



Q&A with Catherine Kaputa, Author of *Breakthrough Branding*

By Blogtrepeneur

B: Many books tell entrepreneurs to think big. You're recommending the opposite. What makes small the next big thing?

CK: In my book, *Breakthrough Branding*, I'm not saying not to think big and to think small. What I'm talking about is finding a small idea and not a big complicated idea. In business, people are always talking about finding the "big idea." I say, go for a "small idea," one that's simple, focused and relevant.

It's a paradox but small ideas are big – they are more likely to become big brands. "Small ideas" can occupy a unique niche. They are focused so you can tweak them and get it right during the initial start up phase. You don't want an apple and orange business, but a focused idea that is relevant to the market. Look at Kevin Systrom who started a company called Burbn that was a location based app like FourSquare that did a lot of things. The business wasn't doing all that well but one portion of it had a lot of traction, its photo sharing app. So Systrom abandoned the complicated big idea and focused on the small idea, the photo app. He renamed his business Instagram. About nine months later he sold it to



Facebook for about a billion dollars. Small ideas become big brands.

B: How can you tell if your brand has the potential to become a winning brand? How long should you work on it?

CK: There's no magic formula like give yourself 3 to 6 months and if you don't get traction, move on. But if you don't get customer interest in the first 6 - 12 months, it's probably time to look hard at whether you have a winning idea. Sometimes entrepreneurs have moderate success and then there is the Eureka moment and they find a better way to tweak the brand to great success like David Overton and his cheesecake business. Even though Overton believed he had the Cadillac of cheesecakes, for years he couldn't figure out how to scale the brand. His cheesecake business was mainly supplying restaurants. Then he came up with the idea of opening a restaurant to market the cheesecakes and The Cheesecake Factory was born. Today, it's a billion dollar restaurant chain.

B: Most entrepreneurs tend to focus on their age group. Are there any groups that are undersold and ripe for opportunities?

CK: When you look at psychographics that tie people together rather than demographics, there are literally hundreds of consumer markets. The best way to come up with a winning idea that becomes a big brand is to find the "white space," a consumer need that a specific group has that no one has recognized yet. Steve Jobs was good at that, but we all can be. Look at Fred Carl. He was a contractor redoing his kitchen, His wife Margaret liked to cook wanted an old-fashioned, serious stove like the Chambers 46 she grew up with. They weren't made any more, so Carl looked into buying a commercial restaurant stove and putting it in. But that wasn't feasible since commercial stoves in restaurants put off too much heat



for a home. So Carl approached stove manufacturers and one after another they told him he was crazy. No one would want a stove like that. But Carl knew there was a market - people who were serious cooks at home like his wife. Carl finally persuaded one to make 12 stoves on spec. Carl sold them out in a couple of days. He called his stove Viking because he thought of Vikings as strong and enduring. Today, he's got a thriving business and spurred a lot of manufacturers to make serious stoves for the home.

B: You talk about a brand's DNA. Could you explain how you determine it?

CK: In many ways, brands are like people and people are like brands, and as I talk about in *Breakthrough Branding*, it can help in creative development to think of your business brand as a person with a distinct personality and value system. Think, if my brand were a person, who would it be and why? It will help you in determining what to name the brand, its messages, its look and feel, and marketing activities. To determine your brand's DNA, you want to do a combination of slow thinking (analysis like the SWOT Analysis that I talk about in *Breakthrough Branding*) and fast thinking (brainstorming individually and with others). Often the best ideas come from fast thinking and not painstaking analysis.

B: You had a varied career becoming the branding writer and guru that you are now. What did those different opportunities do for you in terms of opening your eyes to the power of branding?

CK: I got interested in branding out of necessity, because I was being branded by others and not in the way I wanted to be branded. I was making a career change early in my career from being a Japanese art historian to an ad executive, and everyone was rejecting me and branding me as an academic. So I discovered, if



you don't brand yourself, other people will. And I can guarantee you that they won't brand you in the way that you want to be branded. My first personal branding challenge - that first career change from art historian to ad executive - may have been my most dramatic, but I found that I have had to empower myself and take charge of my personal brand at every stage of my career to create new opportunities and to stay relevant to the market.

B: If you had to do it all over again, would you follow your past career path or move into entrepreneurship from the start?

CK: If I were starting out today, I would be attracted to entrepreneurship at an early age. In reality, today, we're all entrepreneurs, whether we have our own business or work in a company. We all have to empower ourselves and take charge of our own destiny. There are no guarantees. When I started out after college, it was a different environment. But today, is the age of the entrepreneur, and the internet, technology and a dynamic business environment opens up many opportunities to explore. And with a tough economy, becoming an entrepreneur at an early age, even right after school may be the best decision for you.