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99 Cows

“moo.”



SETH GODIN

It's okay to [click](#) on the duck.

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For Helene

PICK AND CHOOSE

Please read this eBook quickly. Find examples that resonate with you, and chew 'em up. My goal is to show you a wide range of remarkable stuff—to challenge you to realize that remarkable takes many forms and that if you choose to, you can bring this thinking to your career, your job, your product. This eBook is a sketchbook, not a manual; it's designed to shine some light on the edges. Some of the ideas in this book won't work, can't work, and haven't worked. Others have been huge successes, both commercially and socially.

What they all have in common is that they don't have anything in common. They represent the edges. Stuff to get you going.

Have fun.

INTRODUCTION

I wrote a book once. Actually, it came out in hardcover on May 8, 2003, and you can find it by [clicking here](#).

Purple Cow (that's the book I'm talking about) is all about being remarkable. It's a manifesto about the death of the TV-industrial complex and the rise of truly amazing products, which market themselves with ideaviruses, sneezers, and hives. The challenge of the book is this: Stop trying to slap marketing onto something after it's done. You need to build the marketing into the product experience itself, or you'll never find the time or money it takes to make your offering successful. *If you keep making average products for average people, you're going to fail.*

If you click anywhere on this page, you'll go straight to my Web site, where you can find out about getting a copy of *Purple Cow*. You'll also find three or more free chapters, a witty essay about milk cartons and the first edition of *Purple Cow*, and more.

I hope you'll take a look at the Web site, as it will make the rest of this eBook make more sense.

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I wrote *99 Cows* to help readers of *Purple Cow* see what I mean when I talk about “going to the edges.” Every single story in this eBook is about the edges. These are companies (big and small) and individuals (successful and not-yet-successful) who made the scary choice to be remarkable. As a result of doing something wonderful, out of the ordinary, or just plain weird, they've managed to create a product worth talking about. When I say *remarkable*, I mean just that. It's worth talking about.

The lesson here is simple: It's less risky to be risky. It's not safe to be safe. The most reliable way to succeed today is to stay away from the middle. (There were plenty of supremely cool, really amazing, totally worthwhile companies that were nominated that I didn't choose. The main reason? While they were cool, they weren't remarkable. I didn't think that there was a population of sneezers who would be eager to tell their friends about them.)

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Hey, isn't this stuff obvious?

To put it more bluntly, here's a note from a reader, Gustavo Delarosa:

"I just finished your book and wonder, 'how did you manage to write an entire book on something that can be summed-up in one sentence?' ... I think that I've found my Otaku and it's railing against hacks who make a living through espousing philosophies that don't work in the real world and give unfollowable advice."

Well, I'm the first to agree that the ideas in *Purple Cow* are really simple. Scary simple, in fact. Yet simple doesn't mean widespread. Every year, 75,000 books are published, and 90 percent are boring, safe, average books for average people. And they don't sell. McDonald's is big, but it's not profitable. American Airlines sells to the middle of the market, and they're a total failure from a business perspective.

There's no money left in the middle anymore. Average products for average people are rapidly becoming commodities. Sure, you can get big that way, but you'll make less money and have less fun. *Purple Cow* has just two goals. The first is to convert people who didn't already figure out the simple message. The second is to give the people who "get it" a simple way to teach their friends.

I'm maniacal in my goal of getting you to buy many copies of the hardcover and give them to your friends. Hence this eBook. Easy to forward by email. Cheap. Hopefully you'll find ten or twenty or a hundred colleagues who need to hear about how *remarkable* can make a difference. And maybe, just maybe, they'll pony up a few bucks and buy the real book.

•

One last thought before you get to the stories: Readers of my work will know that I'm relentless in pursuing an agenda of respectful marketing and rational thought. I think we owe consumers of every kind the treatment we'd want for ourselves. And I think that measured, evolving practices always beat superstitious beliefs. That said, I tried very hard not to leave people out of this book just because I disagree with their point of view. So... I don't drive a Hummer, but that doesn't mean it's not remarkable. If I think someone's efforts are Purple Cow-like, that doesn't mean I'm endorsing them or guaranteeing that you'll like what they do. As they say in Detroit, your mileage may vary. Just in case, I threw in a couple of extra Cows. That way you can skip the ones that annoy or offend.

WHAT'S REMARKABLE?

There's a little confusion about this simple word. When I say *remarkable*, I don't mean curious or interesting or just weird or wacko. I mean, as I say in *Purple Cow*, "worth recommending." Not that everyone would recommend it. Just that a special community of people would recommend it to others in their community (or hive, as I call it).

New Coke wasn't remarkable. It was stupid.

Why? Because the people who like Coke like it because it's old-fashioned. They like the tradition of it. This hive of people, especially the vociferous sneezers, had only one response to a marketing message that said "new and improved." They hated it.

"Old Coke" would have been remarkable. Old Coke, in an antique bottle, based on a long-lost original recipe, would have been worth talking about, worth recommending.

Remarkable is in the eye of the beholder. If the target market wants to hear about it and wants to talk about it, then it's remarkable. Then it's a Purple Cow.

A word about links: Every page of this eBook is linked to something on the Web. Usually, it's a page that's relevant to what's being discussed. Sometimes it's not. All the links were working (and interesting) at the time we published (May 8, 2003).

[Buy in bulk](#)

*You can save a lot of money and impress
your colleagues by buying a bunch of
Purple Cow books for the whole crew.*

www.Apurplecow.com

Relevance: 93

(I)

LISTEN (BUT DON'T LOOK)

David Lindley is a killer guitar player. He's universally regarded as a major talent. He's recorded with Bonnie Raitt, Jackson Browne, Bruce Hornsby, and a host of other musicians. But so have plenty of other guitarists.

David also wears brightly colored polyester clothes from the early 1970s. In patterns that do not match.

And at the concert I attended, he brought no less than a dozen different stringed instruments along, most of a sort I'd never seen before.

Best of all, his concerts (and the live albums that come from them) are totally unique. The average song lasts almost ten minutes, and they're not boring. It's just him and a partner, whaling away on stringed instruments and drums, with the occasional offbeat vocal.

David has no chance of being a rock star. He's never going to be played on American Top 40. He's not just an above-average musician. Instead, he's following his path and making music for a fairly small but very devoted and very loud group of sneezers. Sneezers who think he's brilliant. As a result, he plays where he wants, when he wants, and makes a good living doing it.

There are a thousand sidemen in LA and New York who wish they had a gig like David's. The only difference between them, though, is that David is intent on following his muse, while the others are just trying to get a gig.

(2)

TOO COOL FOR YOU!

Fairly lousy locations, off the beaten business path. No signs readily visible from the street. Tiny rooms, small baths, austere lobbies. It's so dark in one of them you can't even read the newspaper.

Why, exactly, is Ian Schrager clearing multimillion-dollar profits from his hotels every year?

Because some folks don't want to stay at a Hilton, that's why.

In every way, Ian Schrager Hotels are the un-Hilton. They've worked hard to be hip. Don't be surprised if you run into Anne Heche, David Byrne, Annie Liebowitz, or Mark Cuban as you walk through the lobby.

Is "hip" as big a market as the huge one catering to the core business traveler? No way. But the business traveler market was already taken. By focusing relentlessly on a tiny subset of the market (one that is intensely aware of who else is watching), Schrager becomes the only choice.

(3)

JINGLE JINGLE JINGLE JINGLE JINGLE JINGLE

I'll admit that I thought this was an incredibly dumb idea. I'll also admit that I'm wrong. That's part of my point—it doesn't matter what *you* think. It matters what the audience you care about thinks.

Scott Schaible's wife is a light sleeper. So light that the jingling dog tags around his dog's neck woke her up.

Rather than getting rid of the dog (bad idea) or using duct tape (for the collar, not the dog!), Scott invented a tiny neoprene pet-tag holder that would silence the jingles. And that was the end of that.

Until he started getting great feedback from people as he walked the dog. Every pet lover, it seemed, wanted one. Itzadog! was born. The product: The Quiet Spot Pet Tag Silencer.

Scott realizes that only 1 percent of the potential audience is willing to pay \$8 for his patented invention. But that's enough—because those people are eager to spread the word to their friends and to total strangers. He gave dog lovers something to talk about, and now there are five hundred stores around the world busy selling his profitable device. He didn't need Wal-Mart to win.

(4)

IT'S THE ONLY THING...

Coachville isn't a product, it's a movement. Thirty-two thousand people have joined over the past two years, making it one of the fastest-growing professional organizations I can think of.

Founded by Thomas Leonard, a charismatic personal coach who recently passed away, Coachville is a group of people focused on helping each other make a living as coaches.

What's remarkable? Coaching is an entire vocabulary. It's a profession, a dogma, and it's viral. Coaches spend a great deal of time selling strangers on the benefits of this new experience, which spreads the word. And many of the coached decide it would be fun to *be* a coach, so the word continues to spread.

By building a central location for the movement, Leonard made it easy for coaches to talk to each other. By facilitating conversations (as opposed to just selling a product), Coachville was able to grow at precisely the time when most dot-coms shriveled.

Do you see what's going on here? The product *is* the marketing. If it weren't, there wouldn't be any coaches. The very act of creating the profession also created the marketing engine.

(5)

HOLY COW!

Need a running clam? A herd of shiny jelly beans? A purple cow? A weird futuristic wreck promoting a video game at a trade show? Someone needs to build weird stuff. That's what Mike Dillon at Dillon Works does.

He used to work for Disney as an Imagineer, and he started his company about seventeen years ago. He now has more than fifty employees in their own 30,000 sq. ft. building.

Obviously, the key to succeeding in a business where you make anything is to *really* make anything. If it's completely impossible, it's likely someone will tell you that Mike can do it.

There are tons of people with the talent to make a running clam out of fiberglass. But only Mike, apparently, had the brains to see how unrisky it was.

I'm not even going to get into his other project: www.bonsaipotato.com. It's a cross between a Pet Rock and a Chia Pet. It's Zen, without the wait! I know; *now* you've seen everything.

(6)

ITSYBITSYYOGA (DOT COM)



Can babies do yoga? Yes, they can. Visit www.itsybitsyyoga.com.

If your toddler can do yoga, you're going to tell people, aren't you?

(7)

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU SELL FROM A VENDING MACHINE?

What if you had the brainstorm that instead of selling bits, you could sell digits?

A vending machine that beams software to Palm organizers is a Purple Cow. It never runs out of inventory, it appeals to people with credit cards and with time and money to spare, and the profit margins are pretty good.

EZ ZAP sells both commercial software and advertiser-supported freeware. You can find one at a local airport if you're lucky. The freeware is a great way to get someone to try the machine in the first place, don't you think?

A COW BY ANY OTHER NAME

Can a person be a Cow?

M.J. Rose was on her way to becoming a fairly successful novelist when she decided to become a *very* successful e-novelist. She self-published her novel and came out with the eBook as well (in 1998, the old days).

