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–*Sidney Falken, Chief Branding Officer, Hanes*

What Great Brands Know



Unleash Your Right-Brain Genius to
Stand Out and Make Customers Care

Tracy Carlson

Praise for *What Great Brands Know*

“What an inspired book! These are great lessons for marketing, and for life. Tracy’s six principles are elegant in their simplicity, but are born from a lifetime of working with—and closely studying—great brands. This is a great book to share with everyone who touches your brand!”

– **Sidney Falken**, Chief Branding Officer, Hanes

What Great Brands Know offers precisely what’s been missing from marketing for too long: a framework for integrating human, creative thinking with business strategy—an integration that’s required to create inspiring brands. Great brands are built with passion and a relentless focus on providing value to the customer—not through “branding,” which is often a superficial and hollow process. In this book, Carlson offers a warm, welcome and accessible path to creating compelling brands.”

– **Eric Almquist**, Partner, Bain & Company

“Today’s business owners need both/and thinking to successfully reach customers and stand out in the marketplace. *What Great Brands Know* will help you achieve the best of both. Drawn from compelling real-world examples, Carlson’s systematic and practical framework will satisfy your orderly left-brain while providing plenty of fun and accessible right-brain boosters to ignite your creative mind and transform your work.”

– **Jennifer Lee**, author of *The Right-Brain Business Plan*

“Carlson’s intelligent little book decodes how truly great brands create their magic—and lights a persuasive path for you and others to follow. You may not approach marketing in quite the same way again after reading *What Great Brands Know*—and that would be good for everyone, businesses and consumers alike.”

– **Bill Gentner**, President, Kao Consumer Products,
Americas, Europe, Middle East & Africa

“This wonderful little book will have you cheering for an alternative approach to marketing that is at once accessible and inspiring. Written with humor and passion, *What Great Brands Know* will get you thinking about what’s wrong with business—and some innovative ways to fix it.”

– **Diane Coutu**, Director of Client Communications, Banyan Family Business Advisors and former Senior Editor, *Harvard Business Review*

“In the era of big data, Carlson offers a compelling reminder of the power of ideas, inspiration and instinct. A must read for marketers who want to reawaken their inner passions and build brands that matter.”

– **Len Johnson**, Executive Director, Marketing,
The University of Chicago Booth School of Business

“*What Great Brands Know* is a manifesto for right-brain branding that embodies the very virtues of creativity and humanity it extols. This is truly business thinking for the 21st century. Carlson’s book bristles with her trademark intelligence, insight, and wit, issuing a wake-up call for the world of marketing. I only hope executives are listening.”

– **Pam Grossman**, Nomellini-Olivier
Professor of Education, Stanford University

“This book outlines a framework for engaging whole-brain thinking that includes headings like “beauty” and “harmony”—but don’t let these “soft” topics fool you. Carlson makes a compelling case for engaging hearts as well as heads when we embark on a branding mission. She skillfully distills what we may intuitively sense about the brands we love into clear, logical explanations. The book itself demonstrates the principles of good branding. The reader can’t help but be engaged in the material, which is full of illustrative stories that are both wise and entertaining.”

– **Betsy W. Huntley**, Director of Marketing,
Choate, Hall & Stewart, LLP

“In *What Great Brands Know*, Tracy Carlson illustrates breakthrough strategies to garner consumer’s attention and loyalty, sorely needed in today’s competitive and rapidly changing marketplace. With clear and engaging prose, this book provides fresh examples of successful brands as well as steps any individual or organization can employ to unleash similar creativity.”

– **LeeAnne Baer**, Executive Director, Consumer Research
and Insights at Time, Inc.

“In her book, Tracy Carlson smartly explains how the art of commerce combines with emotional engagement to explain why successful brands live in the lives of their consumers. If you are looking for a place to start on how to make your brand sing, this book provides an excellent hymnal. I am giving this book to everyone in my marketing department so they can learn how to turn our brands into icons. Thank you, Tracy Carlson.”

