Debating the future direction of market research

‘observation’-based research is emerging through social networks, blogs and community groups accessing and analysing the huge wealth of data created in the world of web 2.0 technologies.

A testimonial from Alan Giles (Saïd Business School) on the cover recommends that it should be essential reading for clients. In the main, I agree with this, but probably not for the reason that the author has in mind. I think that it might encourage clients to think through what they can expect from the research they have in mind — is it likely to be fit for purpose? — and become more responsible commissioners of research by thinking more about what is possible, rather than having blind faith in the value of conducting a survey. I also think that students will find this an interesting counter to market research textbooks, and will also find the extensive references to other published sources very useful. However, Giles also says Graves’ book should be *‘carefully hidden from anyone whose livelihood depends on market research’*. I would totally disagree with this latter recommendation — in fact I think it is essential reading for researchers as it provides a valuable reality check on what can, and cannot, be achieved from standard methodologies. In fact the book has already created quite a stir within the market research sector. Researchers may disagree with some of what Graves has to say, but the underlying premise needs to be seriously debated more widely, particularly in an era where so much quantitative research has moved online and focus groups have become a production process. It is not just about poor questionnaire design; it’s about the whole research process, what it’s become and where it should go in future. As such, Graves makes an interesting and useful, if somewhat one-sided, contribution to this debate.

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Creative B2B branding (no, really): Building a creative brand in a business world

Scot McKee

Goodfellow Publishers Limited, 2010; Hardback; £29.99; 225pp;
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If you’re looking for another hardback marketing book that will sit neatly together with the others on your shelf, you’ll be happy to know that this one won’t stick out, although with a glossy printed cover and no outer sleeve it feels cheaper than its £29.99 price (unfortunately Amazon only discounts this one by £1.50). The text inside is easy to

What's in a title?

read, but is only supported by a handful of black and white thumbnail images and a few simple diagrams.

Here we're being told that not only is this book about B2B branding, but it's 'Creative B2B Branding' and just to make sure we believe it, the writer emphasizes it by saying 'no, really'. With a title like that, I expect to find fresh approaches supported by distinctive creative; unfortunately, there are no new insights and the creative is so small that the reader can only just make out the headlines. As for being good examples — with the exception of one campaign — the headlines are repetitive and lacking any form of branding. What the writer seems to be saying is that the job of creative branding is to produce a memorable image that grabs attention and can be repeated everywhere. I was also disappointed that too often the writer used consumer references to support what he had to say. If this book was heavy on theory I could accept that, but it's not.

On the shoulders of giants

Where this book is strong is the very personal approach the writer has taken, and he's not shy in putting forward a number of dismissive comments about B2B clients. Surprisingly though, in the introduction he tells us that he's never been able to read a business book of any description from cover to cover; he's dipped into some and returned to a few. He even goes on to say that after reflecting on this fact, he's not sure if he's stupid or the books are boring. For someone who's supposed to be a branding expert, this seems a very odd thing to say; surely he would have done extensive research into his marketplace, especially when one considers just how many books there are covering all aspects of branding, advertising and marketing. Written by many of the giants in our industry they'd hardly all be boring, otherwise why would so many get published and more importantly why are so many of them in their second, third and even fifth editions? In addition, with such a wealth of knowledge available to us, the opportunities and benefits of continually being able to see further and more clearly become obvious, as does the ability to identify what's been said before, what's been overlooked and what is a good tone of voice and copy style to use. This book seems weighed down by the writer's personality; the chapters read more like a collection of magazine articles where the writer treats the subject matter like some kind of sport. Too often, two or three lines of detail are supported by four or five lines of inconsequential ramblings. At one point, the writer tells a story about the problems he had with buying a BMW; now I'm all for using personal experiences to support an argument, but four pages of it? Obviously, someone became bored with this text because after printing BMW eight times in one paragraph they then spelt it BWM!

Getting the messages across

The structure to this book is quite logical and the writer covers of most of the issues relating to advertising a brand. As for who this book is aimed at, I'm not exactly sure that was ever part of the criteria nor would I like to say whom it would most help. There's a lot of basic stuff here; AIDA is covered off (all-be-it in a non-creative context), the Avis story is mentioned, the Revlon quote's given, there's a bit about Coca Cola and of course Nike and Apple. As with the copy

style, issues relating to B2B marketing are given a very personal slant where the insights seem to only relate to the writer's own experiences. I'm reminded of What If's book *Sticky Wisdom*, which is all about their approach to problem solving and creativity. Unlike here, they're very clear as to it being just about them and their process, as opposed to being about a marketing issue. Too often with this book it feels like the content is being held hostage by the writer, who rather than simplify things entwines so many personal comments into the text that you're left feeling that he believes that only he can unlock some mythical chains that restrict B2B branding. There is, however, a change in the penultimate chapter on digital; it's still written from a personal point of view, but the overbearing additives have been dispensed with. Although nothing new is said, it's clearly written, easy to understand and more importantly easy to refer to, especially the bits on social media. After this chapter, there's a case study presented as an interview between the creator/writer and a client. As Joe Duffy's book *Brand Apart* proves this is a good way to present work; however, in this instance there are few useful insights as this is more like a back-slapping love-in.

In conclusion

I applaud Scot for writing a book, trying to improve the perception of B2B branding (advertising and marketing), and for trying to make the subject more personal. I also sympathize with him as he seems to have had to continually deal with difficult clients. If this book had been called 'frustrations of b2b adman', I sense I may have been writing a different review. In terms of the subject matter would I recommend this book? No, Al and Laura Ries's *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding* has far more to offer and at a fraction of the cost, as does Adam Morgan's classic *Eat the Big Fish*.

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