Within a year, Rose had the highest-ranked small-press novel at Amazon.com, got noticed by the Doubleday Book Club, and was picked up by them, making *Lip Service* the first self-published novel they had ever bought. Shortly after that, the book was published by Pocket Books. Getting in the back door to mainstream publishing is almost impossible, but she's so remarkable, she did it.

Mainstream houses have since published four of Rose's novels, the latest being *Sheet Music* (Ballantine, May 2003).

Along with Douglas Clegg, Rose co-wrote *Buzz your Book* and teaches Buzz your Book classes online to entrepreneurial authors. Authors that are either self-published or want to act that way.

(9)

“THE GREATEST CHAMBER MUSIC ORCHESTRA OF ALL TIME”

That’s what the quotes outside of Carnegie Hall say. And who’s the conductor of the fabled Orpheus orchestra? No one. They don’t have a conductor.

And I’d argue that this is why they’re so good. An orchestra with no conductor is a Purple Cow. People talk about it. Especially musicians. Excited by the prospect of joining such a remarkable group, musicians line up to audition for the musicians that are already in. So Orpheus can be pickier than the average orchestra. Which means that they get better and better, further enhancing their ability to recruit great musicians.

Too often, businesses forget that recruiting better people makes a better company. And of course, recruiting better people also makes it easy to recruit better people. When your company is the Purple Cow employer of choice, everything gets better.

BIGGEST SECRET IN THE MAGAZINE BUSINESS

In 1997, I got an invitation that changed my life. Alan Webber and Bill Taylor wanted me to come to Telluride, Colorado to hang out with fifty strangers for a few days. At my expense. At the time, my businesses were barely making payroll, there was way too much to do and I felt totally stretched. Of course, I went.

The Fast Company Advance was vivid purple. It was filled with extraordinary people, delighted to share their ideas, their energy and their networks. Alan and Bill, the founders of *Fast Company*, had decided (unusual in the magazine business) to put their money where their mouth was. Not only was FC a magazine filled with remarkable ideas, it was run by people who understood that they needed to change the very definition of what a magazine could be.

They understood, for instance, that the only way the magazine could grow in the face of *Fortune* and *Forbes* was by igniting networks of passionate people. The baseball hats they gave out at that first Advance said it in three words, “Work is personal.”

Over the last six years (yikes) Alan and Bill have been my mentors, my friends and my role models. They have established, for all time, where the bar is when it comes to thinking important thoughts about business and what it means to build and run an organization. Most important, though, they’ve demonstrated for more than a

million members of the *Fast Company* movement what it means to be genuine. They've walked their talk, and delivered on their promises.

So what's the secret of *Fast Company's* amazing success? (In five years, with no advertising, they grew to be almost as big as *Forbes* and *Fortune*) The answer is simple: People make Xerox copies of the best articles in the magazine and give them to everyone else. The more it got copied, the more subscriptions they sold. Other magazines featured news. *Fast Company* features stuff worth passing around.

(II)

DEAR READER

It started when Suzanne Beecher discovered that some co-workers were at a loss for good reading material. They didn't know what to read next, so they were watching TV instead. Suzanne decided to email them a few pages from the book she was reading every day and get them hooked.

Four years later, 150,000 people are signed up to receive excerpts of books that Suzanne is reading and loving. She offers a fiction book club, a business book club, and more. Of course, when you get an excerpt, the logical thing to do is to forward it to a friend. The list keeps growing.

Back when it started, publishers were wary about allowing Suzanne to excerpt their texts. Now publishers fight for her to pick their titles to present to her readers.

In addition, she builds and brands book clubs for over fifteen hundred libraries—using her content and their name. She's also now doing it for corporations (like Pfizer) who want to offer their employees or their customers books via email to spark their interest and get them reading.

ONE LIBRARY AT A TIME

Room to Read has dared to take on a big goal: helping the 1 billion people in the world who lack basic literacy. Teaching literacy is a long-term solution in that educated people can solve their own problems and break the cycle of poverty.

Room to Read was founded by John Wood, who quit his career with Microsoft because he wanted to give something back to the world. “It was scary at first, because people had no idea why I would leave a great company at the height of the technology boom (late 1999) to build schools and deliver books on the back of a yak in remote Himalayan villages.”

But there are lots of charities (most without yaks). John stands out in four ways:

1. **BIG VISION THAT RESONATES:** “World Change Starts with Educated Children.” People very quickly understand what Room to Read is all about. Simplicity matters.
2. **STANDING OUT WITH UNIQUE “PRODUCTS”:** There are thousands of charities asking people for money, usually in the same old boring ways, like sending you address labels you didn’t ask for. Room to Read does things differently. Buy a \$5,000 school. Yes, for \$5,000, Room to Read can build a school in Nepal. They keep overhead low and let donors know of the changes created with their donations. “Productizing” their offerings will be necessary for charities to survive in an increasingly competitive landscape.

3. FOCUS ON RESULTS: Room to Read has established over four hundred school libraries accessible to 120,000 children. Room to Read not only publishes annual goals to donors, but also updates them.

4. LOW OVERHEAD: Only 5 percent of the money goes to overhead. That's remarkable. It makes it easier to spread the word to a new kind of donor.

[Don't settle](#)

Fast Company isn't just a magazine, it's a movement. Check it out for free:

www.fastcompany.com

Relevance: 83

(13)

FORE!

Online golf. Market it with permission. Make it viral. Do tie-ins with charities (<http://www.hbn.com/money/>) and corporations (Xerox). Keep costs low, and make it easy to make a profit without dominating the attention of a large population.

David Lundgren has grown his course from 30,000 plays a month to 30,000 a day, all by offering a simple, remarkable, free product online.

SOMETIMES IT HELPS IF YOU'RE REALLY TALENTED

I discovered John McWade somewhere around issue one of *Before & After*, a newsletter about design. John was probably the first desktop publisher in the world, being a beta tester for PageMaker.

Before & After is like no other newsletter. It's four-color. It's glossy. It comes out four times a year if you're lucky. And, get this, 97 percent of the subscribers save *every single issue*.

Whenever I meet someone who's doing bad design, I send them to John. His newsletter isn't designed to be a commercial success. It's designed to be great. Amazing. Awe-inspiring. Every issue, every example, every article is just about perfect. With word of mouth like this, John's Purple Cow continues to grow by leaps and bounds.

The less John worries about the business part, the less he *needs* to worry about the business part. It's remarkable.

CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

Live concerts demand amazing sound—for everyone. Computers can make a difference because they can allow the guy at the sound board to optimize the sound for the entire audience.

Lake Technology is a small tech company in Sydney, Australia. They have developed and manufactured a new product called Lake Contour. It is not a mass-market product. It makes it easy for the guy at the sound board to customize the audio for every seat in the house.

Lake started by going on the road for a year with Bruce Springsteen. Word spread to Elton John, Paul McCartney, and others. Having earned a reputation, Lake is moving down the influencer curve, targeting smaller venues and even churches. It worked because Lake built a great product and brought it straight to people who really and truly cared about it.

(16)

DOMINATING A DIFFERENT MARKET

Wes Davis and Chad Alvarado run Legacy House Youth Church in tiny Poulsbo, Washington (population 7,000). Amazingly, more than a thousand people in town attend that church.

More than four hundred students typically attend weekly youth services. Legacy House does this by relentlessly involving students, inviting them to participate in roles that might usually be reserved for adults.

By dominating the religious life of their community, they've created a very different kind of church. If for no other reason, everyone goes because everyone goes! Legacy House is the Microsoft of devotion, apparently.

HOW TO FIND AN OFFICE IN NEW YORK CITY

Why would you trust an engineer-turned-executive for advice on renting a multimillion-dollar office? Because Joel Spolsky is a great writer, very funny, and totally honest.

As he runs his software company (find them at www.fogcreek.com), he's happily been blogging about this and that on his personal Web page. His column, "Joel On Software," has turned out to be a fantastic way to market his company and get it off the ground. For the first year or so, almost all of their clients came from his readers. Fog Creek had clients in forty-four cities before they spent a nickel on marketing.

Giving first, taking second. Word spread about Joel's insight. Attention followed. Then business.

GIVING GEEKS WHAT THEY WANT

Plenty of companies think they can change the world of computing. They've got engineers who are sure they've got the next superchip or operating system. And almost every time, lousy marketing leads to defeat at the hands of Microsoft or Intel.

Matt Oberdofer tried a different approach. His company, Engineered Intelligence (EI), is pushing for systems that make it easy for programmers to write complex parallel programs on their Windows PCs and to run their code on high-performance clusters.

But how to get the word out?

Matt developed GRID WARS, a parallel programming challenge that invites inventors to write battle programs using CxC (his programming language), upload them to the Grid Wars Web site, and compete with other programs to take over virtual parallel processors in a 50 x 30 grid of processors. Competitors vie for prizes and (more importantly) for industry recognition. EI gets people to try their software and see how easy and powerful it is to use parallel programming, and EI gets these people to tell their friends about it so they can compete, too.

If your goal is to demonstrate your parallel programming chops, then Matt wants to hear from you—and likely will.

POW! ZAP!

I hate it when non-talented copywriters get lazy and use “Pow!” in a headline about comics. Sorry. Sue me.

ATOMIC CITY, in Philadelphia, is the largest African American–owned comic book store in the world. Michael Yates and Martin King understand that all comic book stores sell exactly the same thing. That’s why the *way* they sell comic books matters so much.

The staff is as interesting as the stuff they sell. The store is an offline chat room that’s thriving in a world of online chat.

“We want to be different,” says co-owner Martin King. “We strive to make a difference by being creative and reaching out to make the best impression to the world at large. It’s not easy, but we are learning every day how to make our business better.”

If the experience isn’t cool, people won’t bother with it. These guys get that.

(20)

COOL SHOTS

Every photographer has access to the same cameras. Editors can hire just about anyone they choose. So why do some photographers succeed in making it as freelancers, and some fail?

Guts. Steven Vote has them. Some people don't like his work. [Click here](#) and you'll see for yourself.

It's not for everyone, which is exactly why it might be just right for the next editor.

YES, YOU CAN GIVE IT AWAY

I didn't realize that sermons, training, curriculum, and other resources for churches were actually a big business. People develop the stuff and sell it. I guess that makes sense.

Anyway, Jonathan McKee turned the industry upside down by launching TheSourceForYouthMinistry.com several years ago. His plan was to give free online resources to youth workers around the world.

He created hundreds of pages of curriculum, training, sermons, and ideas... all for free. No “free gift when you buy volume III”—just free resources that youth workers can actually use. Given the marketplace, it's no surprise that his site quickly became popular. Being a permission marketer, he asked for signups for his free newsletter. He now has over 14,000 youth workers as subscribers.