– **Marc Rovner**, General Manager, Consumer Healthcare
at Boehringer Ingelheim

“*What Great Brands Know* reveals the patterns of ingenuity that animate the products and companies we love. With left-brain lucidity and right-brain insight, Carlson illuminates what we have sensed dimly: product quality has a human quality. The good news is that product genius can be nurtured, and this finely crafted book delights its readers as it shows the way.”

– **Eleanor Brown**, James Irvine Professor of Economics, Pomona College

“In this book, Tracy demonstrates how the most successful companies blend intuition with data, and sheds light on how right brain marketers can achieve breakthroughs by valuing intuition, creativity and passion. Tracy connects the dots to help us build narratives that enhance rather than oppose data.”

– **Louise Dubé**, Managing Director of Digital Learning at WGBH

What Great Brands Know

Unleash Your Right-Brain Genius to Stand Out and Make Customers Care

By Tracy Carlson

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
How Great Brands Are Born	15
What Great Brands Know and Use to Make an Impact: The Six Principles	33
A is for Art	35
Beauty	39
Craftsmanship.....	43
The Arts	47
Getting Started with Art.....	53
B is for Balance	57
Harmony	61
Equanimity.....	65
Zagging	69
Getting Started with Balance	73
C is for Connecting	77
Synthesis	81
Association	87
Intuition	91
Getting Started with Connecting	97

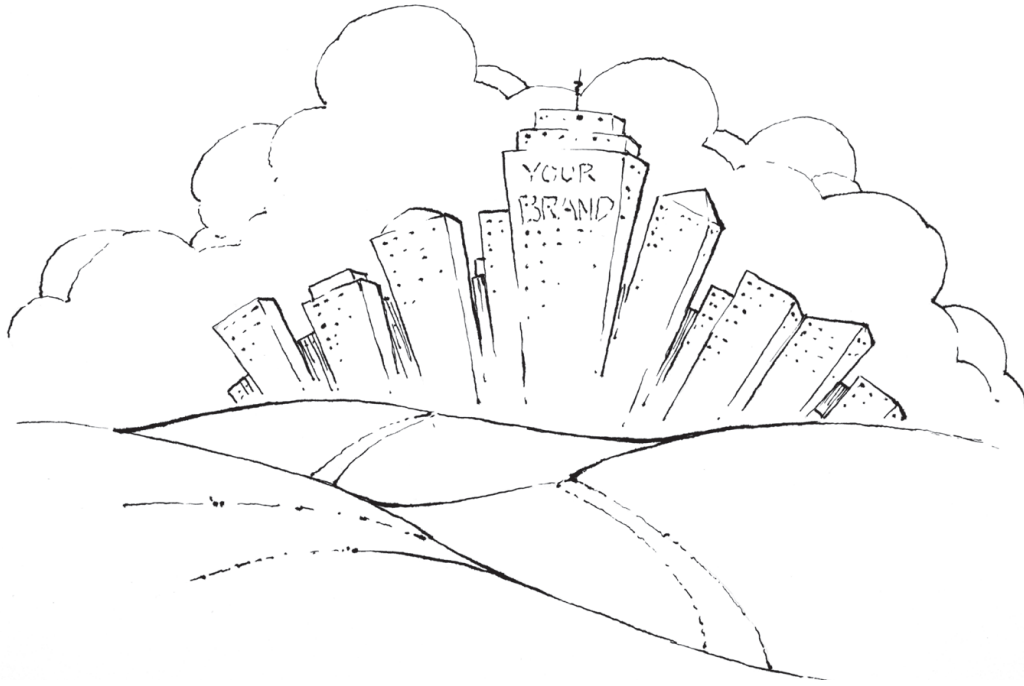
D is for Depth	103
Essence	107
Multidimensionality	113
Roots	119
Getting Started with Depth	125
E is for Emotion	129
Attunement.....	133
Empathy.....	139
Engagement.....	145
Getting Started with Emotion	151
F is for Fun	155
Joviality	159
Enjoyment	165
Play	169
Getting Started with Fun.....	175
The Way Forward	181
Appendix: Ready for More?	201
For further reading.....	203
Videos	203
Newsletters.....	206

Books Referenced and Additional Books You Might Enjoy	206
Notes	211
Acknowledgments	215
Unite the Hemispheres! Spread the Word!	219
Need Some Help?	220
About the Author and Illustrator	221

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Thus every matter, if it is to be done well,
requires the whole person.

