



# Our Take:

## OG's Point-of-View On Best-Seller Business Books

June 2007

### In This Edition We Review

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## ***What Sticks***

*Why Most Advertising Fails and  
How to Guarantee Yours Succeeds*

Rex Briggs and Greg Stuart  
Kaplan Publishing, 2006

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## A Little Background

*What Sticks* is a buzz-worthy new marketing book. A Google search of the title and subhead produced 275,000 results. Nineteen customer reviews on amazon.com gave it 3.5 out of five stars.

The front cover quote from Steven D. Levitt (author of *Freakonomics*) proclaims *What Sticks*:

“A rarity among advertising and marketing books.”

The first sentence of the publisher's comments says:

“*What Sticks* is the one book that explains exactly how marketing and advertising works today, based on new insights from analysis of over \$1 billion worth of advertising.”

They also call Marketing Evolution, the firm Rex Briggs founded:

“...the leading marketing effectiveness research and consulting firm...”

These are impressive quotes and claims. And since OG operates in the same space as Marketing Evolution, we are particularly interested in *What Sticks* has to say, and how they do what they do.

That's why we're sharing our point-of-view with you.

## The Basic Premise

The *What Sticks* book is composed of three parts:

1. Marketing is Broken. (But It Can Be Fixed).
2. The Advertising Fix. Improve Your Marketing and Advertising – NOW!
3. Guaranteeing Your Advertising Works. Actions You Can Take Today to Fix Your Own Advertising – Insights from Research on \$1 Billion in Ad Spending.

The stated intention of *What Sticks* is how to achieve better results for the same budget. The methodology used by the authors is called return-on-marketing-objective (ROMO). In fact, ROMO™ is Marketing Evolution's core service, described as a “proprietary Methodology for analyzing marketing campaigns.” It is based on experimental design, and “uses a patent pending media and data collection approach”.

According to the Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) “ROMO is one of the few advertising measurement approaches that uses experimental design to isolate the effect of media in the advertising mix.”

Within ROMO, the authors describe their COP, or Communication Optimization Process, which is paired with marketing effectiveness measurement. *What Sticks* states that COP:

“...is an authoritative process to enforce:

- The alignment of marketing plans to definitions of success
- Development and application of marketing best practices, and
- Agreement to specific marketing actions.”

# Our Take: OG's Point-of-View On Best-Seller Business Books

*What Sticks* features a wide range of examples and case studies, from FMCG (Unilever, Kraft, Procter & Gamble, Nestle, Colgate) to retail (McDonald's, Target) and automotive (Ford, Volkswagen). The book also includes four 'technical' appendices:

- Explanation of Scenario Planning
- Research Methodology
- A Brief Review of Motivation Research
- A Quick Primer on Pretesting Messaging Research

## Where We Agree

Overall, OG agrees with and applauds the work of the authors, Marketing Evolution, *What Sticks*, ROMO™ and COP. From what we can tell, we share the same beliefs about the state of marketing, marketing communications, marketing measurement and marketing accountability.

The area we found most heartening in *What Sticks* concerns messaging. This is the first marketing book we've read which explicitly talks about messaging as a component in driving marketing effectiveness. Much of Chapter 11, "Messaging and the Transformation from Intuition to Science" is compatible with OG's IdeaLoopz® methodology. In large part, it's because we both rely on experimental design to isolate the motivational value of messaging elements.

We also appreciate the authors' efforts in reorienting marketing communications around The 4Ms:

- Motivations (strategy)
- Message (creative)
- Media (allocation)
- Maximization (ROI)

Not surprisingly, the sequencing of The 4Ms is identical to the components of our Loopz® Marketing system – IdeaLoopz®, ImplementationLoopz® and ROMILoopz®.

## Our Top 10 Quotes from *What Sticks*

Listed in no particular order:

- "Mistrust of data and lack of knowledge storehouses about how advertising really works is pervasive and is at the root of many of advertising's current challenges."
- "Just like a gym membership, the more you push yourself and your brand's marketing, the stronger it will get."
- "We think it's problematic to have the advertising agency's own performance...measured by itself."
- "What if success isn't magic? What if success is a discipline?"
- "Accountability isn't measurement only; it's helping marketers do something about the measurement."
- "If you get the first two Ms right – motivations and messaging – it will matter less if you get the absolutely best possible media schedule."
- "Marketers are inclined to hear what they want to hear in a focus group."
- "...messaging is one that almost everyone – including the CFO and CEO – believes they know well, yet the research confirms the way messaging works is more complex and varied than most of us were taught."
- "In summary, ad recall measures don't equate to whether the ad worked or didn't work -- period."
- "Perhaps it's because that's the metric...research companies have norms, and now they are locked into doing things a certain way, whether it makes any sense or not."

## Where We Disagree

The one area where OG respectfully disagrees with *What Sticks* is pretesting messaging research. In Appendix D, the authors' state:

"The best way to know the impact is to measure it in the real world using A/B split tests, as in the backbone of our research presented here."

Throughout the past six years, OG has successfully employed IdeaLoopz® for creating and optimizing marketing ideas, communications messages and key visuals **prior to creative development**. IdeaLoopz® is based on a fundamentally different research approach than A/B split tests, which use different messaging, visuals and/or creative approaches in separate marketing campaigns or ads.

Based on OG's experience and the evidence of our IdeaLoopz® research, we know that once communications messages are imbedded into a creative execution, motivational measurement becomes much more complicated. That's why we're such strong proponents of systematic, quantitative testing of messages as the first step in a marketing communications measurement process.

In addition, we believe that marketers can eliminate much of the time, cost, emotion and politics associated with developing and producing creative for the A/B split tests. The *What Sticks* authors recommend:

"...develop and measure four or five ads and then quickly adjust in order to run only the most successful ads."

### OG's Reaction:

Why spend tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars to produce and test four or five ads, just to keep the 'best one'? And more importantly, why would we want make this process more complicated if we don't need to?

## OG's 1-9 Rating

With our IdeaMap® research, we ask respondents to rate messaging concepts on a 1 to 9 scale, where 9 is the most positive ranking.

Using this 1-9 measurement scale, OG gives *What Sticks* a 7.

After our first reading of *What Sticks*, we really wanted to give it a 9. We were genuinely excited, because we agree with almost all of the business issues, marketing solutions and processes described in the book.

But as fellow practitioners of marketing measurement, we wish the authors of *What Sticks* had taken a more comprehensive review of the different methodologies available today. And perhaps a bit less focused on ROMO™ as 'the solution' to marketing communications and advertising success.

This one editorial comment notwithstanding, we highly recommend *What Sticks* to OG's clients, friends and advisors.