That audience entitles him to success as an author (his second book will be out soon), and he often dominates the discussion in this hive. Free is still remarkable.

HOW COOL IS SAGMEISTER?

David Byrne's last album has a big eyeball on the cover. And the sleeve is clear plastic acetate, with little stripes. When you move the sleeve back and forth, the eyeball moves. It's very cool. It's the work of Stephen Sagmeister. He's not just a designer. He's a designer who does oddball stuff, beautifully.

His latest is a T-shirt. He's taken the famous postcard of John Lennon in NYC, wearing his cut-off "New York City" T-shirt, and made a replica of the shirt. But what makes it really cool is that, in the postcard, Lennon's arms are folded across his chest, slightly altering the shape of some of the letters on the T-shirt*. In Sagmeister's replica, the "k" in New York is tweaked, almost into a "v," exactly the way the letter appears on the postcard. No, not everyone will get it. But every art director will. And they'll remember the subtle brilliance of the shirt, and the next time they need clever and cool, they'll call Sagmeister. *click to see the shirt.

BUILDING A BARN (FOR COWS, GET IT?)

You can have brainstorming sessions anywhere. Which is why they so often end up in sterile conference rooms at the local Marriott. The food is just as boring as the room.

What if architecture and environment became part of the product that a brainstorming company sells?

For fifteen years, Chuck Dymer and his Kansas City–based company, PeopleWorks, Inc., have been helping organizations generate ideas. Ideas to develop new products, ideas to strengthen teams, ideas to improve business strategies. One of the things that Chuck noticed about his clients' businesses was that space matters.

So last year, tired of the usual hotel conference rooms and corporate retreats, Chuck decided to build a space designed specifically to help his clients generate ideas. It's expensive and cool and friendly, and it has a kitchen. With great food.

That space has become PeopleWorks' best marketing tool. The Idea Loft represents what PeopleWorks does and how they do it. They made a service, concrete. People may not remember *why* they're talking about the experience they had, but the experience they had is markedly more intense because of the space.

AN ORGAN FOR ORGANISTS?

Don Chapman built a Cow a lot like Michael Cader's *Publishers Lunch*.

Don's Cow starts with a Web site (www.worshipideas.com) designed to share ideas about arranging music, directing vocalists, and bringing music to church. The site encourages people to subscribe to a newsletter (it has just reached 10,000 subscribers). The newsletter is filled with great ideas (and it's easy to forward). Best yet, the newsletter promotes Don's subscription-only sites, filled with downloadable sheet music.

So his fans spread the word within the tightly knit community of Christian music folks. The newsletter spreads, it builds subscriptions, and Don is now making a living doing what he loves.

SHARING IDEAS FOR A LIVING

David Winer has insisted on writing groundbreaking software his whole life. Instead of joining a team that's updating yada yada version 3.2, he creates something nobody knew they wanted.

Winer was the brains behind the first outlining software. Then he created many of the ideas that led to blogging. Now, he runs Scripting News, writes blog software, and is a honcho at Harvard.

He's remarkable. People who want to know what's next seek him out. Dave will never be looking for work, as far as I can tell. It'll find him.

(26)

IS SALAD JUST SALAD?

In a world where people don't cook, I guess it was obvious that someone would brand salad. I mean, all you have to do to make a salad is buy some lettuce and put some stuff on it.

Dole, the pineapple people, did something remarkable. They picked, cleaned, processed, branded, and guaranteed salad. Now, when a harried househusband goes to the market in search of dinner, the easy thing to do is buy a bag of Dole.

I bet this idea got laughed out of a dozen conference rooms. In fact, I was there when it got laughed out of Kraft. Today, it's a multimillion-dollar idea.

TURNING THE TRIPOD AROUND

CameraPlanet has been around for more than a decade, waiting for now. Now is here.

As digital gear becomes commonplace, people have the same digital video cameras in their hands that the networks are using to cover stories around the world. And the new ubiquity of blogs is teaching the world that anyone (everyone) can be a talking head.

So... CameraPlanet is building a business around the idea that anyone with a digital video camera is her own CNN newsperson. People around the world submitting stories, all the time.

What's the frequency?

WHAT RHYMES WITH ORANGE?

It's quite possible that Max Sparber is in fact the world's worst poet. Either way, his Web site is remarkable. Cheap, too.

In a world in which everyone is trying to be the best, Max is remarkable for being the worst.

(29)

ARE TIRES BORING?

Black Circles is a tire company that owns no tires and has only seven employees.

Run by a twenty-four-year-old Liverpoolian named Mike Welch, who left school at fifteen with no qualifications, the company is changing the very traditional tire industry in the UK. Welch has the temerity to buy directly from manufacturers and sell directly to the customer (a big deal in England). Black Circles sells tires for 25 and 50 percent less than a local store does.

Since the company's launch in January 2002, growth has been dramatic, with first-year sales hitting £400,000. Turnover in 2003 is expected to be between £1.2 million and £1.6 million, with sales of £2.5 million in 2004. The firm already has corporate customers like Sainsbury, Marks & Spencer, and McDonald's.

Operating online or via telephone, Black Circles works through a network of almost 300 independent garages across Britain. That network is expected to grow to about 800 by the end of this year, making it the biggest independent tire retailer in the U.K. Compare this to Kwik-Fit (Europe's largest tire and exhaust business, until recently owned by Ford), which has about 650 outlets in Britain.

TURNING DEER HUNTING INTO A SPECTATOR SPORT

Extreme Shot of Atlanta, Missouri, manufactures camera-mount systems for outdoorsmen—specifically, for hunters. Now, in addition to bagging a deer, the hunter can take high-quality video of the hunt itself.

Why?

To share. It might not become *America's Funniest Home Videos*, but the footage is something that the hunter can show to friends. Obviously, this spreads the word across the hive that shares the *otaku*. It turns every customer into a sneezer.

Even better, the company sells not just the mounts, but also, right next to them, videotapes of excerpts from customers' tapes. Thus, there's a chance to buy the work of other hunters while you dream of having your footage included in the next tape. It amplifies the sneezers.

OLD GUYS SKATEBOARD, TOO

Everyone knows that skateboarding is hip, the cutting-edge sport for teenagers only. Everyone except Michael Brooke.

A self-described geezer on wheels, Brooke started with a \$5-per-month Web site. That turned into a book called *The Concrete Wave*, which has sold 30,000 copies to date. That led to a television show and a magazine as well.

Someone discovered Brooke's work and turned it into a documentary called *Dogtown*, which was a hit at the independent Sundance film festival. A fictionalized version is being turned into a \$100 million movie as I write this. Throughout this process, of course, the skategeezer was ignored by the advertisers and readers who turn traditional youth skateboarding magazines into thick doorstops. That's okay, though—for the over-the-hill gang, Brooke is the only game in town. He's remarkable, and people tell their friends.

PURPLE TAGS

InfoSight Corporation is based in Chillicothe, Ohio. Their philosophy is, “If you can make it, we’ll find a way to tag it.” If you have an application that can be solved with a conventional paper or plastic tag, they will politely turn you away. They say, “We want the hard stuff.”

Consider the Pic-Anneal Laser Marked tag. Designed for the metals industry, these metal-coated tags can be imprinted with bar codes by an industrial laser printer while on the assembly line. That means they can be attached to metal products before they go in for pickling and annealing, two scary processes that would destroy anything less robust.

Turns out that the pickling process involves soaking the metal for two hours in hot (100-to-180-degree) sulphuric or hydrochloric acid. Follow this with a baking process (in a 1400-degree oven for up to 48 hours). After this torture, the tag can still be read and scanned, with only a 1 percent failure rate.

Most people will never hear of InfoSight or Pic-Anneal tags. But if you need to use a tag in an unusual environment, sneezers in the know will send you to <http://www.infosight.com/>.

IMELDA! IT'S THE BIGGEST SHOE STORE IN THE WORLD

Most people don't need the biggest shoe store. The one in town is just fine.

But if you have a shoe *otaku*, the Internet can bring you exactly what you need. Thousands of shoes with free shipping, and a money-back guarantee. www.zappos.com It's the *bigness* of it all that attracts attention, though.

IF YOU HAVE A BIG FIGHT AND BREAK THE WEDDING CHINA

Not all of it, of course, just a plate or two...

Replacement Wares, in North Carolina, has a huge treasure trove of stuff, and they're good at replacing what you broke. What's remarkable about this business is that there's not a lot of room for competition, and the marketing is pretty cheap. They run tiny ads in *The New Yorker* and stuff, but mostly, business works like this:

Someone is lamenting a lost dish. A guest tells the story of Replacement Wares and their excellent service. The word spreads. Both the lamenter and the problem-solver get satisfaction from the conversation. So the word keeps spreading—from one dinner party to another.

By selling something that dishless people truly want to buy, Replacement Wares becomes a Cow.

DOES A DOCTOR NEED TO BE PURPLE?

In the old days, once you were done with medical school, you were set. In India, just as in the U.S., there were too many patients and not enough good doctors.

Today, of course, it's a different story. Doctors are closing their practices or trying to figure out how to pay the malpractice insurance. Dr. Mani Sivasubramanian doesn't have that problem. He's as busy as he wants to be.

Dr. Sivasubramanian didn't follow his remarkable path in order to find clients, of course. He did it because he's always wanted to help sick kids have a chance at life. He saw a way to do it better when the Internet came to India, where he lives. Rapidly gaining expertise in e-zine publishing and marketing, he chose to target the folks who talk to other folks—many, many of them—to spread the message about heart birth defects to a far wider audience than he could reach on his own.

A few months ago, he spread the word about Congenital Heart Defects Awareness Day (on Feb. 14 of course), and sent his message to almost half a million people by featuring it on twelve high-volume mailing lists.

Better still, he's had close to 12,000 people sign up for something he calls a Chain of Love, which will help a poor child undergo a life-saving heart operation. Heart surgeons are marketers, too.

MAKING A BOOK INTERACTIVE

Dan Seidman wrote *The Death of 20th Century Selling: 50 Hilarious Sales Blunders and How You Can Profit from Them*. In addition to being a very funny book (for a sales guy, anyway), it can't help but start a conversation. After you read the book, you want to tell people *your* worst selling story. Salespeople carry them around like trophies, and they love to share them.

As a result of tapping into this reservoir of mirth, Seidman was named one of the top twelve sales coaches in America by *Ultimate Selling Power* magazine.

MAKING IT AS A COPYWRITER IS HARD... ISN'T IT?

All you need to be a copywriter is a pencil... and clients. Getting the clients is the hard part. First, there's lots of competition. Second, many organizations don't realize how much they would benefit from a professional. The end result? Two objections to every sales call: 1—You're too expensive; and 2—Why do we need a copywriter?

Lisa Sparks, based in Cape Coral, Florida, decided she'd had enough. Business was stagnant, and she had to take action—so she decided to give it away.

