How can you be immensely successful for many years, and yet not be imitated by competitors? Impossible, you say. Not so. Virgin Atlantic, the Body Shop, Apple Computers, and Birkenstock they all achieved this status, and there are ample additional examples. They cracked the secret of successful differentiation that is not imitated and are adored by customers who think that they are incomparable. Dr. Dan Herman calls it an Unfair Competitive Advantage. It's not at all unethical. Everyone has a fair chance of attaining such an advantage including, every reader of this book.

There is a secret to successful differentiation that is not imitated. It is a psychological secret that has to do with the way your competitors think. Most marketers today are MBA graduates who tend to think and operate in typical and predictable ways - you might call them MBA Clones. You can take advantage of their biases and outsmart them. In this groundbreaking book, Dr. Dan Herman not only reveals the secret of successful differentiation that is not imitated but also supplies you with a comprehensive set of practical rules and tools that will enable you to make an unfair advantage your reality.

Dr. Herman, a competitive strategy consultant with vast global experience, a seasoned CMO in a large corporation, a branding professional and a businessman, does not tell you to think out of the box as so many do he provides you with a new and comprehensive toolbox for success.

You'll learn:
-- The secret of successful differentiation that is not imitated

-- How to scan methodically for both strategic and tactical opportunities for success

-- How to integrate a business model, a competitive strategy and a brand concept to create a unitary unique success formula for your company

-- How to create marketing hits short meteoric successes

-- How to use electrifying marketing, just-on-desire branding and the brand drama approach to build emotionally powerful brands, and many other useful additions to your profit-generating arsenal of concepts and methods.

Using a plethora of examples from top businesses around the world, Dr. Herman offers a business oriented-point of view that is fresh and different, and even humorous at times. Even though this book will turn your thinking inside out, everything in it is practical and easily applicable in any kind of business.

My Personal Review:
Masters degrees in Business Administration (MBA) are not only being taught in elite schools, but in nearly every university, college, and diploma mill that can find some way to get accreditation. Most of the programs teach their students similar concepts in the core subjects of Financial and Management Accounting, Finance, Economics, Statistics, Operations, Organizational Behavior, Information Systems, Marketing and Corporate Strategy. If everyone has the same tools and book of tactics, including how to differentiate your company and create a competitive advantage, how can you actually compete and win in the real world? Worse, these kinds of programs train these managers to work, think, and fit in to the large companies that hire MBAs by the campusfull. That is why this book refers to MBA Clones and provides an approach that takes a different tack than standard MBA thinking would see.

It isn't that what you learn as an MBA isn't valuable, it's that learning the core of a business program provides you with only a basic toolset. You still need to learn to apply them. However, if you apply them like everyone else (the problem with 'best practices') you aren't creating a compelling advantage. The best business folks are artists and use their toolsets in powerfully creative ways to win in the marketplace.

Dan Herman is a Ph.D. and CEO (and co-owner) of Competitive Advantages Ltd. Through which he and his team serve companies all
around the world. Their goal is to help their clients identify growth opportunities and creating 'unfair' competitive advantages. Along with this Advantagizing they help create powerful and compelling brands and profitable business models.

In part 1 of this book provides a look at what Herman's views on some common myths of Competitive Advantage (that you have to be better than your competitors, that you have to endear yourself to as many customers as possible, and that your competitive edge is to be found on a parameter that is important in your business category. He then provides a secret to Differentiation and uses examples from Virgin, Google, Starbucks and others to show you what he is after.

Part 2 explains their O-Scan (opportunity scan) method. It is about identifying insights about customers and what they are GOING to want (rather than what they are demanding today). You also learn to use a customers 15 stage consumption process to find points of pain and opportunity, to provide more consumer benefits, and seeing the hidden rules your competitors are using to win.

Part 3 is provides Herman's views of Branding. First you have to understand the consumer's mind. I found this discussion of how the consumer experiences things, what they are trying to do, and how they for their beliefs to be quite interesting. Herman also rejects the idea that Branding creates brands. He says that it is the real success factors that you have identified previously that will provide substance and power to your brand. He provides the ABCDE of Brand Success: Attribution of benefit, Believability, Craving, Differentiation, and Ease of acting upon their desire.

For Herman, brands are more about expectations, anticipations, and dreams that take them out of their hum-drum reality. It is about adventure, temptations, testing limits, nostalgia, and much more. The goal is to make your marketing electrifying to your customers. He also provides interesting chapters on developing marketing hits and how you can drive your consumers crazy about your brand.

Is all this absolutely original and unique? Look, I have an MBA from the University of Michigan Business School and what he says here is consistent with what I learned there. The expectation I had upon graduation was to use what I learned creatively. What Herman does is help those interested in turning the toolkit you were given into a weapons system. And I think that is very worthwhile.

Reviewed by Craig Matteson, Ann Arbor, MI

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