



by Seth Godin

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“SACD or DVD-A?”

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“PowerBook or iBook?”...

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# Enthusiasts *by* Seth Godin

Depending on his area of expertise, an enthusiast cares about the answers to the following questions:

“Paddle shift or stick?” “SACD or DVD-A?”  
“Cherrywood or carbon fiber?” “Pho Bac or Pho Bang?” “PowerBook or iBook?” “Hearthstone or parchment paper?” “Habanero or chipotle?”  
“Linen or organic cotton?”

I’m an enthusiast. As you may have guessed, I am every marketer’s dream. I am an enthusiast in not just one but a bunch of areas. I get magazines with names like *The Rosengarten Report* and catalogs from Garrett Wade.

Enthusiasts are the ones with otaku. We’re the ones who care about what marketers are up to. The ones who seek out new products and new corporations, the ones who boldly go . . . (oops, sorry, another enthusiastic topic jumped in there). Anyway, we are the ones who will spread the word about your innovation, tell our friends and colleagues about your new Purple Cow.

It’s not just consumer goods. Enthusiasts read the *Harvard Business Review* and get excited about a new consulting firm or a new technique. Enthusiasts read the classifieds at the back of *Advertising Age* to figure out which ad agencies are doing well. And political enthusiasts decide who gets elected president of the United States.

Plenty of marketers have decided that they need to be obsessed with these otaku-filled piggy banks. Some of them have even rented or, better yet, collected permission-based lists of the most profitable subsets of these populations. And yet most of them fail.

I think they fail for the very same reason you often fail in getting the enthusiast in your life the perfect Christmas gift.

Enthusiasts don’t want you to hand them a gift certificate. (They’ll figure out how to get the money for the thing they really want.) Nor do they want you to give them a gift and say, “The salesman at the store said you’d like this.” While you may satisfy our short-term craving for more, you also remind enthusiasts that you’re not on the bus. If you’re not

one of us, you’ve disappointed us, made us feel marginalized, or, at the very least, made us feel like failures for being unable to persuade you about the joys of our enthusiasm.

Enthusiasts are enthusiastic! This means we want to spread the word. It means we want other people to “get it” as well. We want the organizations we buy from to feel like we do, to care as much as we do about the experiences and the products and the processes. We want our friends and fans not just to buy us a stick shift warmer for the Ferrari, but to research it first, to compare the different warmers, to understand the trade-offs and make the same (obvious) choice that we would.

When you take a chowhound to dinner (that’s what enthusiasts of good, authentic restaurants call themselves), she wants to know that you care as deeply as she does about the choice—not that you picked the closest restaurant listed in *Zagat*. When you design a product for a videophile, he wants to know that you’ve spent as many hours staring at the flat screen as he does.

Visit Steve Deckert’s site, *Decware*, and you’ll have no doubt that he’s a true enthusiast. It’s different than buying from some invisible technology conglomerate. That’s one reason it’s so easy for little companies like this to do just great with the early adopters with otaku. We buy from him because he’s like us. He’s one of us.

So, what should you do if you want to sell to an enthusiast, or buy a Christmas present for an enthusiast? She’s not going to make allowances for low price or great service or kindness. She’s going to be picky. She’s going to be aware of the trade-offs. And she’s not going to go easy on you. If she did, she wouldn’t be an enthusiast, would she?

What you’ll need to do, I’m afraid, is become one yourself. If it’s important to you to deal with people with otaku, you’ve got to get some.

