

PERSONA INSIGHTS

Accidental Branding: A Not So Accidental Book Review

By Tony Zambito

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Do you ever get the feeling that most good things happen by accident? Somewhere in your career, I am sure that after long weeks and long hours, it all seemed hopeless that this "breakthrough" you were working on just wasn't going to happen. And, of course, you pick up the paper and read of this marvelous success story of a company that has grown astronomically in the past two or three years and find that it all happened by "accident." No business plan, no major marketing plan and strategy, no thought given to branding, and etc. In your head you scream: "what luck!"

If you relate to this, you should check out David Vinjamuri's new book [Accidental Branding: How Ordinary People Build Extraordinary Brands](#). In David's book, he covers such entrepreneurs as:

- Craig Newmark of Craig's List;
- John Peterman of J.Peterman Company;
- Gary Erickson of Cliff Bar;
- Gert Boyle of Columbia Sportswear;
- Roxanne Quimby of Burt's Bees;
- Julie Aigner-Clark of Baby Einstein;
- and Myrian Zaoui and Erik Malka of The Art of Shaving

All of these people were entrepreneurs who David points out enjoyed "accidental branding" success and were not minted MBA types who succeeded. Some were downright eccentric in their personalities and beliefs also. So, was all of their success truly an accident? If you judge by virtue of conventional wisdom, as David says, you could say this all was accidental. However, if you look at what traits do these entrepreneurs possess in their pursuits, you can see a different picture. In fact, you can see a picture of extraordinary traits that led to their success.

What types of "persona insights" might we pick up from David's book about these people? David highlights a few:

- Yes, there was lots and lots of luck involved - so let's get that out of the way first
- They each experienced the problem they were trying to solve
- They knew how to be their own customer
- They were perfectionists and "do sweat the small details"
- They had faith and persisted
- They were very good storytellers

David points out that they were very good at "listening to customers and breaking the rules." It brought to mind for me my own remembrance of visiting Jeff Skoll at eBay when they only had 20 employees. Jeff and I worked together at Knight-Ridder for two years and had become frequent lunch buddies. Jeff was the first President of eBay and I remembering seeing a "war room" they had, with

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helmets and fake guns, to go after their competitors. And, I remember hearing him tell me how Pierre Omidyar started this company trying to help his fiance' find PEZ dispensers and PEZ collectors to trade with her own PEZ collection. The plan was still quite casual and they were "experiencing" it and making it up along the way. Well, I think they did pretty well! And core to their success was a basic principled belief that they shared. That was, that humans were fundamentally good and honest and that given a medium to auction and trade, they would be good to each other.

This is a fun yet insightful read and David has an engaging style of writing that will keep you turning the page.

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Hyperlink: http://www.personainsights.com/persona_insights/2008/05/accidental-bran.html