Martin Luther



INTRODUCTION

Whether you're a leader inside an organization or run your own business, trying to grow your brand is harder than ever. Heck, it's tough enough just to hold your ground.

You know you won't get where you want to be by going the safe, incremental route. But you also know that brilliant, game-changing ideas to stand out and connect with customers tend not to drop from the sky. So what do you do?

Money's tight, but even if you had the budget, who would you hire that can really help you leapfrog? You haven't been too impressed with what you've seen. Despite the flash, the agencies and consultants all feel a little stale.

Besides, you're going flat out as it is. You've got plans to meet, numbers to make, a pipeline to fill. So you just go with something safe for the new offering or the next campaign. Path of least resistance. With barely a second to breathe, thinking expansively just doesn't make the list.

And if you're in a big company, the internal challenges can be every bit as daunting. The call for Bold New Ideas! for innovative products and approaches turns out to be only lip service (again). When push comes to shove, no one wants to take a real risk. The same old hoops for approval still dangle. You know that's just not going to move the needle, and you're getting mighty tired of the dance.

You want more

Deep down you know you should be thinking more holistically—especially about your customer. Your company, maybe your entire industry, is in a rut, looking at things too narrowly. It feels flat and lifeless. And you know if you don't find some deeper way to connect with people—well, then it's just going to be all about price. That's frustrating. (Besides, it's boring.)

Meanwhile, you can't help but envy the few brands out there that seem to be slightly magical. It's not just their success you admire—it's their creativity and how they've actually changed people's lives. But try as you might, you can't connect what they do with your own situation. Yes, it's all very well if you're Apple or Google, but what about the rest of us?

It can feel pretty disheartening. Your category is crammed with the ho-hum, with more on the horizon. Oh, for a little inspiration! To make a difference at the end of the day! Wouldn't it be nice to feel a quickening of something genuinely new and different? Glimpse the possibility of transformation?

Another way...

Stop. Take a deep breath. Relax. There are fresh, powerful ideas and approaches available. They may cost little or nothing. And, in fact, they are just inches away.

But first, consider this:

In business (and especially business school), what are we taught? To analyze. Focus on the facts. Think logically.

These are good things, and they fill our days. We can get pretty fancy with them, too. We look at the role and interplay of variables. We parse correlation vs. causality. We track, compare, segment, chart, survey, slice, and dice. Numbers rule, and we can never get enough of them. Every year, new and more powerful tools help us crunch ever-mightier reams of data.

Much of this is important and necessary.

Some of it is genius.

Some of it is extraneous and butt covering.

Some of it is downright soul killing.

It can be hard to tell the difference.

All of it, however, comes from one place: the left brain. The part of us that is deeply concerned with what we already know to be important. What we can name and measure. What we can approach logically. What seems to shine with objectivity and abstract truth.

This is what gives us some security that we are doing the right thing in a data-rich world where the stakes are very high.

This is also what gives us the safe and incremental. What crams our categories with the ho-hum. What leads to stale offerings and a zero-sum market.

In my twenty-plus years in business and marketing, I have come to realize that the world-changing stuff doesn't come from there. Instead, it comes from places that are harder to describe.

A sudden awareness.

The gentle insistence of a feeling.

The glimpsing of a shape or pattern.

An empathic understanding.

A flash of imagination.

A vision of how unrelated things connect.

These are wispy origins, especially next to the hallowed halls of Logic, Analysis, and Mathematics. Yet these are the very source of the quantum insights and discoveries we seek. And they all come from another place: the right brain.

