

Based on: "In Praise of the Purple Cow" by Seth Godin

In today's world, competition is a fact of life. Companies no longer have the luxury to be the best in the industry and expect to remain #1 without any effort. But the right approach is not to look at the situation as a problem, a roadblock between the company and immense profits. The correct approach is to be creative and see the situation as a golden opportunity to differentiate your goods or services, or simply to start from scratch. And the key to a successful venture is to take risks even when the doubters loudly voice their problems with your solutions. After all, if you believe in your product, and this belief is made contagious by effective communication of your product ad all it entails for your target market, there is really no reason the venture can not be a success unless a major part of the puzzle is being overlooked. For this, just refer to the quiet (or uncontrollably screaming, at times) little voice in your head, also known as your conscience.

Enter the idea of creating a "purple cow." Godin very nicely and practically begins his article by describing his visit to France and encounter with some of the best bred cows around. The message is clear, as stated later in the article: "the opposite of remarkable is 'very good.'" All of the cows that Godin watched from his windshield were exceptional in themselves, but on the whole, none stood out among the rest. They were, undoubtedly, all brown and boring.

If, however, there had been a purple-colored cow among the herds Godin observed, most tourists probably would not be able to resist taking a picture or two and showing it to family and friends. Why? How many people have seen a real purple cow?

Case in point: if a company is a real purple cow, its customers will undoubtedly recommend its exceptional—rather, remarkable—goods or services to family and friends. In order to have consumers literally going crazy for a product, the best thing to do is to create a purple cow.

But Godin takes no mercy on readers when he points out that "the sad truth about marketing just about anything" is the fact that once a purple cow is created by one person, there can be no clones. The fact is, if the idea is gone, someone else has already claimed it as theirs, and reinventing the wheel will never get anyone else the title of purple cow herder.

There are examples of purple cows everywhere; they are the ones that make the headlines and make many people wonder, "Why didn't I think of that?" Search marketing, for example, has been a huge hit and ensures that major companies that want to be exposed to people that conduct searches with certain keywords are in fact the first thing that searchers see. Of course, it comes with a cost: "online marketers pay search engines fees to have their Web sites or ads pop up" when certain words are searched for (Boone and Kurtz 128). This logically brings up the mention of Google, a purple cow so successful people say they are "googling" something rather than searching for it.

This is also the case with companies such as Scotch tape, which the Boone and Kurtz text points out is actually cellophane tape. There are, of course, hundreds of more examples, but the cold hard truth is that they are taken already.

To create a true purple cow involves more than a great idea; there are many of those out there anyway. It is worth repeating that the opposite of remarkable is very good.

So the question becomes, how does one create this elusive odd-colored cow and milk it for all it is worth?

Godin provides a number of strategies that can be implemented.

Firstly, he recommends a makeover to the way a target market is identified.

Boone and Kurtz, of course, provide a discussion on target market selection that is quite basic and practical. Godin, on the other hand, makes the controversial (yet logical) claim that centering your attention on the fewest possible potential consumers will help to win sales and keep them coming back for more. He advises that once you narrow your list down to those most likely, most interested people, ignore everyone else and just give these people 100% of your attention. After all, if they are on your list, they have survived the tests to see that they can afford your product, have a real need for it (whether or not they realize it), and are willing to pay attention to your pitch and see how your product is different from a product they have possibly been using their entire lives. To change someone's perception of something, first you have to know exactly who you are talking to and how to push the right buttons. This is the essence of marketing: get into their heads and do it well. Relationship marketing, as described in the earlier chapters of the Boone and Kurtz text, is all about the service, although of course the good does count. The point is, it's not good enough to have a great product and expect people to flock toward it as if they have nothing else to do. It is the way the potential benefits of the product are conveyed, and knowing your audience's mindsets in detail can really help here.

An innovative true-purple-cow idea that Godin offers in "In Praise of the Purple Cow" is to "create two teams: the inventors and the milkers. Put them in separate buildings. Hold a formal ceremony when you move a product from one group to another. Celebrate them both, and rotate people around." This makes perfect sense because when an elusive purple cow does in fact come into existence, it is usually milked for all its worth, but the worth steadily decreases very quickly after it reaches its highest point. The inventors should be able to knock the CEO and department heads back to reality with their findings of what others are doing, then hopefully provide some fresh ideas to keep the cow from becoming old too soon and possibly even experiencing immature death.

Godin also makes the point that the purple cow does not always mean starting a new business from nothing and basing it on a genius idea. One of his tips on "raising" a purple cow is that the changes can be tiny: "the way you answer the phone, launch a new brand, or price a revision to your software," for example. Thinking small, of course, is perfectly in tune with the idea that the target market needs to be as small as necessary and consist of people who, if approached and convinced the right way, have a very high likelihood of actually buying the product you are offering.

I have found that Godin backs up an idea in a book called "101 ways to becoming CEO." In this book, one of the strategies is to use the approach of doing first, and allowing for the possibility that you might end up asking why you did something. The author virtually guarantees that for every situation in which you look back and think that you should not have done something, there will be ten situations for which you will thank yourself for doing what you did. Godin phrases it this way: "Ask, 'Why not?' Almost everything you don't do has no good reason for it. almost everything you don't do is the result of fear or inertia or a historical lack of someone asking, 'Why not?'" In other words, you only live once, so why not just go ahead and take the risk? Focus on the benefits you could achieve if the idea does go through, the great strides you could make

against the competition, the respect and trust you could earn, both of consumers and other businesspeople. Put the fear of losing on the backburner, because if you don't risk making the move for the better of the company, you are really risking the company's future and settling for mediocre rather than taking a chance to be extraordinary. Don't be afraid to be different; otherwise, how do you plan to differentiate your company at all?

But of course, one needs to bear in mind that Godin's ideas are in print and, undoubtedly, have been read by thousands of searchers of the Holy Grail, in this case the purple cow. For a true purple cow to be successful, one needs to think creatively about reaching new customers, as well as keeping current ones, and resist basking in the glory if the purple cow passes the color test. At the end of his article, Godin points out another unsettling fact: relaxing after the creation of one purple cow means the company has reached its apex, and it can either stay there for a while, or start its downward descent. So how does one go about keeping the benefits if one has been creative enough to breed a purple cow without mixing up the genes? By making another purple cow, of course.