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# Reviews

## No Logo

Naomi Klein

Flamingo, 2001; softback; 490pp; £8.99; ISBN 0 00 653040

It is not often that a reviewer for a technical journal gets his hands on a copper-bottomed bestseller. *No Logo* is a book that has reached heights other books about marketing do not reach. It may acquire cult status as a rousing polemic against global corporate power.

Yet, far from being a strident anti-capitalist rant, it is a racy read, well written, shrewdly argued, formidably researched and enlivened by case histories and anecdotes from all over the world — many from Britain — although the perspective is North American (the writer is a Canadian journalist).

The title *No Logo* is puzzling. If Ms Klein wishes to convey that ours would be a better world if we were not in thrall to the big brands, there are less cryptic ways of saying so, as she proves in her book. But confusion about the nature of brands and branding not only contaminates the title; it permeates her argument. By erroneously using ‘brand power’ and ‘producer power’ interchangeably, she misses an opportunity to deal with the relatively new phenomenon of global brands in the incisive way she reserves for other big ideas. (Note that a ‘logo’ may be the projection of a ‘brand’, just as a ‘brand’ may be the projection of a ‘corporation’. But there is nothing inevitable about such relationships.)

Anyone who buys this book in the hope of learning how some brands manage to command allegiance and others do not will be disappointed. (Think of two car owners hotly disputing the relative merits of Ferrari and Porsche. You will never see them blow a gasket over Shell versus BP — arguably the more ‘powerful’ brands.) The only thing you will learn about brands is the crimes committed in their names. To those crimes, says the author, there is no end, but they can be grouped under three headings: crimes against the producer, crimes against the consumer and cultural vandalism. (My headings, her crimes.)

The defining crime against producers, by which Klein means the workers, is exploitation. She spent weeks observing young girls and women stitching trainers for 18 cents an hour in Philippine sweatshops, at any moment liable to a beating, the sack or worse. The irony is that the contractors who ‘own’ these slaves work impartially for Nike, Reebok or whoever offers the price of starvation wages.

This enables her to make a valid point about brands: they are becoming detached from the manufacture of a single product and float, like the smile of the Cheshire Cat, above a multi-product family, serviced by marketing men and fat-cat CEOs, with everything else outsourced to the lowest bidder. (I am writing this on the day when Dyson announced that he will move production of his vacuum cleaner from Malmesbury to Malaysia. Only the smile will remain behind in Wiltshire.)

Crimes against the consumer run the gamut from restricting choice to

**Well written best  
seller**

**Some confusion**

**Crimes against  
workers**

**Exploitation and  
outsourcing**

**Crimes against consumers . . .**

endangering health. Klein posits that brands, and the corporations which own them, can grow only by gobbling up their rivals, thus stifling competition. She is highly entertaining on corporate warfare, for instance when she describes ‘brand bombing’, and what Wal-Mart or Starbucks get up to when they want to lay exclusive claim to a territory. But she reserves her real anger for the blood-and-guts issue of consumer health put at risk, whether by Ericsson scrambling our brains with their mobiles, Monsanto curdling our stomachs with GM foods, Nestlé malnourishing third-world babies or McDonalds raising a generation of fat-food slobs.

**. . . not to mention the environment**

The third group of crimes is the worst. Klein accuses the big brands of trying to take over our lives — leaving us no space to breathe except branded air, and nothing to drink but branded water. Brand encroachment is both physical and metaphysical. Billboards proclaim ownership of the highways, the gothic arch of the church is replaced by the golden arch of McDonalds, Disney plans to build and brand entire towns; wherever you look you will see that a brand name has got there first. Klein shivers our timbers, but never hysterically, and sometimes even humorously.

As for our minds, waking or dreaming, the take-over proceeds: knowledge, as dispensed by universities, is becoming increasingly sponsored; medical research is already branded by the big drug companies; American schools provide colourful advertising hoardings in classroom, canteen and even lavatory. Leisure is, of course, a prime target for brand conquest, and Nike’s swoosh owns most of the sports that Coca-Cola has failed to sweep up.

**Censorship?**

That is the good news. The bad news, as Klein believes the McLibel case has shown, is that the brands want to exert censorship and, hubristically, strive for hegemony — eg Saatchi lusting after the Midland Bank, Branson/Virgin wanting to command oceans and skies, and Camelot.