So she holds workshops on how to write—and write well—at a fraction of the cost of her copywriting rates. (She tells me it's weird—like she's giving away all of her hard-earned experience.) Companies that weren't willing to pay to have someone do the work for them appear to be willing to come to a free session to learn how to do it themselves.

In the process of promoting her workshops, a funny thing happened, though: Business *increased*. A free seminar (really free, with no strings attached) generated word of mouth and attention. It made companies realize that they really did need to know how to do this stuff. But then, once they realized that good copywriting is actually *work*, they were delighted to hire the local expert—their teacher!

THE REASON BIRDS ON HIGH POWER LINES DON'T GET ELECTROCUTED

Turns out that maintaining and repairing power lines is tricky and expensive. One of the most expensive parts, it seems, is turning off the power so the folks on ladders don't get killed. If you could solve that problem, the utility companies would line up to become customers.

Darryl Ed at Haverfield Electric Air Team figured out how to do just that. It has to do with crows and squirrels.

Haverfield repairs utility lines, while they'll still in service, from helicopters. The linemen work from a platform attached to the helicopter while the helicopter hovers over the line. This patented technique saves time and money over traditional methods, particularly since the juice still flows through the cables during repairs.

It's hard to imagine a client *not* telling every colleague she knows about this super-clever (and daring) way to cut costs and repair power lines. (By the way, the reasons crows and squirrels can happily hang out on high power lines is that, like Darryl, they're not grounded. Since the electricity has nowhere to go, it doesn't bother them.)

I get chills just thinking about this.

CHOPS, SLICES, AND DICES

Admit it. You're in the store or watching some TV commercial, and a new kitchen gadget jumps into view. One that promises to grind pepper better, or peel garlic, or mince basil. It's pretty cheap and so, so cool. You buy it.

Most of the time, it's a fraud. It doesn't work. It ends up in the drawer, and that's the end of it.

But every once in a while, it really and truly works. You feel vindicated. And whenever someone comes over for dinner, you haul it out and show it off.

That's what Chef'n is all about, apparently. The garlic chopper they sent me really and truly works! Aside from the silly name, this is a very neat company. Sales doubled last year because Chef'n keeps making remarkable, inexpensive kitchen gadgets that actually work well enough to show off to your friends.

DID YOU FIND A SCAVENGER?

Bret Watson creates scavenger hunts (I think they're treasure hunts, but he's the boss). He writes tricky, humorous question-clues based on locations like the Metropolitan Museum or Wall Street. He puts together hunts with themes like "Sex in the City" and "Gangs of New York."

You bring your own group of pals or join a team, and go racing around like mad for two or three hours of exhilarating competition and entertainment. When you're done, you're probably going to go to work and tell everyone what you did over the weekend, so he's expanding with hunts in Boston, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Newark, and LA. Naturally, he does private hunts for corporations tired of Outward Bound-style retreats as well. The site says Jeff Bezos, Oprah, and match.com, among others, are clients and fans.

THIS ONE IS FUNNY

Barney's Motel is not the place you'd pick if you were looking for a growth stock. For starters, it's in Brandon, Manitoba. And it's independent, with no national advertising or central booking facility.

And yet, sales were up 25 percent last year, and 40 percent the year before. How?

Here's what owner Barry Williams says: "After several years of sand-head management, the only things we could afford to provide our customers were trust and humor. We filled our rooms with humorous statements regarding any shortcomings our guests might experience (waiting for cold water from the cold water tap) and filled each room with drinks, snacks and breakfast cereals. All this is done on the honor system as approximately 50 percent of our customers still pay cash, and we don't have the staff required to physically check the room supply before each guest leaves.

"We put a sign on our front lawn that reads 'One Night at Barney's will cure you of Sleeping Around' and attached a tag line to all our correspondence that informs our customers that they can SLEEP DEEP CHEAP with us."

Every chance he gets, he's decided to be funny. And when given the choice, Barney's Motel chooses to trust the customer. Using the same methods with his staff has seen Barney's go from 1,000 percent turnover in staff two

years ago to zero turnover for the past six months. In-room customer comments indicate that 80 percent of the time, Barney's exceeds guest expectations.

NOT STARBUCKS

When you walk into the Julius Meinl Cafe, you sense you've left the U.S. and walked into downtown Vienna. Every detail of the Vienna coffee house experience has been duplicated with amazing authenticity. From the high-backed booths and high, round, standing tables to the wait staff and pastry chef that hail from the motherland, you feel transported to Europe. They present your coffee on silver trays complete with a small glass of water, tasty biscuits, and sugar in a straw-like paper container. And the experience is truly authentic because the whole place was designed in, built in, and shipped from Linz, Austria. Also, the name and the products all come from the Meinl company in Vienna—one of the world's oldest coffee companies and supplier to most of the independent cafés in Austria for the past hundred years.

How often do you find a brand with this much history and success that has not extended itself all over the world?

HELP! I'M A PRISONER...

Mike Fry, a former Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey circus clown, has invented sixteen flavors of fortune cookie. Since 1988, he's been making them, stuffed with fortunes customized for corporate customers.

A flavored fortune cookie sounds simple, and it is. But you've probably never had one, and once you do, you feel compelled to talk about it. Add to the mix some clever fortunes for people like Oprah (Oprah again! she's everywhere), and it's a remarkable idea that spreads. People go to www.fancyfortunecookies.com and buy them by the millions.

The only reason to buy a customized fortune cookie is to give it to someone else. Think about that for a second. It's not a private purchase. If the fortunes are funny and the cookies are good, the idea is going to spread.

COLUMBUS WOULD BE PROUD

Paul Hoffman lost his job in computers in 1988. In a dream, he decided to make stickers of the famous NASA shot of the whole earth viewed from space.

He turned his life savings over to a decal printer in return for 88,000 two-inch-diameter, four-color stickers, and he started giving them away. He even found lists of peace and justice groups, environmental groups, and church groups, and mailed them stickers. Paul had given away 35,000 stickers before it occurred to him to ask for donations. People were asking to send him money: “Give us SOME guidelines!” So he printed “suggested guidelines” on the back of each sticker.

Fifteen years later, he’s distributed (gasp) 15 million stickers. The backing comes in eight languages, and there are two sizes to choose from.

EarthSeals combine a remarkable famous image (that no one owns) with a unique distribution strategy that makes them incredibly spreadable. Get yours at www.earthseals.com.

JUST PEANUTS?

When you're sitting on an airplane for three or four or five hours, cramped into coach and trying to make one packet of peanuts last a long time, all you can do is yearn for first class.

By building a Web site (www.firstclassflyer.com) that's devoted to just that (traveling better, cheaper, and more comfortably) and making the site free, Matthew Bennett has built a subscription engine that's priceless. He's added 50,000 subscribers in the last year alone.

This is an idea that's easy to spread and—for the few hours you're crammed into coach (or gleefully flying up front)—worth talking about.

THE WAY JAMES BOND GETS TECH SUPPORT

Of course, Bond would use a Mac PowerBook. And of course, when it broke (and it would), he wouldn't stand in line at the computer repair shop. Enter PowerBookResQ.

This is a simple but sort of amazing idea. You call them (1-866-Mac-Repair), they have the Airborne guy in your neighborhood drop off a box (every truck has one onboard), you stuff your machine into it, and ship it back. They fix it and return it within twenty-four hours.

The best part is how simple it is. If you know someone with a PowerBook, you'll tell them about this service, because it's an easy story to tell and a great idea to share with a friend.

How did they spread the word? To create buzz about PowerBookResQ, they purchased the latest G4 PowerBooks for publishers of the major PowerBook-related Web sites (<http://www.powerpage.org>, for example). Now, every time Apple announces a new PowerBook, these publishers get a brand new unit for free and return the older system to PowerBookResQ to use for parts in incoming repairs. PowerBookResQ not only gains ad space on these Web sites, but what's more important, they gain the mind share of the publisher who sneezes PowerBookResQ to anyone he comes into contact with who needs a PowerBook repaired.

NO PROPELLER, NO RUDDER, NO COMPARISON

The Hinckley Picnic Boat is a sleek yacht that operates like a Jet Ski.

The 36-foot powerboat combines the Down East lines of a lobster boat with a new water-jet propulsion system that eliminates the need for a propeller. There is now a long waiting list for the semi-custom yacht, which has sparked a whole new class of jet boats. The Hinckley Picnic Boat needs only 18 inches of water to travel safely, meaning you can take this 36-foot boat up the creek. Since the boat is driven with a joystick, it's almost impossible to go for a ride in one and not have the owner give you a sales pitch.

THE WORLD'S (OKAY, CANADA'S) DONUT EXPERT

People don't always realize the value of being a Purple Cow in non-business walks of life. In the academic realm, "very good" is also the enemy of success, especially where job markets are clogged with freshly minted Ph.D.'s and where the attention of students and academic readers is increasingly divided among the millions of articles in the tens of thousands of academic journals that exploded onto the scene in the 1970s and 1980s.

When Camille Paglia arrived, many considered her less than scholarly, but of course, you've heard of her. She's now a full professor, able to pick and choose among visiting professorships and lucrative speaking engagements—and she is a bestselling author.

Many very good scholars wind up teaching on contract (at best). Not Steve Penfold. Penfold spent ten long years completing a Ph.D. in History at York University, Toronto, cycling through a number of popular progressive themes in social history, women's studies, and so on.

Penfold had never been one to fit in. He decided to switch his thesis topic to the cultural significance of donut franchises in Canadian life. In essence, he became the expert on Tim Horton's, crullers, and double-doubles. (Apparently, donuts are quite important in Canada.)

The thesis was actually a lot more involved than anyone might have thought. Penfold delved into the business logic behind the expansion of franchising in the twentieth century. He pored through archives for historical information about people's cultural habits and about the business of donuts.

At one point, Penfold was flown to Harvard to accept an infamous Ig Nobel Prize for his work. It was obvious that the average layman thought his research was pretty silly. Then came the chance to apply for a tenure-track position at the Department of History at the University of Toronto. For a struggling recent Ph.D., getting a permanent U of T post is about as close to heaven as it comes, especially given the university's penchant for hiring at the more senior levels or for insisting on graduates from Harvard, Oxford, Yale, and the Sorbonne.

Penfold was shortlisted; then he beat out two other applicants for the job. "The others were very good, but they were both very good in the same sort of way," he told a friend.

[Let's get rid of spam](#)

You can read this essay, and more, for free on my blog (subscribe, too!)

www.sethgodin.com

Relevance: 73

WHY AREN'T MALE BALLERINAS CALLED BALLERINOS?

Ballerina Eliza Minden got fed up with sore toes and did something about it. Eight years of R&D produced a revolutionary pointe shoe, one made of materials usually found in space capsules and underwater exploration equipment, yet still encased in the requisite peachy-pink satin. The Gaynor Minden shoe has shaken up the dance world. Instead of buying new shoes (noisy, uncomfortable shoes made of leather, paste, burlap, and paper) that wore out quickly, young dancers started to switch. (The old folks were apparently too stuck to change.)

