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## Chip and Dan Heath: Marketing Made Sticky

What Makes A Message Work.

From: [Inc. Magazine, January 2007](#) | By: Mike Hofman

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Marketers have long wondered why simple campaigns sometimes have a greater impact than more sophisticated efforts. Brothers Chip and Dan Heath explore this conundrum in their new book *Made to Stick* (Random House). The authors--Chip is a professor at Stanford, and Dan works at Duke's corporate education program--looked at ideas from the golden rule to popular urban legends to create a checklist of what makes an idea truly memorable. The Heaths recently ran down their checklist with editor Mike Hofman.

### Why do you think some ideas catch on while others languish?

*Chip:* We believe that the best ideas have most of these traits: They are simple, core messages; they are unexpected; they are concrete, credible, and emotional; and they are stories. So when John F. Kennedy said that we were going to put a man on the moon within the decade, that idea stuck because it had many of those qualities. A more current example, and our favorite marketing example, would be Jared, the Subway spokesperson who lost 245 pounds by eating Subway every day. It meets all of those criteria. But believe it or not, some top people at Subway initially objected to the campaign.

### Why?

*Dan:* They thought that the idea of healthy fast food could be problematic. The lawyers worried that there was a legal risk to saying that eating Subway could help you lose weight.

*Chip:* Paradoxically, Subway's last campaign prior to Jared was "7 sandwiches under 6 grams of fat." Some of the marketing people felt that they had already put out the message that Subway was healthy.

### Why didn't the six-grams slogan work? It seems both simple and credible.

*Dan:* I don't think it's all that concrete. What does six grams of fat mean, really? And it's not a story in the way that Jared losing a ton of weight by eating Subway is a story. When Jared holds up those ginormous pants and you see the before-and-after photos of him, these things are concrete and they allow the audience to assess the credibility of the message for themselves. And there's an emotional element to Jared's story that the six-grams campaign lacks. You feel like Jared faced a challenge and overcame it

and I can, too. It's a simple tale of victory.

**You argue that the "simple" part is where a lot of marketers and communicators mess up. Why is that?**

*Chip:* In the book, we call it the "curse of knowledge," and it's actually particularly common among entrepreneurs. They've spent years building a product and now it's time to sell it and they want everyone to hear everything about it. But for a truly sticky idea, you need to edit the message to its very core.

*Dan:* Simplicity is a powerful force, and it can be hard for people like entrepreneurs, who always have a lot to say, to master it. We're not talking about paring the superfluous elements out of your message. That's the easy part. The hard part is picking from several valuable ideas the single most valuable idea and making it as sticky as possible. Herb Kelleher has told a great story about Southwest Airlines (NYSE:LUV) that captures what this means in practice. Tracy from marketing comes into his office and says that customer surveys say that travelers on the Houston to Las Vegas route would enjoy a meal, and a chicken Caesar salad is the right meal to serve them according to market research. And Kelleher responds that the mission of Southwest is to be the lowest-fare airline in every market. So, he asks her, how is serving chicken Caesar salads on that flight going to make Southwest the lowest-fare airline in that market? There you have an entrepreneur who knows his core value.

**I would think entrepreneurs would have an easier time making their ideas stick because they can use their power as owner of the company to end any debate about what the core message is. Is that the case?**

*Chip:* Entrepreneurs have an advantage in that their businesses are relatively small, so it's very easy for them to spread the word about their core message. But these companies also face a huge disadvantage because they are very often focused on the entrepreneur who founded the company--who has that curse of knowledge.

*Dan:* The great cruelty is that the smarter you get about something, the harder it is to share what you know. This is the problem we all have with doctors, lawyers, and accountants. We all know that they know what they're talking about. But we've all had the experience of sitting in a lawyer's office and not understanding what they're saying because they're forgetting that you don't know what they know. It's the same with a 10-year-old trying to show you how to play a video game. The child can't fathom the scope of your ignorance.

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**The companies you've mentioned are consumer marketers. How does your checklist apply to business-to-business marketing?**

*Dan:* Business-to-business marketers do a notoriously bad job when it comes to the emotional element of marketing. It's as if the marketing world believes that consumers buying something for themselves are totally emotional, but the minute they go to work and buy something as part of their job, all they care about is optimization and efficiency. There's an interesting story about a Microsoft (NASDAQ:MSFT) campaign in the United Kingdom for a software development product. It came about because the marketing people one day realized that software developers thought of themselves as creative people. Prior to that, my guess is the marketers thought that *they* were creative and developers were something different--they were technical. So the marketers decided to design a brochure unlike all the brochures out there that described a product feature by feature. Instead, Microsoft made an emotional appeal to

developers as creative people. The message was, the next time you have a creative breakthrough, our development tools will help you turn that idea into reality. As a result of that campaign, sales of that product improved.

### **How can you diagnose whether your business has an unsticky core message?**

*Chip:* You'll know it when the founder of the company is the ultimate arbiter for every question. The typical answer to any major question is, "Let's ask Barry"--that is, let's ask the boss. With the really sticky ideas, a company has told a story to people throughout the company and beyond, so that employees can make the right decisions on their own.

*Dan:* I would add that if your competitors think that your core statement is also true of them, then it's not good enough.

### **Resources**

To read a blog by *Made to Stick's* authors, go to [madetostick.com](http://madetostick.com).

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