Where the breakthroughs are

In my experience leading brands like Dove and Hellmann's and consulting to companies from the Fortune 500 to startups, it's right-brain thinking that allowed me to spot things others didn't see. A hunch led me to investigate the issue of childhood obesity—a decade before any food and beverage brands had it on their radar screen. In the commoditized world of bar soaps, inklings led me to develop new concepts using flavors as fragrances (before The Body Shop and its imitators), with off-the-charts results on a project that had bedeviled my predecessors for years.

Time and again the non-linear approach, the emotional understanding, the perception of symbolic connection has inspired the breakthrough.

And I am not alone. While I've been bringing my right brain intuitively to my work for over twenty years, for the past few years I've focused specifically on how right-brain thinking applies to brands and business. And I've come to see that the brands we all consider special—the Targets, Southwest Airlines, Trader Joe's, and Apples of the world—are deeply imbued with right-brain genius along with classic left-brain smarts. Their counterparts (like Walmart, United, Safeway, and Microsoft) are not.

As we seek to transform our brands, to make richer connections with people, we need not look outward exclusively. Nature has provided us with a handy resource right inside, tucked next to that magnificent left hemisphere that business loves so well. We need more business folk to realize that the right brain is also a

source of deep intelligence and immense value. We just need to understand it, honor it, and develop it like a muscle so we can harness our full power and potential.

In my own work, with limited or fixed budgets, I drew upon a rich reservoir of opportunities by leveraging what nature is teaching us. Nature has given two halves of a whole—and they work best when they work together.

You don't need my guidance on operational efficiency or quantitative analysis. That's not my expertise. Besides, you may have that down cold already, or if not, you can find some great resources to help you learn. But what the heck do you do with the right brain in a brand and business context? That's where I come in, and what this book is for.

This means you

You may be leading a team or company poised to make a difference. You may be a change agent within your organization, eager to find new ideas and approaches that work. You may be an emerging leader; a marketer who gets it, a product developer who knows something has to change. You may be a small business owner turned off by what the business world says you should be doing. Or you may be someone who's simply curious and interested in the business world and what it means culturally, socially, and artistically.

In the pages that follow I'll give you a framework for understanding and applying right-brain thinking to marketing and business

issues. As you read, you'll get a fresh understanding of what truly iconic brands share that distinguishes them from their competitors. Differences not only in what they *do*, but how they *think*. You'll glimpse why some approaches feel right and work well, while other outwardly similar ones just fall short. You'll start to make connections with your own situation, and along the way I'll share some ideas and approaches for getting started.

And it doesn't stop there. As you identify and learn to incorporate these right-brain principles into your projects and work, you'll also notice something else: you'll feel better. More whole, more human—as nature intended.

Why am I doing this?

With a staggering quantity of books about branding out there already, why on earth does the world need another? Plenty has also been written on the right brain, starting with two excellent books to which I am deeply indebted: Daniel Pink's *A Whole New Mind*, and Iain McGilchrist's *The Master and His Emissary*. So why this?

These are ideas I am passionate about, and they have never been more necessary. This is missionary work, people.

This book is the natural outcome of 20+ years in the thick of marketing strategy for brands at organizations like Unilever, General Mills, and MIT where I often felt: *something big and important is missing here*.

This book stems in part from my own curiosity. Why do I shudder when I see companies like Microsoft, Verizon, and Bank of America on lists of best brands? (Would anyone really shed a tear if they vaporized overnight?) Why do other brands make me want to write a thank-you note or love letter? I know I'm far from alone.

There may be no shortage of brands or companies, but there *is a desperate shortage of ones we truly care about*. Ones that genuinely brighten our lives, ones we'd mourn if they disappeared tomorrow.

There are also people like you out there, eager to make a difference. You want your work to matter. You're frustrated and restless. You sense that something fundamental is missing—and you're right.

I'm writing this for you because it works. And because it feels better.

