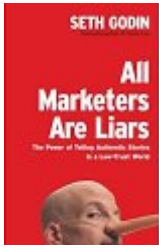


## All Marketers are liars

### The issue



Knowledge management programmes rely on the receptiveness of people within an organisation to listen, understand and then embrace new ways of working. Communication is key to the success of programmes that often ask staff to view their own work more systemically and see their own contribution to the organisations' performance through a new lens. Despite it's crucial role in KM; do we actually know whether our communications make a difference? Do we sometimes, focus on the channels and perhaps less so on the message itself? What is it we wish to convey and do we understand what happens when our messages get received?

### *The book*

Godin begins his book with a singularly dire warning, arguing that we must forsake attempts to communicate nothing but facts and must instead focus on what people believe and then work on stories that add to their worldview. This, he argues, is the only way our stories will spread. Without that spread – the story passed on though word of mouth – Godin argues, new products, services or ideas will not succeed.

### *Steps*

The book is organised around 'steps'.

1. **Step One** concentrates on why people's worldviews matter. This is a powerful argument that recognises the fact that human beings have mental models of the world and that we only purchase, consume or believe stories that conform to that view. Few of us are persuaded to change our minds by last minute electioneering, junk mail or the latest marketing campaigns. Consider the newspaper you read. Do you buy or read a newspaper whose editorial persuasion is at odds with your own values and beliefs? Few of us do, as we prefer to immerse ourselves in an analysis and opinion that reinforces our mental models of the world.
2. **Step Two** proposes that whatever is being 'sold' is actually purchased not because it fills a simple need but because it creates an emotional want. This demands that we find new ways of telling our stories that help understand what is new and how it can make a difference.
3. **Step Three** focuses on first impressions and how they influence our decision-making. We make judgements based on initial encounters and we stick with those judgements. Godin cleverly realises that we all know first impressions matter. What he does here is take this enlightenment just a bit further arguing that we never know when the first encounter is going to happen and that is why 'authenticity matters'. In fact authentic stories are key to his thesis as 'authentic organisations and people are far more likely to discover that the story they wish to tell is heard and believed and repeated.' Telling an authentic story, therefore, ensures that your users will pass on that story.

4. **Step Four** concentrates on a number of case studies that offer evidence for his views that great marketers tell stories that we believe. One global company cited is Amazon and the belief that the company's customer service is the best in the world. The final section, Step Five, argues that personal interaction is the only way to make things work well. As Godin states 'when a human being works with the consumer and takes independent action on her behalf, something changes.

### *Commentary*

#### **Communicate more effectively**

Why should knowledge management practitioners be interested in a book on marketing, a subject pretty much removed from the core of what we do? In the first instance, a great deal of Godin's arguments appears to concentrate on traditional consumer related industries and his case studies reflect that focus. However, there are potential insights for KM professionals that can help us all communicate with our clients more effectively. Firstly the argument that stories are powerful and can trigger new action is well made but not new as first Stephen Denning and then others argue about the power of organisational storytelling. DNV-CIBIT's own best practice studies on behalf of EFQM found that companies throughout Europe believe strongly that successful KM demands ongoing communication to help generate understanding and identification with its goals. However, there should be little focus on KM but on the business benefits provided. Godin's contribution to our work lies not just in the power of stories, but also in his argument that they need to be framed within our worldview. This demands that we understand the way our colleagues see the organisation and the need to create a story that conforms to that worldview is essential or we are lost before we start.

#### **Authentic**

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the story has to be authentic. Colleagues who are consumers of knowledge management services need to be confident that their experiences conform to the story they accept, otherwise they won't pass on their positive experiences to others. In other words, it is not necessarily about how the channels we use, although this is important. More importantly, it is about what story we wish to tell and how we live that story so that those we serve believe it and spread the word to their colleagues that it's a story worth engaging with. Such an approach should remind us to keep KM jargon to the cognoscenti – ourselves – and focus instead on the everyday language within the organisation. Stories that are authentic, backed up by regular reiterations and using language shared by the whole organisation – seems simple. Doesn't it?

### *Further reading*

- Seth Godin: [All Marketers are liars](#), London, Penguin Books, ISBN: 978-0-718-14865-2
- Stephen Denning, [The Springboard](#): How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-era Organizations,

## More information



To get more details on how DNV can support your communication more effectively, please contact Senior Consultant [Mike Kelleher](#) by e-mail or telephone 0031 30 230 89 00.