Gaynor Mindens last three to five times longer than regular pointe shoes and are now worn by the members of 148 dance companies throughout the world. No one is switching to the old kind of shoe, but every day, some relieved dancer tells a friend about the new shoes, and Eliza has a new customer. Toe shoe design hadn't been improved in nearly a hundred years. Now stores are reporting that shoe sales have doubled since the stores began to carry Gaynor Mindens.

WHY SHOOT DONKEYS?

People who sell complicated products talk to each other a lot. And they get frustrated.

Steve Kayser writes about this topic for a mailing list of 13,000 subscribers. He's managed to turn it into a useful tool for his employer, Cincom.

Salespeople try to sell increasingly complex products and service solutions to a buying committee within the client company. The buying committee consists of multiple executives from disparate departments and geographical locations—a maze that has come to be known as the *complex sale*.

The key, it turns out, is knowing when to shoot the donkey.

“Shoot the donkey” refers to a classic scene in the movie *Patton*, in which the Third Army is in a race to rescue a trapped American unit. The rescuers get held up on a bridge by a cart-pulling donkey that has stopped and refuses to budge, totally blocking the bridge. An MP struggles with the donkey and the owner, trying to get them out of the way.

General George Patton roars up, whips out his ivory-handled pistol, shoots the donkey, and immediately has it hurled off the bridge, removing the obstacle.

Winners, leaders, and innovators know how, why, when, and where to “shoot the donkey.”

Expert Access is a newsletter just for salespeople who need to know when it’s time to shoot. The only way the newsletter circulation grows is when one salesperson tells another. It spreads.

[Tom Peters](#)

Yes, it really was all his idea. Find his work at:

www.tompeters.com

Relevance: 83

WHAT DOES GOOGLE SAY ABOUT YOU BEHIND YOUR BACK?

Type “marketing insights” into a search engine, and you’re likely to find <http://reveries.com>: an online magazine focused only at marketers. This month’s cover is an in-depth interview with the head of Google’s marketing.

One big reason for the site’s popularity is its newsletter, “Cool News of the Day,” which has been published for the past five years. By using permission to send out an eminently forwardable free newsletter, Reveries can reach the people who want to be reached, and then encourage them to share the newsletter contents with their colleagues. This inevitably leads to more subscriptions, which leads to more traffic to the magazine itself.

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DON'T YOU HATE IT WHEN THE PIZZA BURNS THE TOP OF YOUR MOUTH?

Blame CookTek.

CookTek started by making induction cooktops: amazing little pads that heat the food above them using magnetism. Then CookTek evolved into making hot pizza boxes, which look like insulated rectangular bags but actually get heated by a metal alloy disk (surrounded by polymer, no less). That's why the pizza is hot when you get it.

What CookTek has done lately that's truly remarkable is to build RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) technology into the pizza bags. Now, the store operator knows how long it takes to deliver the pizza, where the pizza is, how hot it was when it got there, and more. Pizza, it seems, is really about information, not mozzarella.

For the \$29 billion pizza restaurant industry, this is a no-brainer. For CookTek, the benefit of redefining their product from heating to information means that it becomes truly remarkable. The Cowness of the product comes from completely redefining what it takes to win in pizza. By escalating the information challenge, CookTek creates an entirely new category that early adopters in the field need to know about.

DATA INSURANCE

LiveVault (www.livevault.com) is simple. It does data backup remotely, storing the information offsite.

That's it.

Instead of selling a chore (backup software), they sell insurance. The data is backed up automatically, and when you need it back, it's there. The IT guy can buy the solution, and then it becomes invisible.

It's a new company, but they have a 98 percent retention rate, and last year, they increased the amount of data they backed up by 500 percent.

[Who Am I Kidding?](#)

Yes, I'd be delighted if you bought some books. Here's a list (free stuff, too).

www.sethgodin.com

Relevance: 53

MR. SMITH IS NOT INCLUDED

What if you could look like the stars of *The Matrix*? Or at least dress like them?

A custom tailor in Canada stands out from all the other custom tailors in the world by selling clothes inspired by movies. A quick visit to AbbyShot Custom Clothiers (www.abbyshot.com) makes it clear that it's not just a gimmick—the clothes are beautifully made as well.

Is it possible to wear a pleated black trench coat to a party and *not* tell everyone where you got it?

DOES IT MATTER WHO CLEANS YOUR OFFICE?

Jancoa, in Cincinnati, has decided that the people who work for their janitorial service have a lot to do with their future success. They're trying to create a Purple janitor. It appears to be working—Jancoa has grown from ten people to three hundred in a decade.

The entire focus of the company is to find great people and make them happy.

Jancoa provides all employees with three weeks vacation to start. They help their employees buy houses. They have a mechanic on staff to service their vans, and employees can have their vehicles serviced by the mechanic and have the cost deducted from their paychecks. Jancoa doesn't even give employees money for mass transit; instead, they handle transportation for their employees via their own shuttles.

They teach Hispanic employees how to speak English, and everyone else how to speak Spanish.

By hiring remarkable people and treating them remarkably well, Jancoa turns every employee into a salesperson, every day. Turnover plummets and customer satisfaction goes up.

BETTER THAN CHESS?

Wizkids Games (<http://www.wizkidsgames.com>) makes little toy soldiers that you use to re-create historical battles or D&D or sci-fi games. Of course, plenty of other companies make similar products, but Wizkids figured out how to make theirs remarkable. Imagine chess sets for which the manufacturer can charge a premium for his pieces. (Of course, it's not chess—it's proprietary battle games).

The company includes all the rules and statistics for each piece on the base of the figure. No rule booklets required! That means that the act of playing with the figures is dramatically different, and your friends will notice. On top of that, the figures are pre-painted—eliminating the portion of the market that loves the craft, but making the product irresistible to the people who spend a lot of time playing and couldn't care at all about painting.

The beauty of this market is that in order to have someone to play with, you've got to sell them on your brand first!

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE BUTTER STAINS?

Some of the best-selling record albums are movie soundtracks. Which leads to the obvious question: Why don't movie theaters sell movie soundtracks?

It turns out that:

1. Selling soundtrack CDs and selling popcorn are two different skills.
2. Employees like soundtracks, too, so shrinkage is an issue.
3. Theater lobbies are not ideally suited to merchandising and displaying soundtrack CDs.
4. Inventory management—deciding which soundtracks to order, when to order them, and how many to order—is just too overwhelming for theaters to manage.

The answer? CD vending machines.

Soundtrax installed its first soundtrack vending machine in a large multiplex theater in October of 2002, and it is doing very well indeed. They installed another in December of 2002, and it has also done well. This is a solution that takes less than a second to understand, and it's easy for the theater to experiment with.

Look for a machine in a theater near you.

PERRY MASON... ON RETAINER

Law firms generally do a pretty good job of handling episodic and lifecycle events—stuff like financings and litigation—for their clients. Law firms do a terrible job of providing day-to-day operational legal support, however, because they're expensive, and they're organized for crises, not for the boring day-to-day grind.

That's where Outside GC comes in. This is a team of former tech-company execs who act as time-shared in-house counsel for early-stage companies that aren't ready to hire their own captive attorney.

The math here is compelling. Since the workload is predictable and assured, the rates are far lower. Outside GC can handle such things as customer, partner, and vendor agreements, employee issues, trademark and copyright matters, corporate governance, and leases without having to charge the crisis premium. Outside GC doesn't completely replace big law firms; instead, they work with clients to supervise outside counsel.

After just over a year in business, Outside GC has more than seventy-five repeat clients and a team of six lawyers. The astonishing thing is that there are literally hundreds of thousands of individuals competent enough to do this work, but very few have taken the plunge. Being safe is risky, or, in this case, being risky is safe.

CRANKY, EXPENSIVE, AND VERY, VERY GOOD

Eli Zabbar doesn't care what you think.

I mean, he cares very much about what you think of his bread and his cheeses and his produce and his soup, and he cares very much about what you think of the shopping experience. But if you don't like his prices or his attitude, that's just fine.

At his Upper East Side Vinegar Factory food store in Manhattan, he turned his unused rooftop into a greenhouse for growing delicious fresh tomatoes year round. He makes the most expensive BLT sandwich on the planet at his Madison Avenue store. His soups are astonishing, and his sourdough bread is almost as good as the loaf at Balthazar.

There's also an in-store, high-end florist. His stores are remarkable. Unbelievably overpriced (or are they?). Like it or hate it, people talk about it.

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A FORCE OF NATURE

When people hear that I used to run a company called Yoyodyne, half of them ask me what we did. The other half say, “Oh, you used to work with Jerry Shereshevsky.”

Jerry has been in the ad business for a while, working at agencies, then at the BMG Music Club, then for me, and finally for Yahoo!. And along the way, he’s made a point of befriending (in the best sense of the word) tens of thousands of people. He doesn’t do it to sell them something; he does it because he genuinely likes people.

Without spending his entire life on it, Jerry manages to do something nice for you on a regular basis. Along the way, he helps people solve their problems. And, with his penchant for cigars and boisterous laughter, he makes an impression as he goes.

Jerry’s remarkable. People don’t forget him. They respond to his networking with networking of their own. He’s far more likely to help a friend find a new friend to solve a problem than he is to tap the network for his own uses. And so it spreads. Jerry’s new title at Yahoo!—Ambassador Plenipotentiary to Madison Avenue.

Jerry’s a Cow. In fact, he has a big purple one in his backyard.

(61)

I WENT TO STARBUCKS AND DIDN'T DRINK A THING

And they still made plenty of money from me.

That's right, I used my laptop to check my email.

The brilliant insight behind the T-mobile WiFi hotspots at Starbucks is that they've used them to re-enlist the sneezers.

At the beginning, Starbucks was cool. Early adopters noticed. They sneezed it to their friends. They spread the word.

Years later, Starbucks is everywhere. Common. Boring.

How do you avoid becoming Radio Shack? By putting a thousand WiFi access points across the country, making it easy for road warriors, SOHO jocks, entrepreneurs, and students to surf the Web and check email.

They come. They love it. They tell their friends. Starbucks gets sneezed all over again.

TIVO THROUGH THE PURPLE COW LENS

Type “Tivo” into Google, and you’ll find more than 520,000 matches. Try “Tivo changed my life,” and you’ll find nearly a hundred exact matches. With only 700,000 users, this digital VCR is sort of a poster child for Purple Cowness.

The good news is that it’s remarkable. It causes the early adopters to notice and, what’s more important, to sneeze constantly.

The bad news is that people don’t usually talk about television recording devices. It’s not an easy thing to explain to the center of the curve—people are lazy when it comes to TV, and it’s a hard sell. That’s why there aren’t seven *million* users.