A few years ago I started Right-Brain Brands and began sending my newsletters out to the universe. I have been honored and humbled by the response. Overwhelmingly the feedback has been:

Yes!

Right on!

Way overdue.

Damn—that explains it!

Amen.

Integrating right-brain principles results in a larger, warmer, and more deeply human approach to business. This has struck a chord with lots of people, and I'm hoping it will with you, too.

The time is ripe for change

The past few decades have wrought a sea change in business and society. Newly accessible sources and overwhelming quantities of information have ushered in new grounds for decision-making—and a new cadre of masters. Left-brain expertise, in the form of analytical rigor and metrics, has properly displaced a lot of fuzzy thinking and impulsive subjectivity.

But permit me a soapbox moment: the pendulum has swung too far. We are not just bundles of data waiting to be charted, guys. We're still people, with dreams and quirks and passions. We're much more complex and interesting than you think. Only a few brands and companies really get this and meet us where we are.

Business is too important to our economy and our everyday lives to reside solely in the hands of technocrats. Just as we need both a left and right brain to thrive, so do we need whole-brain thinking—and the talents of both left- and right-brainers. We all lose when we're missing the rich and vital contribution of these different voices and approaches.

Imagine briefly a world where our enterprises hum with the combined talents of engineers, economists—and English majors. Where there is room for programming and poetry, analysis and

art, spreadsheets and soul. Both/and. Places of collaboration, of free-range thinking and kick-ass execution. And honestly, doesn't that world sound like a lot more fun?

Okay, then. Let's get this started.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Now that you're eager to unleash your right-brain genius, here's a quick overview of what you'll find in the pages ahead:

How Great Brands Are Born:

Here we'll set the stage. After spending a bit more time on the left and right brains, we'll show how (singly and in combination) they give us an entirely new way to look brands.

- You'll see why some brands are “successful” but leave us cold—while others make us cheer for them.
- You'll have a chance to apply this perspective to your own product/service and your competitors.

What Great Brands Know and Use to Make an Impact—The Six Principles:

Here you'll find a framework that's easy to grasp and remember, using concepts beginning with the first six letters of the alphabet*.

*Most idea books (especially in business) offer a structural device to make them memorable. Usually it's an acronym (like SUCCESS! or SCORE!), which feels contrived and utilitarian, rarely leaving much sense of spaciousness around the ideas. A few hardy souls attempt to use the entire alphabet—but this is equally artificial (and gets pretty flimsy around Q, X and Z). The framework here arose organically. After working out the ideas needing expression and trying on different options, a six-letter approach (with three related ideas each) offered the best balance of maximum ease and minimal contrivance.

Within each principle you'll find:

- **An overview:** What this principle is about, and how it differs from what prevails in marketing and business today.
- **Three dimensions:** There are three facets to each principle. For each we'll define what it is (and isn't), and why it matters.
- **Brand Spotlights:** We'll bring each dimension to life with a brief case study. Some brands are famous, others aren't. All have earned their distinctiveness by investing their blood, sweat and tears in right-brain approaches. They haven't bought their success through heaps of advertising over time—an approach that's unavailable in today's fragmented media world, unless you have unlimited resources (and who does?).
- **Getting Started:** At the end of each principle, we'll provide ideas for getting started with that principle, most of which will be low or no cost. These suggestions will be aimed at getting more familiar with the ideas, which is an absolute prerequisite—there are no one-size-fits-all instant applications (for wouldn't that be a very left-brain approach indeed?).

The Way Forward

Here you'll find ways to make the case for integrating right-brain thinking based on three specific issues that prevail in a left-brain business world. In addition, we'll recap the Six Principles and suggest areas ripe for initial application.

Appendix: Ready for More?

Here you'll find additional resources, including a curated list of books and videos for exploring these ideas in greater depth.

Thank you so much for reading the first chapter of *What Great Brands Know*. I hope you enjoyed it.

To start unleashing your right-brain genius, get your copy of *What Great Brands Know* today!

Learn more by visiting:
www.rightbrainbrands.com