**Why blame the brand and not the person?**

She finds the brands guilty, whereas the real power lies with corporations, or even individuals. It is not brand power that fuels the chainsaws of the timber companies that lay waste to the rainforests. Yet when her brand argument does apply, she fails to point out a lesson for direct marketers who ignore the downside of their pursuit of relationship marketing: the more intimate the bond between consumer and producer, between brand and bewitched, the more vulnerable the brand to adverse publicity.

**The backlash**

Not every consumer feels part of an endangered species, not even after reading *No Logo*. But the author describes the actions of those who do. They are hitting back — with adverse publicity among other means. There are many facets to this fight — from organising local boycotts of sweatshop products to defacing posters with anti-ad art; from peaceful protests by ‘Swampy’ and assorted toad lovers to violent damage in cities like Sydney, London and Barcelona.

In her view, all these local movements, consumerist and environmental, are beginning to coalesce. Sometimes the big corporations are forced to retreat (Shell/Brent Spar), offer better wages (Nike) or clean up a mess of their own making (McDonalds). Businesses reach for self-regulatory codes of conduct as a first line of defence. Schools are beginning to

educate a generation of brand sceptics. A thousand motivated individuals and groups coordinate global opposition via the Internet.

Klein admits that there is a long way to go before the forces of evil are defeated, but her aim is clear: to see a 'citizen-centred alternative' to the international rule of the brand. In her book the democratisation of corporate power is not incompatible with enterprise.

*Victor Ross FIDM*

## **The Biology of Business: Decoding the Natural Laws of Enterprise**

*John Henry Clippinger III*

Jossey-Bass, 1999; hardback; 304pp; \$28.50 (\$19.95 from Amazon); ISBN 078794324X

### **A difficult read**

I liked *The Biology of Business* but I warn you now: it is neither essential nor easy reading. I read the book on a flight to Chicago; it was part of the course reading material for the integrated marketing communications course on which I was to teach at Northwestern University.

### **Biology as an analogy for business**

*The Biology of Business* is a collection of papers on complex adaptive systems, and it sets out to draw analogies between how businesses operate and evolve and current thinking in biology and evolution — trying to meld chaos theory, genetics, DNA and evolution into management concepts. On first reading it has little relevance to marketing, being more concerned with the internal structures of organisations.

### **Stimulating**

It is quite a difficult read, and the papers are written by a variety of authors in very different styles, which left me confused several times. I found the book academically stimulating and thought-provoking, with some real hidden gems, but at the same time a sad reflection on today's fad for taking a good idea and trying to write a management book about it.

### **The ideas have relevance, but . . .**

If you work with customers in marketing, advertising, sales or customer service, you will find precious little relevant direct advice or ideas. Why was this book among the course reading material? What was its relevance to integrated marketing communications? The reason I liked this book so much was that, having read it, I realised that complex adaptive systems are what marketing and customer service are all about!

The ideas within complex adaptive systems are ideal for marketing. These are summed up as 'seven basics of self-organisation', namely aggregation, non-linearity, flows, diversity, tagging, internal models and building blocks. The reasons ring so true to me because they embody the things I do every day in understanding customers. Below I have drawn an analogy with each of the seven basics:

- aggregation: building customer segmentations that group like-minded customers together
- non-linearity: breaking down the illusion of the 'average customer' in senior management's mind

- flows: recognising the cause-and-effect chain in our customer policies and service and their value to the business
- diversity: recognising that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ mentality does not work for customers
- tagging: the need for a ‘customer language’ or segmentations which the whole business can use and understand
- internal models: using customers’ past behaviour as a predictor of their future value
- building blocks: a great marketing programme puts all these elements together in different ways for different objectives.

**... you need to work at it!**

Complex adaptive systems have real relevance to marketers. Perhaps in many ways applying principles from biology to human populations is much more sensible than trying to apply them to organisations — after all, the behaviour of populations is the cornerstone of marketing. So read this book and then think very hard about how to apply the lessons. It certainly will not spell them out for you, but they are there. Or you could wait for a book that applies the complex adaptive systems ideas to marketing, but by then the competition could be too far ahead!

*Clive Humby FIDM*