The good news is that Tivo hasn’t run an ad since 2000, and they’re waiting patiently for the 70 percent of the TV-watching public who haven’t heard of them to learn about them from a friend. By not wasting time or money, Tivo is hunkering down for the inevitable growth curve that will push their product through the curve. By the time your friend Bob has heard about Tivo from six or seven friends, he’s going to buy one.

REMARKABLE OR INVISIBLE

My friend Edith is a recruiter for a major software company. She specializes in training people to ask good interview questions—and in her spare time, she helps MBA students market themselves to companies.

Over brunch, she told me a few things about the students she works with. Some of them, it seems, are Purple Cows. Others are doomed.

“You can tell in about three seconds if someone’s a rock star,” she said with a smile. Not the drug-using, long-haired kind, of course, but the kind you’d like to hire. These are the people who can make or break a company, who turn a division around or launch a great new product. The challenge for rock stars is to make that clear in the nine seconds of attention they get from a recruiter. To create a résumé and a first impression that clearly communicates their rock-star status.

Isn’t this risky? Won’t this lead to a few doors getting slammed? Sure. So what?

According to *The New Yorker*, the top colleges no longer seek great, well-rounded kids, the sort who letter in soccer and are president of the National Honor Society. Instead, Harvard and Yale are seeking the oddballs, the folks who can write but can’t do math, or who can invent a new kind of nuclear fusion but can’t get a date. Sure, the class as a whole is well-rounded and average, but each individual is remarkable.

I met a student named Ramit Sethi last week. He's a rock star. A Purple Cow. It's all over his Web site, his résumé, and his manner on the phone. Most of his peers are too scared, too insecure, too worn down by the system to succeed. Alas, being invisible is just not a good plan.

[Buy in bulk](#)

You can save a lot of money and impress your colleagues by buying a bunch of Purple Cow books for the whole crew.

www.Apurplecow.com

Relevance: 93

IS THE ROAD FROM SAN FRANCISCO TO LA DOWNHILL?

You've probably heard of the AIDS ride, a 400-mile bike trek that thousands of ordinary people attempt every year. It's run by a private, for-profit company called Pellotta Teamworks.

Pellotta also runs a variety of other extreme events, including 3-day walks and a trek to Africa. In every case, in order to participate, you've got to go out and raise thousands of dollars for the charity involved.

This is classic Purple Cow thinking in action. Pellotta creates an event so remarkable that the potential audience can't help but be aware of it. (You're going to ride *how many* miles?) Once the participants are hooked, they have an easy way to talk to their friends and co-workers about their goal. The personal effort is easier to sell than the philanthropic goal. "Hey, if he's willing to walk for three days, I'm willing to put up \$100."

Everyone who gets solicited to contribute is, indirectly, getting solicited to participate. Aging baby boomers who want to reclaim their physical stamina frequently sell themselves on the big goal. Pellotta ends up raising millions for charity, at a cost far lower than that of the ineffective beg-a-thons that run by mail or on television. Pellotta makes a juicy profit, the charity raises more money, and the participants have a remarkable experience. The lesson: Getting rid of the costs of interruption helps everyone win.

IT'S NOT HYPE IF IT'S TRUE

Dean Kamen has certainly used the media to spread the word about the Segway Personal Transporter, his gyroscope-controlled electric scooter. It's a big idea, it's easy to talk about, and from the first day, Dean has made it a great story.

But the real story is the work Dean is doing. The Segway is an insanely cool product. Whenever one rolls down the sidewalk, people stop and look. They want a ride. They tell people they saw one. It's almost like watching Superman flying overhead.

Sure, there are challenges—it's too expensive, for starters. But the real issue that the critics miss is this: Most engineers, most companies, most organizations don't have the guts to build something as audacious as the Segway. They're busy making average products for average people. And then they wonder why no one seems particularly interested.

Dean's next project is far more profound than the Segway. It's a vegetable-oil-fueled water purifier, about the size of a room air conditioner on wheels. Imagine the local entrepreneur wheeling this into a village in Kenya. She pours a quart or two of nut oil into the top, dumps in a few gallons of unsafe, unpalatable water, and produces gallons of pure, fresh drinking water for the children of the village. Diarrhea (one of the leading causes of death in Africa) is caused almost entirely by unclean water. Here's an invention that will save millions of people and empower an entire generation of water entrepreneurs.

YOU TOO CAN BE A MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER

Tony Robbins is a brilliant marketer. Starting with great material (from Zig Ziglar and others), he put together a better-than-average motivational speech. There have been thousands before him, and there will surely be many after him. The desire to change people's lives for the better with a speech and a book is irresistible.

That's when Tony's brilliance kicked in. In order to spread the word about his talks—and more important, in order to reinforce his message—Tony figured out how to teach people to walk on hot coals.

Imagine sitting in the Holiday Inn in your town, listening to Tony talk, and watching his team build a fifty-foot-long aisle of burning coals just outside the building. It certainly focuses your attention!

Of course, it's physics, not motivation, that prevents your feet from melting while you walk on the coals. So what? It's the motivation that got you to try it in the first place.

What happens after the first group is exposed to burning coals? That's right. They tell their friends. They tell the media. The word spreads because walking on hot coals is remarkable.

At the next town, far more people are waiting for Tony and his message. And so it goes, from city to city, with the crowds getting larger and the fees going up.

If the coals were an irrelevant gimmick, this probably would have backfired. But by creating a product that is integrated with the idea and is really and truly noteworthy, Robbins built a nine-figure business. He created a brand that allowed him to deliver the original, life-changing messages he had wanted to send all along.

[It started on my blog](#)

*You can read my rambles for free by
clicking here (subscribe, too!)*

www.sethgodin.com

Relevance: 83

WATCHING PAINT DRY?

Not quite, but the initial reception for the Weather Channel probably wasn't much better. Ten years ago, before there were hundreds and hundreds of cable channels, the idea for the Weather Channel seemed pretty loony.

It wasn't.

The Weather Channel makes a fortune. So does www.weather.com. They have millions of viewers—people, it seems, with a weather *otaku*.

When everyone else was trying to be like NBC but a little different, the folks at the Weather Channel set out to be more than a little different. They wanted to be remarkable. They are the Mona Lisa of weather, and it's unlikely they'll be replaced any time soon.

HOW DO YOU SELL QUIET?

As I write this, I'm listening to the Dead through my Bose noise-reducing headphones. It's a very clever idea—they have a computer chip inside that creates a wave pattern that's the opposite of the noise from the plane. The two waves crash into each other, canceling themselves out. The result is that the annoying low-level hum is completely gone.

But how to market this neat device? You really can't understand it until you slip the headphones on. And, of course, it helps if you're on a plane.

So Bose targeted an ideal group of early-adopting sneezers: people with an *otaku* for a better travel experience. Bose worked with American Airlines to put the headphones in first class.

Within months, thousands of people had tried the device—people who travel a lot, are demanding, talk to other people who travel a lot, and can afford the headphones. Bose is running some advertising (which is how I heard about the American Airlines partnership—it's ranked the favorite 1st class bonus by travelers), but I think the ads are a waste. It's people telling other people about this remarkable device that will make it succeed.

GETTING REALLY REALLY SMALL WITH STEVE

Are all venture capitalists the same? A colleague who runs a small VC firm heard my Purple Cow presentation and asked me if I'd sit down with his partners "and teach them to be Purple Cows—if that's possible in this industry."

Of course it is! Steve Jurvetson understands. He understands that the most successful VCs are the ones who back the successful entrepreneurs. And the really good entrepreneurs can choose whichever VC they like. Steve knows that being good with a spreadsheet isn't the key to success—it's having the confidence of the right entrepreneurs. So, while most VCs are busy saying "no" to everyone, keeping a low profile, and looking for really attractively priced deals, Steve has a very different approach.

He picks an industry and a segment that he thinks shows promise (it used to be viral marketing, now it's nanotechnology). Then he learns whatever he can and goes on the road. He speaks constantly, addressing industry groups, seminars, and conferences where entrepreneurs are likely to gather. If he makes a mistake and says something that's wrong, the entrepreneurs correct him. He gets smarter as he goes, and more important, spreads the word that he is the one and the only guy to go to if you're starting a nanotech company.

Steve's the Purple Cow in this sector. Why would a soon-to-be-successful entrepreneur go anywhere else?

IT'S ABOUT THE BIKE

People who are serious about mountain biking aren't afraid to spend money on their equipment. With the bike being the only thing between your butt and the mountain (and that cliff), it's pretty easy to rationalize spending another hundred bucks for something really good.

Rather than marginally improving the mountain bike, Steve Christini took a major leap forward. He invented a bike with all-wheel drive. The front wheel turns whenever the back wheel skids.

The complexity of the device isn't relevant to our discussion. What matters is that this is an easy thing to talk about with the folks on the lift on your way up the mountain. The all-wheel drive is a massive differentiator, one that makes it easy to attract attention.

Of course, the bike has to deliver on the promise (I haven't tried it), but it's certainly a Cow.

(71)

ANY BOOK YOU WANT— AS LONG AS IT INVOLVES CHEESE OR FISH

Harry Schwartz is the name of an independent bookstore in Milwaukee. It's a big, all-purpose bookstore, like the Tattered Cover or Powell's. When the Internet came along, Harry Schwartz could have done what many bookstores tried to do (but failed). They could have opened a general-service online bookstore.

But you can't out-Amazon Amazon.

Instead, Jack Covert took the store's existing specialty in business books and ran with it. Dial 1-800-CEO-READ, and you can talk to a real person who's quite knowledgeable about business books. Even better, staff members are experts at handling orders of 100 or 1,000 or 10,000 copies of a book—at a really low price.

Organizing around a specific competency—in this case, the needs of large-scale business-book buyers—makes it easy to talk about what they do. It's not just a bookstore... it's a bookstore that only sells business books in bulk.

As a result, Jack Covert is one of the key players in the ever-growing business-book business.

WHERE'S WOLFMAN JACK WHEN YOU NEED HIM?

Radio is dying. Clear Channel has built a sanitized monopoly. The Internet and the iPod have stolen a generation of listeners. Radio is boring and easily replaced. R.I.P. radio.

Or not.

Paul Saunders, founder of Rville.com, has a different idea. Build a radio infrastructure—everything from ad promotion to technology—and then allow thousands of local entrepreneurs to start their own stations.

Suddenly, you can build thousands or tens of thousands of local Internet radio stations—and sell national advertising at the same time.

Obviously, each entrepreneur has an incentive to market her station. Some of those folks will become avid listeners. Others will start their own stations. It spreads.

ACTUALLY, IT *IS* ROCKET SCIENCE

NASA is no different from most bloated government bureaucracies. Most of NASA's and the Air Force's rocket scientists are officially classified as GS-1515-XX, Operations Research Analysts. And some of them spend a lot of time working the system, not improving it. Gary Lister is different. Obsessed with continuous process improvement and lean systems technology, Gary is a Purple Cow.

