

Contagious: Why Things Catch On Summary



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1-Sentence-Summary: *Contagious: Why Things Catch On* illustrates why certain ideas and products spread better than others by sharing compelling stories from the world of business, social campaigns, and media.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Have you ever wondered what makes some random YouTube videos go viral, regardless of their quality, bad taste, or how cliché they are?

The answer is because people share them. Even if a popular video seems random to you, it has qualities that make people want to pass it on.

We assume that some concepts or products become more popular than others out of sheer luck. One article gets a million and another, although similar, sees only a handful. That’s just how the Internet seems to work – at least if you don’t look any deeper.

But what if there was somebody who tried to find out what separates contagious ideas from the ones that never make themselves known?

Jonah Berger has been doing exactly this for over 15 years now. Much like the book *Hooked*, Berger digs deep into the psychology behind consumer choices. His conclusions about why some ideas spread like a virus are the core of *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*.

Here are 3 of the most important lessons the book teaches about how products, ideas, and stories get shared:

1. Word of mouth is the most powerful marketing mechanism.
2. “Top-of-mind leads to tip-of-tongue” should be the mantra of all marketers.
3. People intuitively make sense of the world through stories.

Ready to seriously upgrade your marketing knowledge base? Let's go!

Lesson 1: Word of mouth is better advertising than online marketing.

If you are trying to market a product, grow a personal brand, or organize your community around a common cause, you probably think that social media is your best bet. Everyone seems so excited about using Facebook or Instagram ads for spreading their ideas.

Jonah Berger reveals that we have it all wrong. The most powerful marketing tool that exists is not social media, but word of mouth. Person-to-person sharing about new products, brands, causes, and events.

And guess what part of the word of mouth recommendations happen online? Only 7 percent. That's right, 93% of sharing, even of online content is via face-to-face interaction. Maybe we are, after all, not as addicted to internet communication as some researchers are trying to convince us we are.

There are two big reasons why word-of-mouth marketing is more effective than “formal” ways of advertising.

First and foremost, our trust is greater in our peers than in advertisers. If a friend recommends a new whitening toothpaste to you, it's most likely because it worked for her or someone she knows. Otherwise, why would she even mention it?

The reason she shares the miraculous toothpaste brand with you is that she heard you complaining about the color of your teeth. She knows that this is your pain point. She wouldn't talk about it with Sally, who just had her teeth whitening appointment a few days ago.

This is the second component that makes the word-of-mouth marketing so powerful—it is exceptionally well-targeted. If a colleague or family member recommends something to you, it is usually because they believe it may answer your current needs.

Lesson 2: Use common triggers to prompt people to think about your product.

Remember Rebecca Black's viral video "Friday," where a group of teenagers jump in the car and go to a party to delight in the freedom of the upcoming weekend? It wasn't the best video – but it became a hit anyway.

What helped the song spread was the weekly cue that prompted viewers to think about the video. Yep, you guessed it; the signal was Friday. On Fridays, people remembered the song and searched for it much more than on other days.

The same worked for the Geico commercial with a camel that stubbornly asks, "Guess what day it is?" to people in an office. Eventually, someone grumpily answers, "It's hump day." This video was shared 20 to 30 times more often on Wednesdays than on other days of the week.

These examples illustrate a simple but often overlooked fact about contagious ideas. **For people to share concepts, they have to remember them.** What's "top-of-mind" easily becomes "tip-of-tongue."

A marketer's job is to find or create triggers that will naturally spark the thought of the product or idea in customers. As famous psychologist Daniel Kahneman has shown, the human mind remembers things by connecting them with other memories.

This association mechanism allows ideas to be recalled repeatedly by many people throughout their day or week. Tapping into this aspect of human psychology results in virality.

Lesson 3: The mind is trained to learn through stories .

Being human means that you are fond of stories. This is probably nothing new to you. But why do we get so hung up on narratives?

For millennia people have been inventing various tales to understand the world better. People told legends like the Trojan Horse or flood myths long before recording them in writing. Stories are still primary carriers of ideas today.

Apart from being entertaining, the most memorable ones usually contain an essential message woven between the words. In the biblical narrative of Noah's Ark, for example, the underlying message is that *God protects virtuous people*. However, this moral is "smuggled" in the story, without ever being explicitly expressed.

This "smuggling" is precisely why we are unlikely to question a message presented to us in this way. We perceive it, at least to some extent, unconsciously because we are more focused on the events of the story itself. But while our conscious attention remains on the surface of things, our unconscious absorbs that which hides beneath.

If you want to make your product or idea stick, create a story around it. Jonah Berger himself certainly understands how important this is. At least half of his book is stories and anecdotes.

Contagious: Why Things Catch On Review

If you are looking for a marketing book which is entertaining, easy to read and carries value, *Contagious: Why Things Catch On* does the job. While some of the points, like the importance of storytelling, may be evident for veteran marketers, even the most experienced people in the advertising industry can learn something new. Plus, you get to enjoy Jonah's punchy and eloquent writing style, which is a great bonus.

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Who would I recommend the Contagious: Why Things Catch On Summary summary to?

The 20-year old marketing student who wants to extend his knowledge beyond university curriculum, the 42-year old business owner who is trying to take her company's flagship product the next level, and anyone who wishes to make more conscious purchasing decisions.