



Eating the Big Fish: How Challenger Brands Can Compete Against Brand Leaders

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In Eating the Big Fish, Adam Morgan offers hands-on advice, examples, and useful information to the #2, #3, and #4 brands looking to compete effectively with the top banana. He defines the various types of "challenger brands" and then discusses the brand and advertising strategies of the most famous and successful challenger brands of the last decade.

Eating the Big Fish: How Challenger Brands Can Compete Against Brand Leaders Details

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Michael says

Posits the thesis that challenger brands must approach strategy and tactics very differently than leader brands. Strong, actionable direction. Well done, though could use an update that refreshes the case studies.

Meg says

Actually I'm reading the 2nd, updated version. It is particularly apropos to the major brand evaluation my company is undertaking right now and this book is really sparking a lot of new ways of thinking.

Scott says

This book has some absolutely brilliant moments, however it is a bit of a challenging read due to some of the language / grammar used and also the length. It also does just keep going and is a bit repetitive near the end.

Perhaps don't take this book as a straight read through but rather the chapters and focus you need whilst developing your strategic thinking.

Pete Davis says

I'm reading through the Top 10 recommended publicity and marketing books to see if there's any gems for use with civic projects. Many recommended this one as a guide to being an insurgent challenger to some established entity. There were some gems: focus on differences and dramatize them, triple down on what makes you special, be a "lighthouse" in the sense that you don't follow the market but rather be a consistent source of your founding spirit that attracts the market to you. However, unlike some others I've read - like the Cluetrain Manifesto - this was a little too markety/smarmy/over-boostery to corporate ways and went on a bit too long. I'd recommend skimming it or finding a summary online.

Sara Laor says

Big fat book that states the obvious: what is your point of differentiation? What are you willing to sacrifice in order to become unique? Good concepts, pretty much basic marketing packaged in long words and a fat tome.

Michael Tuggle says

Adam Morgan is one the earliest and best leaders in the concept of "challenger branding" that Loomis has adopted as our foundational philosophy. We are a challenger brand agency serving those clients who are outmanned and outspent by bigger competitors. Our job is to outthink those competitors and this book lays the foundation for that. Even if you're not a challenger brand agency, or in advertising, it's a fascinating read.

Chi Pham says

An appropriate textbook for marketing, no more, no less. Honestly, I expected a book on the level of "The Origin of Brands", but I was let down. Over the years, I have come to read many more books like this, but with more engaging writing styles. Hey, Mankiw teaches us that textbooks could be fun, too! Give this book a shot if you need to learn (quickly) about marketing, but it is not going to be a great ride.

Nicholas Moryl says

Solid marketing book. Examples will get dated but the principles are pretty good and do a good job of helping the reader pull back and think about how they'd apply to their own business.

Mike Moyer says

This is one of my favorite books about branding and marketing. The book covers some key concept about how smaller companies can beat the big companies. It pairs well with Blue Ocean Strategy.

I loan the book out a lot to friends and students so I've had to buy it many times because I don't keep track!

Joey Rath says

Really good book with profound ideas in how challenger brands approach the marketplace. It was a little dry to read at times, but a definite must read for any new brands and individuals that just want to be smarter marketers.

Scott Wozniak says

This is a strong description of how a company can find their niche and grow their share in a space that's already dominated by a big fish (existing market leader).

There are a lot of examples of both good and bad strategies. But I was pleasantly surprised by the thought given to the overall framework and universal principles.

If your business is a challenger in a space already dominated by another company, then this is a great book for you.

Manda says

Morgan explains how "challenger brands can compete against brand leaders." What is a "challenger brand"? In his Preface, Morgan suggests that it is based on eight "credos":

1. Break with the immediate past
2. Build a lighthouse entity
3. Assume thought leadership of the category
4. Create symbols of reevaluation
5. Sacrifice
6. Overcommit
7. Use advertising and publicity as a high-leverage asset
8. Become ideas-centered rather than consumer-centered

He discusses each in detail in Part II.