A visit to his blog, http://little_lean_lessons.blogspot.com/, is a useful look at rocket science and process insights. By going underground (without permission, in his spare time) and attracting like-minded individuals, he's changing the way things get done—and improving his career options as well.

DOT DVD

You've probably heard of Netflix. My friend Michael reminded me of them when he discovered that I was *buying* the DVDs I watch on airplanes. "Idiot!" he said. "Why buy them when you can get dozens every month for \$20?"

Of course, he was right. This is a remarkable business model. Netflix mails you three DVDs (with return, postage-paid envelopes), and you can keep them for as long as you want. As soon as you return one, they send you another. (Along with a free-sample coupon with each DVD—a coupon to give your friend, naturally).

In addition to being remarkably cheap, the service is really easy to talk about. Combine this with their smart (and aggressive) measured advertising campaign, and it really is Purple.

UNLESS YOU'RE THE STAY-PUFT MARSHMALLOW MAN...

If you're driving through Minneapolis, you'll probably encounter (sooner or later) a beautifully painted little car, a car belonging to The Geek Squad.

Most people don't think about computer repair until they need it. And when they need it, they need it *now*. The Geek Squad drives to your office, fixes your computer on the spot, and drives away. The Geek Squad is cute, funny, memorable, and quite remarkable. There's nothing stopping any computer repair company from doing this—except they don't; The Geek Squad does.

“LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT MY GRANDCHILDREN”

Visit my dad’s office, and pretty soon you’ll hear about the Ceiva picture frame on his desk. It looks just like a picture frame, but it has a wire out the back. That wire connects to the phone, and every morning at four, it dials out and downloads the latest digital photos that have been uploaded by my sisters and me.

By turning photographs from private scrapbooks into shared community property, Ceiva has created a remarkable new social mechanism. Users tell everyone they meet. The company’s challenge isn’t getting my dad to share the idea—it’s finding the techie early adopters to take the plunge and buy one. In other words, the buyers and the users are different people, and the sneezers are busy talking to the wrong people. But as the Ceiva inexorably spreads, the power of shared pictures will dramatically accelerate the company’s growth.

NOW, IF I COULD ONLY TRACK BOOK SALES!

Data doesn't have to be dry. We're used to seeing online information delivered as boring numbers, dense charts, or incomprehensible tables. This is dramatically different from the way we think about the analog world. We know if the pond is frozen from the color of the water. We can tell the status of the gas in our car by glancing at a simple gauge. The smile on a friend's face is all we need to know a lot of complicated data about whether we're doing something right or not.

So Ambient is trying to bridge that gap by creating a series of analog devices that measure digital data. The first is the Ambient Orb, and I've got one on my desk. The Orb receives radio signals (I actually have no idea where they come from... not from my computer, that's for sure) that tell it to change color. It can be red, blue, or green, or somewhere in between.

Logging onto Ambient's Web site, I type in the serial number of my Orb and tell it what to track. It can show me tomorrow's weather (in my ZIP code or somewhere else) or the status of the stock market. If the Dow is up, the Orb glows green... in a bear market, it's red, red, red.

Now, with just a glance, I know what I need to know. And yes, I tell everyone who walks in about it. And yes, Ambient sold out their entire production run last Christmas, with more goodies to come.

SHECKMATE <HIC>

I'm not one for drinking games, and, my guess is, neither are most chess players. But Firebox.com, a U.K.-based retailer of totally cool stuff, figured that it might be neat to combine the two. They don't call gimmicks like this "conversation pieces" for nothing.

Their chess set is pretty simple. It's just an ordinary chessboard with different-sized shot glasses for the pieces. Fill one side's pieces with whiskey, the other with, say, vodka, and get playing. Every time you take a piece, you have to drink the contents. They call it "self-handicapping." Don't castle and drive, I guess.

They're obviously smarter than I, because the site is doing great, selling a wide range of stuff like this. If it spreads, it's right.

WHAT'S IT SAY ON THE QUARTER?

Using classic permission marketing and ideavirus techniques, Don Wildmon has managed to become a force on the political scene.

You may have seen the many media appearances and quotes of the leader of the American Family Association. They're the folks who want to keep "In God We Trust" on coins and keep the Pledge just the way it is. They also write on their site, "the non-Christian doesn't have the spiritual capacity to [be a good person.]"

The success of the AFA makes some of the realities of American politics crystal clear. Politicians have trouble getting elected with nuanced discussions of policy. They can't get the attention of the TV-jaded public by talking about how many more years it will be before Social Security runs out of money. "Policy wonk" is a dirty word. Instead, it's the vibrant single issues that mobilize people to take action.

Wildmon can get more than a million and a half people to sign a petition about the Pledge because it appears to be such a black-and-white issue. And he can use a petition drive to build an email permission list, which he can use to fuel ideavirus campaigns about other issues. Each piece supports the other.

By relentlessly focusing on a few issues that appeal to a small but vocal minority, Wildmon can amplify his point of view and keep it on the public stage. You don't have to agree with him to see the logic in the marketing.

RESPECT IS SURPRISINGLY HARD TO FIND

Sailnet.com is a pretty simple business. They sell high-end sailing gear by mail and by catalog.

But the third page of the catalog carries a letter from the owners, and it's pretty remarkable. They promise to do three things:

1. Provide free shipping.
2. Drive prices as low as possible.
3. Guarantee what they sell.

With this remarkable combination, why would a sailor buy things anywhere else? By treating their customers with respect—by treating them the way they'd want to be treated—Sailnet makes it easy for their customers to spread the word. It's easy to distrust most retailers, to be suspicious of hidden charges or gotchas down the road. But companies like Lands' End and Sailnet change that equation and make respect a tactic that leads to profits.

(81)

IT ACTUALLY WORKS

No one actually expects the stuff they buy from an infomercial to work. While we may get tricked into buying something every once in a while (spray-on hair?), it's almost always with the expectation that there must be a catch.

So, when Ron Popeil introduced his chicken roaster, most people just changed the channel. But a few were taken in by the beautifully done infomercial, and they ordered a roaster.

Guess what?

It worked. At least a dozen people have told me how much they enjoy their Ron Popeil Chicken Roaster. They even talked about it on the local NPR station. The reason? Because they're stunned. You can be remarkable just by being good—if everyone else is lousy.

LONG, STRANGE TRIP

A nine-year-old asked me about the Grateful Dead the other day. Sure, everyone knows the story about how much they toured and how little they recorded, and how they encouraged their fans to tape and trade live shows. (Even this kid knows now.)

But it's a Purple Cow story through and through. By inventing a hybrid of rock and jazz—and by being better at it than anyone ever was—they built a lucrative business around touring, as opposed to record sales. Add to the remarkable concerts the idea that fans were not just allowed, but actually encouraged, to tape and trade the shows, and the Dead built a classic Purple Cow engine.

Folks living on a bus (those with the Grateful Dead *otaku*) were given the motivation and the tools to share the passion with their non-Dead friends. It spread.

DON'T TELL PETA

I got yet another stock photo catalog in the mail today. I get hundreds of them. Stock photo agencies want you to rent one of their millions of photos for hundreds of dollars (each). The math is great. The competition is cutthroat. Unless you're a real pro, a lot of it looks the same.

This did not look the same.

The cover of the Veer stock photo catalog was the southern half of a very, very ugly dog. Beautifully photographed. Arresting, in fact. Even better, the rest of the catalog *wasn't* filled with the usual selection of stock photos. Instead, Veer spent the time to create pages and pages of fictional layouts, ads, brochures, and more. All featuring their products, no doubt, but still a great source for ideas.

My catalog is gone now. Disappeared. Stolen.

Which is exactly what you want, right?

YIKES!

On the very next page after I told you not to tell PETA, here they are.

No doubt you've heard of this fringe animal-rights group. Fringe, because they don't agree with the majority. But unknown? Hardly. By performing remarkable acts (throwing animal blood on furs at fashion shows, for example), PETA activists have alienated the masses and entranced a vocal minority, all on a shoestring budget.

Some people call their tactics dangerous or disrespectful. But if the goal is to spread the word, they've got that part of the equation mastered. The challenge they have (please forgive me) is now that they have the Cow, they have to milk it. They have to figure out how to take the attention they've attracted and turn it into an engine for actual change.

BEING MALKOVICH

Just heard a great interview with actor John Malkovich. His directorial debut was recently released, and he's flogging it on the radio. The interviewer asked him why the movie didn't spell everything out—why it required people to actually think.

And there, on the radio, he had a small tantrum. He wanted to know why people in the movie business assume that the audience is stupid, stupid, stupid.

He's right. Smart people with a film *otaku* are going to see this movie. And since they weren't insulted—instead, they were challenged—they'll tell their friends.

Average products for average people are a bad idea. That slot is taken. This film, like *Memento* before it, has a chance of spreading the word among a very relevant hive.

SACD, THE SLOW COW

Audiophiles know about a new format for records called SACD. It contains eight times as much data as a standard CD, and if you've got decent ears and a good stereo, the difference is shocking.

The good news for the record industry is that it's impossible to copy (there's too much data), and it's not worth turning into an MP3 because the sound is so much better on the SACD. (Never mind that copying is a good thing—that's a story for another day.) The bad news is that the format requires a brand new CD player.

Adoption has been much slower than people expected. Why? After all, it's a remarkably good technology, something that dramatically improves the quality of any good stereo system. People are talking about it.

I think it's starting slowly because most music buyers can't *see* the difference (it looks just like a CD) and can't easily *hear* the difference (it's not as obvious on the radio as the jump from vinyl was). As a result, it's hard to talk about, hard to share. Click [here](#) for more info on my SACD label.

The music industry spent a decade telling us that CDs were perfect. It's a slow battle to persuade us of exactly the opposite now.

DC DUCKS, THE LOUD COW

If you take your kids to Washington D.C., it's just a matter of time before you board a DC Duck. These are fifty-year-old military vehicles, designed for the invasion of Normandy. They were designed to drive on land *and* in the water—with only a few seconds to switch from one to the other.

The DC Duck guides drive through the city, pointing out the sights and generally making a nuisance of themselves. The passengers are encouraged to quack every block or so, and kids are awarded a bright yellow plastic duck-mouth whistle that makes an even louder quacking sound.

It's essentially impossible to visit D.C. without encountering the Ducks.

The thing that transforms the Ducks from annoying pest to vibrant Purple Cow? The guides are really talented. The company hires smart and trains them well, so the tour is actually fun. As a result, the idea has spread to a dozen cities around the world.

CURVED PILLOWS, THE QUIET COW

An astonishing 80 percent of Americans suffer from back pain at one point or another. A big chunk of that pain could be reduced if people slept with a foam neck-support pillow instead of a traditional feather one. You've probably seen these pillows advertised in the Sharper Image catalog. Many doctors could tell you that they work. But they don't (tell you).

