-size gardens for those with light green thumbs.

J. CREW

This apparel cataloger/retailer may be lucky enough to be outfitting the presidential family, but it hasn't forgotten its core customers ♦ and their tighter wallets these days. J. Crew's Website has a lengthy section called Instant Gratification ♦ an edited collection of their product line (from shoes to accessories to separates) all priced under \$100. Quick, convenient, relevant and affordable.

PERUVIAN CONNECTION


Each article of clothing, whether it's a Silk Forest Bamboo Dress or a Pima Cotton Anatolian Kimono from this brand, is a true work of art and often a conversation starter for the wearer. Peruvian Connection doesn't stop there, however.

It goes on to tempt its customers with a section called ♦Finishing Touches♦ that creates both a significant upsell opportunity for them (\$159 for a Beaded Paisley Silk Clutch or \$259 for Abalone & Leather Drop Earrings) and possibly completes an outfit for the customer, saving her from running all over town for just the right complementary accessory.

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