

Marketing

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DEFENDING THE CHALLENGER

By Eric Blais

Eating the Big Fish: How challenger brands can compete against brand leaders By Adam Morgan (WILEY & SONS, 1999)

It might be that the brand has been in steady decline for several years. The old ways simply don't seem to work anymore. One day someone in the marketing department decides to refer to this troubled brand as a "challenger" brand. Weaknesses suddenly become strengths and everyone's upbeat about the brand's untapped potential.

The idea of challenger brands was brought to marketers' attention in 1999 by Adam Morgan, who was then the joint European planning director of TBWA. Morgan not only defined a set of rules for challenger brands, he turned the whole idea into a thriving consultancy offering clients a "Challenger Strategic Program" and two-day planning sessions to kick-start the process with the brand management team.

Beyond the smart branding of consulting tools and the catchy name for his book, Morgan offers valuable ideas on how the small fish can effectively compete with the big fish. His eight "credos" describe the characteristics of challenger brands and offer guidelines for marketers.

This book could have focused entirely on "lighthouse" brands (credo #2). It's a powerful concept that all brands, not just challengers, should live by. According to Morgan, building a lighthouse identity requires challenger brands to establish and nourish an emotional rather than rational relationship with consumers. It means developing sustainable customer loyalty, not temporary satisfaction. Lighthouse brands build intensity in all communications with consumers. And they constantly attract attention to themselves—think Richard Branson and Virgin.

The number two or three brand is usually tempted to copy the category leader, only with fewer resources. Morgan's book tells you how to outsmart rather than outspend the big fish.

ERIC BLAIS, president of Toronto consultancy Headspace Marketing, writes monthly on the 10 must-read books for marketers