Morgan's primary objective is to provide what he calls a "magnetic compass" for Small Fish which will enable them to compete successfully. Obviously, they face problems: certain markets have moved for the first time from maturity to overcapacity; as a result, there is not enough "food" to go around; and while turning their attention downward, the Big Fish have also turned outward...toward Small Fish; as the Big Fish moved downward, retailers moved upward. Time and again, he stresses the importance of ideas...actually, better ideas. Hence the imperative to break with the past: assume nothing, take no one and nothing for granted, constantly ask "What if?" and "Why not?" For Small Fish, the status quo is death. Period. Better ideas are engaging, provocative, and self-propagating. They help to create competitive advantages.

Think in terms of an ambush: A Challenger brand can attack whenever and wherever least expected. A Challenger brand redefines terms such as "enemy", "opponent", "competition", etc. A Challenger brand has attitude. It thrives when underestimated. Big Fish know they are "Big Fish." They have a tendency to become arrogant, complacent, hence vulnerable. By breaking with the immediate past, the Small Fish is able to answer several critically important questions such as "What is the core issue?" "What business are we in now?," "What business should we be in?," "What are our best opportunities?," "How can we implement a Challenger strategy to take full advantage of those opportunities?"

The four dimensions of a Lighthouse brand are identity, emotion, intensity, and salience. As Morgan explains, identity should be self-referential: "This is who we are and this is what we stand for." Challenger brands should establish and then nourish an emotional rather than rational relationship with consumers. Sustainable customer loyalty, not temporary satisfaction, is the primary objective. Moreover, there should be intensity in all communications with consumers. Finally, Challenger brands must attract attention to themselves.

In Chapter 9, Morgan observes that "Challenger brands are not somehow unusual in that they have a monopoly on good ideas; they are unusual, however, in that they make good ideas happen." In Chapter 14, he explains that his premise so far in Eating the Big Fish is that "Challengers need their own models of strategy and behavior; that we [who must formulate that strategy] are entirely unlike the brand leader in position and resource and, consequently, need to find an entirely different set of rules of engagement." In the next chapter, Morgan explains how to write the Challenger program, recommending a two-day off-site during which key people produce it.

The final chapter pulls together all of Morgan's key points. They are effectively organized within a four-stage process: Attitude & Preparation, Challenger Strategy, Challenger Behavior, and Sustaining Challenger Momentum. Everything begins with and an attitude suggested by shin -- Japanese for "spirit." Never give up. Never lose the will to win. Always be willing to take risks. (Jack Dempsey once suggested that "champions get up when they can't.") Morgan includes some copy from Apple's first 60-second television commercial after Steve Jobs returned. It begins: "Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The trouble makers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently." The ad copy concludes: "And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do." This book may have been written for Small Fish but can also be of great value to Big Fish. Moreover, at least a few Small Fish which use Morgan's ideas will become Big Fish. If they think and then compete as if they are still Small Fish, they will probably survive.

I really enjoyed this book. It reads very smoothly and quickly. For a non-business, non-advertising person, this was a relief.

Dulcie says

B-O-L-L-O-C-K-S. World champion contender in stating the bleeding obvious. Mr Morgan is a pretender & not a challenger.

Save your time and spend it with someone you love or doing something you enjoy.
Just don't read this.

Tim says

Marketing book focusing on how the little fish can take market share away from bigger fish. I enjoyed the case studies in this book and passion in the reading. You have to be bold to eat the big fish but I think that Morgan makes a strong point for boldness and gives marketers many different ways to do it.

A great book for marketers.

Chas Bayfield says

When I set up an ad agency in 2001, this was one of two books I was told to read (the other was the Tipping Point). I'm glad I took the advice, it was brilliant and hugely encouraging. It's helpful to realise that the little guys aren't little because they aren't good, they're little because they haven't worked out how to be big yet.
