

2011: Trendspotting for the Next Decade

Richard Laermer
McGraw-Hill

REVIEW BY GEORGE SLOAN

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2011: Trendspotting for the Next Decade is one of those books you might pick up to read on a long cross-country flight. I had not read any of Richard Laermer's other books, so when I started reading *2011: Trendspotting for the Next Decade*, I had no idea what to expect. Once I cracked the book's cover, I realized that the book would not merely sit on my nightstand or be placed in my briefcase, unread, for months to come. Instead, the book is easy to read, with all the chapters being relatively short.

Reading this book felt very much like sitting down with the author and listening to him tell stories about the societal changes he believes will happen in the next ten years. Laermer is an interesting storyteller, and you will find yourself laughing and nodding as you read this book. If your politics are left of center, you might be nodding in agreement even more.

Part Two of the book is devoted to Trendspotting skills. If you want to refine your qualitative

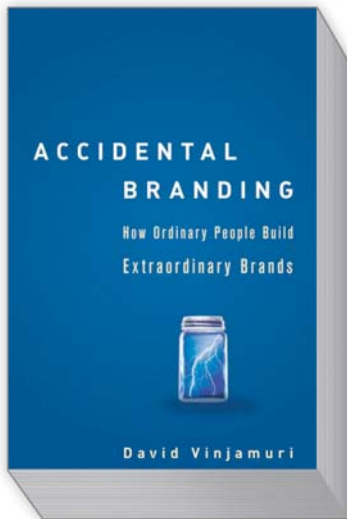
research skills and hone in on future trends, this is probably not the book for you. If you want to learn what an intelligent business writer thinks about how life will change in the next decade, I recommend that you pick up this book.

With acerbic wit and irreverence, Laermer touches on a wide variety of subjects: the media ("Let's not allow anyone to paint us a picture just because they like the colors"); Hollywood ("In the near future, we will be happy with celebrities who are more like us and less fake about their lives"); Trump ("Donald J. Trump is an icon for the mediocrity decade"); J. Lo ("Thanks to Jennifer Lopez, people in the media have decidedly had enough of 'image a day' puffery"); and quite a few technologies ("If an entire population babbles endlessly or scribbles IMs instead of conversing on topics of importance, then trivia is all that matters").

Laermer talks about trends that many of us would love to see happen: the importance of the customer being treated properly; less belief in corporate rhetoric; more corporate responsibility; less CCing to protect your rear end or to climb the corporate ladder; less email in favor of actual communication; more personal interactions; fewer form letters and the use of more style and gusto; introduction of more products that make us live better, rather than longer; more sleep; the return of communities with more local flavor and less corporate sameness; it's about friends, not babies, and childless couples will be accepted; people will find careers that match their personalities rather than live a "traditional" life; and many more interesting positions that make for good reading.

Be warned: Laermer's language in this book is colorful, and amid this color, you may learn a new word — *fnord*. You will also learn that Laermer has developed his own future speak, to which he has given a chapter of its own.

As a leading-edge qualitative researcher, you probably already know much of what Laermer discusses related to spotting trends. This is not a Peter Drucker-style book full of wisdom and that is hard to read but worth it once you get through it and apply it. Think more of a Tom Peters book that is easy to read, full of fascinating insights and hard to put down. If you want to spend some quality time reading what changes another leading-edge thinker believes are coming in the foreseeable, *2011: Trendspotting for the Next Decade* is an entertaining book that will help while away a flight or two. 📖



ACCIDENTAL BRANDING How Ordinary People Build Extraordinary Brands

David Vinjamuri
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Accidental Branding is a profile of seven companies that have achieved cult-like status: J. Peterman, craigslist, Clif Bar, The Art of Shaving, Columbia Sportswear, Baby Einstein and Burt's Bees. These seven highly successful firms are living proof that the entrepreneurial myth is true. It is possible, Vinjamuri asserts, for a single individual with no formal education in marketing, no money and no professional connections to create a phenomenally successful brand on the strength of determination and a unique idea.

None of the seven entrepreneurs who created these companies set out to build a business and make a lot of money. Rather, each stumbled on his or her business idea as a result of a "fortuitous accident" or a personal need.

For instance, Roxanne Quimby met Burt Shavitz when he picked her up hitchhiking in Maine. Burt was a former Time-Life photographer who dropped out, moved to Maine and was supporting him-

self by beekeeping. Roxanne and Burt learned they shared the same values, started a relationship and eventually ended up founding Burt's Bees.

J. Peterman's catalog began with a classified ad in *The New Yorker* for a single item, a cowboy duster, that Peterman had bought in a general store in Wyoming. He had been wearing it for several months and noticed that, when he had it on, people treated him differently. "Through the Owner's Manual," Vinjamuri writes, "Peterman teaches his customers how to turn a coat, a shirt and a pair of boots into a different attitude toward life."

Consumers recognize and connect with the uniqueness and authenticity of these products and services. Vinjamuri believes this is largely because, in each case, the entrepreneur is also a customer and so has a good instinct about what people want. Gary Erickson invented the Clif Bar because he needed compact and tasty nourishment on his long bike rides. Craig Newmark started craigslist in the 1990s as a way to share ideas with his friends for fun things to do in San Francisco.

As another example, Julie Aigner-Clark created Baby Einstein when she could not find educational videos that would teach her infant things she cared about: classical music, art, poetry and foreign language. Julie had a background in art and teaching, and with borrowed equipment, she produced videos from her basement, orchestrating scenes and music that held her children's attention. Her productions don't tell a logical story; rather, they are a video picture book that allows parents to point and narrate. Eventually, her unique videos caught on in a big way: Clark sold her company to Disney in 2001.

All of these entrepreneurs pay attention to detail, especially when watching how customers interact with their product. In the early days of her business, before branching out to soaps and creams, Roxanne made candles with beeswax from Burt's hives. She watched people closely as they examined her products, and she noticed that they turned the candles over. So, in her designs, Roxanne made sure the candle bottoms were interesting and attractive. Craig Newmark's current full-time job is policing craigslist, removing offensive posts and sending personal emails to the offenders. His daily work helps him keep his finger on the pulse of the community he has created. J. Peterman's customer-service representatives are never more than five feet from any item in the catalog; in this way, they can handle the merchandise while they talk to the customer.

In putting the book together, Vinjamuri met face-to-face with each person he profiles, so he is able to convey their human qualities. *Accidental Branding* presents convincing evidence that, aside from their extraordinary success, these successful entrepreneurs really are just like you and me. 📖