The reason they won't tell you is that a pillow is invisible. No one sees the pillow you sleep on (even you—it's in a case). No one talks about their pillows. It's not a topic for conversation, and neck-support pillows are useful, but not quite remarkable.

While it's not technically a Cow, I bring it up because this is actually a widespread challenge—all too often, we try to market something that's naturally invisible. That makes it awfully difficult and expensive to spread the word.

The best way to make a neck-support pillow remarkable? Figure out how to sell it through a channel where the retailer (a doctor?) is rewarded for talking about something she didn't used to talk about.

(89)

THE PURPLE CRUTCH

Walk Easy makes crutches in fourteen colors. Anything you want, except boring. The crutches are light, easy to use, and comfortable. And they make it clear that needing a crutch is nothing to be embarrassed about. Of course, they have the company logo and phone number right on the side.

(90)

GETTING A JOB BY DELETING HIS RESUME

Peter Contardo was looking for a job in all the usual (wrong) places. So he trashed his résumé and stopped looking for a job. That's how he found one.

Instead of looking for a job, he started a volunteer group: The Professionals Network of Tampa Bay. The goal? To help *other* people find jobs or get their own companies started—without leaving town. He started with eleven “clients.” Since then, the organization has grown to more than two thousand members. Members have landed jobs at companies like JPMorgan Chase, AT&T, Verizon, Raymond James, The Home Depot, Catalina Marketing, First Union, United Way, Home Shopping Network, Household, AOL Time Warner, and Sykes Enterprises—all high-quality professional jobs, all in Tampa Bay, all in Florida.

Most major outplacement companies—including DBM, Lee Hecht Harrison, Right Management, Spherion, and Challenger, Gray and Christmas—has referred its clients to the Professionals Networks program and has sent guest speakers to their meetings.

And what about Peter? As a direct result of the organization, he has a job he loves in brand development. And no, they didn't ask for a résumé.

PURPLE NAILS

The walls are painted purple. The white building is wrapped with a purple stripe. Even the President and CEO's email is delivered in corporate purple.

In eighteen years, Larry Gaynor, President and CEO of The Nailco Group (TNG), has taken his company from a small concession specializing in acrylic nail wraps to one of the largest distributors of beauty products in the country. The secret? A corporate culture organized around the idea of discarding the status quo. Gaynor calls his people Rebels.

All new employees are presented with a corporate purple pennant, a bull horn, and a pompom emblazoned with the corporate mascot—the Rebel—to welcome them to the team. At every quarterly meeting, the company cheerleading squad storms into the room to lead the team in a corporate fight song. The company's motto? Be Amazing.

When you peek in on Gaynor working in his office, you'll find him in his purple jacket, working with his purple pen. It's not just a gimmick. The company is organized from the ground up to be remarkable.

MAKING MUSIC COLLECTIBLE

An innovative company called BandMerch crafted a remarkable promotion for the rock group Linkin Park.

Buy a CD, put it in your computer, go online, and you can buy one of three thousand pairs of collectible Linkin Park sneakers, made by hip shoe brand DC Shoes.

This works at so many levels, it's scary.

First, it makes it worth buying the CD instead of listening to a friend's. Second, it takes a sonic idea and adds the visual (sneaker). Third, it pays for itself. Fourth, it's limited in time and size, so people need to get in early.

“Hey, where'd you get those sneakers?”

PS: They sold out of almost every size *before* the sneakers even got to the warehouse.

PPS: This, not suing your listeners, is the way to grow the music business.

MAKING A BONFIRE

When Marc Seago, Emily Malatesta, and Lisa Rosevear started looking for new jobs, they were as frustrated as most job seekers. They certainly seemed outnumbered—hundreds of companies and seemingly millions of people were competing with them. So they started WeWantWork, almost a guild for the unemployed.

With just five weeks of planning and organization, Seago and Malatesta found forty-two marketing and PR pros who were talented, motivated, and unemployed. They closed the group to new members and went on a campaign to attract attention to their roster. In essence, all forty-two did promotional work for the entire group. Because they were marketing folks, the act of marketing itself was proof of their worth. The result was press coverage by CNN, BBC, Reuters, *The New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, *Newsday*, *Crain's*, *PRWEEK*, and others.

At last count, about a third of the group members have full-time jobs, with most of the other members finding consulting and freelance work. Just as a bonfire magnifies the heat of each log and burns ever hotter, creating a remarkable movement caused the idea to spread faster.

What happens when other traditional competitors start to work together?

WHERE DOES BILL GATES STAY?

If you had to name a hotel chain, chances are you'd pick an old one: Marriott, Hilton, Ramada, Ritz Carlton—they've all been around a while.

Wingate Inns, on the other hand, is just six years old. Obviously, they have a lot of branding to do.

Instead of using ads, though, the chain is obsessed with the mid-priced business traveler. Wingate offers guests extra amenities at no charge, such as free high-speed Internet access in every guest room; free faxing, copying, and printing; free local calls; free long-distance access; free expanded continental breakfast; and free whirlpool and fitness center. Starting from scratch enabled Wingate to be the first hotel chain to introduce free high-speed Internet access in every guest room and every hotel.

As a result of obsessing with one sort of traveler, Wingate was chosen as the top mid-priced hotel chain for in-room comfort by the Wall Street Journal's *Smart Money* magazine.

And yes, Bill Gates nominated Wingate Inns for a Computerworld Smithsonian Award in the Business & Related services category. The American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA) called Wingate "The Obvious Choice for business travelers." For Bill Gates, too.

A NEW WAY TO LISTEN TO BRITNEY

Hit Clips are stamp-sized cartridges that contain one- to two-minute samples of popular songs. A clip costs \$2, and a player is less than \$15. It's sort of a walkman with training wheels.

It's aimed squarely at the greatest fad hive of all time—elementary school. One kid is all it takes to sneeze the idea to an entire school eager to sport the latest cheap gimmick. I've seen estimates that more than 85 million clips have been sold since they were launched in 2000.

(96)

HOLD IT IN YOUR HAND

Dimension Printing makes a \$30,000 printer that doesn't print on paper. It prints *stuff*.

A talented designer can sketch an object on her laptop (a bobble-head doll or a military tank or a complicated piece from the workings of a piano), and within a few minutes, the printer makes one. Not just a flimsy mock-up, but a rugged, working piece.

It's inconceivable to me that someone holding one of these widgets wouldn't want to know how it was made. And for many businesses, it completely transforms the way they do things—and cuts their time to market by 90 percent. Amazing.

(97)

THANKS.

Tracy Sheridan is a Cow. She uses one simple strategy, but she uses it with consistency, humility and genuine affection. The strategy? She's grateful. She helps people. She connects them. She does ten things for someone before she asks them to do one for her.

Her new project, Operation Gratitude, is all about bringing entertainment to army bases. Instead of offering sponsors yet another chance to interrupt something, though, she's seeking out organizations that are doing it just to say thank you. The result? So far, everyone's winning.

SIX CUPS OF SOY MILK A DAY

That's how much you're supposed to drink, they say. Revival Soy says they figured out how to combine that into one soy bar. The challenge they faced: How to launch it into retail, get it recommended by doctors, and advertise it.

Cow answer: Don't. Instead, they only sell it online (www.revivalsoy.com). They push hard to have people subscribe to it. And they make it easy for subscribers to send free samples to their friends.

Obviously, you're not going to get people to subscribe to a food product they've never tasted, so the entire company is built around the ideavirus and doctor referrals. The smart thing is Revival's focus on investing in the stuff that matters—making a remarkable product they believe in.

SCRAMBLING THE RADAR

Retailers know that advertising rarely works any more, so they're very attuned to a groundswell of support for a new product. When two or three or six people walk into a Barnes & Noble during the course of a week and talk to a salesperson about the same book, alarm bells go off—this is something hot!

What if smart marketers could organize people who love great products and get them onboard early? What if this legion of sneezers was available for hire—not for money, but for the love of great stuff? The result would be a short-circuiting of the early-warning radar that retailers and the media use. Marketers could cut through the randomness and start early.

That's what Dave Balter is building at BzzAgent. A squadron of agents, all waiting for the next remarkable thing, all trained on the best way to spread the word. It turns out that it's not very hard to double the sales of a book and then make it even hotter. BzzAgent keeps a low profile, but you can check them out at www.bzzagent.com.

(100) BONUS COW!

YOU MEAN YOU WANT TO COOK WITH IT?

Viking Stoves is a nine-figure luxury brand that shows no signs of slowing down. Big, heavy, powerful stainless steel stoves that belong in a restaurant, not a home kitchen. Yet people buy them. Lots of them. Even people who don't cook. The Viking stove is a Mona Lisa. It's remarkable, and it sends a message to everyone who sees it. And of course, you do see it, because the kitchen is where people congregate when they come over to your house.

The Viking is so popular that it has spawned an armada of imitators, including my new Thermador, which, frankly, is a piece of junk. I don't recommend it. Get the Viking instead. There's only one Mona Lisa, after all.

SPECIAL THANKS to Adrian, Stephanie, Will and Allison at Portfolio, Maria and Todd at Amazon, Bill, Alan, Rob and John at Fast Company, AlexG., the master marketer, and Mo, who understands branding. Catherine E. Oliver (what *does* the E. stand for?) did the copyediting. Thanks also to Lisa, Robin & Karen, JSB, Stuart the K, PJ Wilson and of course, Red. Before sliced bread, what *was* the greatest thing?

I received hundreds of contributions to this book. Thanks to everyone who took the time to write and tell me about their special insight.

Jay Levinson turned 70 this year. In addition to being brilliant, Jay is the single-nicest author I've ever worked with. It's remarkable to encounter someone so insightful and generous. If you haven't bought all his books, please do so immediately. Lester Wunderman is another Purple Cow who understands the power of a big idea. You may have heard of a few of his: The American Express card, direct marketing and of course, the little gold box that gets you a free CD from the Columbia Record Club.

Other Purple Cows I didn't get a chance to tell you about: Tom Cohen, who gets it and is a role model (which goes double for Jerry Colonna); Lynn Gordon, a brilliant inventor who continues to carve a positive path for those willing to follow it; and Charlotte Okie, who makes people taller.

Most of all, thanks to you. For being brave and cunning and different and remarkable. For spreading the word. And for not settling.

(101) SPECIAL DOUBLE BONUS COW

CLEVER WAYS TO SELL BOOKS

It's pledge week here at Apurplecow.com. Just like NPR, but better.

I realized that the best way to get my ideas to spread was to sell books. And the best way to get the book out there was to have people who liked the book buy a bunch of copies and give them away.

So, if you [click here](#) and go to www.apurplecow.com, you can click on FREE STUFF and discover all the cool things you can get by buying a bunch of books. It's not just marketing hooahaa—it's a strategy worth copying.

Thanks for reading.

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to the beginning.