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BUSINESS BOOKS: Accidental Brands, 'Powerlines', and Seduction

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By Yinka Adegoke

NEW YORK, May 1 (Reuters) - Brand building is more important -- and difficult -- than ever for companies struggling to distinguish themselves in a sea of competitors. Three new books look at marketing's perennial obsession.

More than a few brand builders have focused on the increasingly powerful female consumer, and that's the focus of "The 30-Second Seduction -- How advertisers lure women through flattery, flirtation, and manipulation" (Seal Press) by Andrea Gardner.

But brands are often forged through the sheer gumption of entrepreneurs like Craig Newmark, the founder of free listings website Craig's List. In "Accidental Branding" (Wiley), David Vinjamuri celebrates "how ordinary people build extraordinary brands."

The third book, "Powerlines: Words That Sell Brands, Grip Fans, and Sometimes Change History" (Bloomberg), author Steve Cone reminds us of some of the great slogans and catch phrases of the last century.

Gardner, the author of "The 30-Second Seduction," writes that marketers have had to learn to form distinct relationships with the modern female consumer, who nowadays is as likely to be a senior business executive as a soccer mom.

Gardner labels the different types of marketers in the same way that the marketers themselves create labels for the different kinds of women they market to.

"The Fan," for example, is the marketer who has an endless enthusiasm for the way of life of the women he is targeting, following her passions and speaking her lingo.

"The Dreamboat" is the marketer who sets women unattainable goals when it comes to their self-image, for instance using skinny catwalk models to sell everything from hair products to cars.

Gardner's anecdotal research finds some younger women are comfortable with the idea of these images, if only because they find the ads inspiring.

"I like the idea of saying to women that feeling powerful is more important than being a stick figure," one of the women who Gardner interviewed said about a Nike ad.

Some brands are built almost without marketing, on sheer guts, hard work, good timing and lots of passion, according to the Vinjamuri's "Accidental Branding."

PLANNED TELEVISION ARTS

Vinjamuri spent time with seven entrepreneurs who created brands that way, and he dedicates a chapter to each, including Gert Boyle of Columbia Sportswear, Julie Aigner-Clark of Baby Einstein, and Roxanne Quimby of Burt's Bees.

What Vinjamuri calls an "accidental brand" is usually developed by an individual not trained in marketing. The entrepreneur has experienced the problem that the brand "solves" and controls the brand for at least 10 years.

Baby Einstein's Aigner-Clark was a new mother trying and failing to find videos with classical music and foreign languages for her baby, while Quimby was a hitchhiker picked up in Maine by a beekeeper who shared her values.

Building a brand this way does have its rewards. Quimby founded her company for \$400 and sold it for \$175 million and Aigner-Clark sold her business for \$40 million to Disney.

In "Powerlines," Cone argues that few modern marketers have mastered the art of creating campaigns that resonate with the consumer and take hold of the collective imagination.

Among his favorites are "A Diamond Is Forever" from a 1948 advertisement by De Beers; "When it rains it pours," created originally for a 1912 ad for Morton Salt; and "M&M's, melts in your mouth, not in your hand."

They are not just the taglines of TV ads, but also political slogans, among them President Franklin Roosevelt's "Happy Days Are Here Again" from 1932, and President Ronald Reagan's "Are You Better Off Than You Were Four Years Ago?," the slogan that captured the imagination of voters in the 1980 campaign.

(Reporting by Yinka Adegoke; Editing by Eddie Evans)

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