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**Book Review**

**Purple Cow**

*Transform Your Business by Being Remarkable*  
by [Seth Godin](#)

Reviewer: [Geoff Wisner](#), Staff Reviewer

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In a series of short, easy-to-read books on marketing, Seth Godin has created a detailed picture of a new approach to marketing that I think is absolutely right. If you read only one of these books, *Purple Cow* is probably the one to choose.

Godin's expertise isn't just theoretical: through clever marketing, he has made nearly every one of these books a bestseller. (Not to mention that by not putting everything in one book, he has sold many more books than he would have otherwise.)

In the old days, Godin argues, you could succeed by creating a product that appealed to a broad cross-section of people, then making up a logo and slogan and doing a lot of TV ads. Think of Wonder Bread and Budweiser. But as time went on, people got comfortable with the consumer products they used in their everyday life. They were no longer looking for something new. Meanwhile they were bombarded with thousands of increasingly slick and professional ads and commercials. They became cynical about advertising, and they learned to tune out 99% of what they were exposed to.

How can you reach people with your product or service today? First, your company needs to be truly remarkable. Like a purple cow in a field full of brown cows, it has to be so striking that people will tell others about it. It's not enough to jazz up something ordinary to make it look like a purple cow, because people will see through this strategy and turn away.

Next, you have to locate the small groups of people who are interested in innovation and are eager to tell others about their latest discovery. Seth Godin calls these people "sneezers" because they spread what he calls an ideavirus. They are also the tuned-in, well-connected people that Malcolm Gladwell talks about in *The Tipping Point*, who can make a new song or a new shoe explosively popular almost overnight.

Once you have found these important people, you need to establish a relationship with them that allows for ongoing communication. This way you're engaged in what Godin calls "permission marketing" rather than "interruption marketing." You are telling people something they have agreed to hear and are actually interested in. Rather than try to sell your product to the mainstream, you tell the sneezers about it and they in turn spread it to the larger group of "early adopters." It is more profitable, Godin argues, to sell a quirky, distinctive product to a small group of fanatics than to water it down and try to sell it to the mainstream.

Finally, you need to find the best vehicle for spreading the message about your purple cow. Godin believes the best vehicle is a good story. One of his recent books is called *All Marketers Are Liars: The Power of Telling Authentic Stories in a Low-Trust World*. Calling marketers liars is a piece of hyperbole: Godin's real message is that effective marketers are good storytellers.

*Purple Cow* includes not only Seth Godin's basic theory of marketing but case studies of companies that have succeeded by being unusual, including JetBlue, Starbucks, Dutch Boy, and Krispy Kreme. Dutch Boy's breakthrough, for instance, was to sell paint in a plastic can with a molded handle instead of the messy, cumbersome metal can that everyone else continues to use.

If you're like me, you will find Seth Godin's books addictive. Check out his website at [www.sethgodin.com](http://www.sethgodin.com) (he has interesting ideas about websites, too) and click on his bald head to read his blog.

**About the Reviewer**

[Geoff Wisner](#) is a freelance writer and staff member of Indigocafe.com. He is the author of [A Basket of Leaves: 99 Books That Capture the Spirit of Africa](#). Visit his website at [www.geoffwisner.com](http://www.geoffwisner.com).

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