The Brand Gap Review

*The Brand Gap* by Marty Neumeier covers the topic of a concept Marty calls the brand gap. Neumeier explains this concept as a rift between creativity and strategy. This rift clouds a company’s brand message. Neumeier covers some concepts he believes are essential to bridge this brand gap. Most of the book is about 5 disciplines Neumeier thinks are the essentials in branding.

A brand is not what a company says it is. At least this is what Neumeier tells us. As he put it, brand is what they say it is, not you. He also said that brand is more important now than it has been before. This is because we are now an information rich and time poor society. Therefore, people are now making more and more decisions based on a company’s brand image and not just the actual specifications of the product. This shows how there could be a need for a strong brand or in Neumeier’s terminology, a charismatic brand. According to Neumeier a charismatic brand is a brand for which there is no substitute. Neumeier said that there are 5 disciplines to building a brand of this nature. These five disciplines are to differentiate, collaborate, innovate, validate, and cultivate. Neumeier spent the rest of the book elaborating on these concepts.

To differentiate is to separate your brand from others in some way. Neumeier said you should start this process by asking 3 questions. These questions are: who are you, what do you do, and why does it matter? If you can’t answer these three questions then you will find yourself to be irrelevant. This is a problem because we don’t retain information we don’t find important. So, we must focus on building our brand and becoming number one. Neumeier said number two would suffice as well but, anything less and there was no point in you participating in that niche.

Collaboration is the next essential step in building your brand. Neumeier is referring to the collaboration of left and right brain people to bridge the brand gap. He said for an example of this type of collaboration look to how Hollywood operates now. He went further into this idea by saying there are three different forms of collaboration as well. The one-stop shop is when you outsource your branding to one company that does it all. The brand agency strategy is using an agency that brings together many specialized companies to do the branding. Finally, there is the integrated marketing team. This is an internal team that works for the company itself. The integrated team was the most preferable method because you have direct control over the messages sent about your brand.

Innovation was the third step Neumeier went over. He said that radical change is what really changes an industry and not strategy. This is difficult because it’s our human nature to go with the flow of things. Neumeier says we must zig when everyone is zagging if we want success though. He went over some tips for brand name, logo, and packaging through this chapter as well. He also talked about how internet innovation is stifled by its design. The main point though is that in order to have success you must innovate.

Neumeier listed validation as the next step in brand building. This is validation from consumers about your company. He started by saying that communication needs to be changed into a circular form. Right now there is a message delivered and that is the end of the conversation. He went on to talk about various methods of validation from consumers. Research, focus groups, and feedback were some of the methods he covered. He said that massive research projects weren’t as valuable as many smaller ones. Prototyping was another method he thought was effective.

Finally, Neumeier said that you must cultivate your brand. He said that a company was a living thing that changes over time. This must be managed not through consistency, but with a company alignment. This is the overall way someone feels about your company. He compared it to someone changing clothes for different occasions. They are still the same person even if though they have on different clothes. He also said that the emerging power of brand also created new weaknesses. A brand can be heavily damaged by actions the company takes and this can have lasting effects. He thought Chief Branding Officers (CBOs) would be important in the future of bridging the brand gap as well. He finished by saying that each time a company follows the five steps he laid out they are creating a sustainable competitive advantage.

The contents of the book weren’t bad and the style was very good. This book did have a lot of graphics in it that helped break it up and illustrate some points well. The format seemed like it had a lot of thought put in it. The book wasn’t a very long book either. Two or three hours of reading is likely. Neumeier used his words well. I didn’t get as much of a conversational vibe out of this book as I did the last few I’ve read for class but it was still an easy read. He liked to use his words in playful ways, which was interesting. Just a few examples of this are “survival of the fittingest”, “zig when they zag”, “featuritis”. He had many more throughout the book and you always knew what he meant when he used them. He didn’t repeat his self, but the thoughts he was communicating still stuck. He had an affinity for listing things throughout the book as well, which is okay but tends to lose some impact when you do it a lot. Although I thought the content of the book was good I feel like he could have done more to support it. There weren’t any cases to back up his thoughts and very few examples. I feel like he could have had much more credibility for his ideas if he had included some of these. As well, I felt like the book was really only a primer on his ideas for this topic. I cemented this thought when I got to the summary section of the book. Most of the ideas in the book were summed up in a few short pages. So, I feel like if you can convey the most important ideas of your book as quickly as it did, you’re really not getting much depth on your topics. The book did read a little like a list of his ideas or arguments at times as well.

So, *The Brand Gap* was a quick read that could be useful to people learning about branding. I didn’t dislike this book, but I have a somewhat hard time just accepting everything this book says without much evidence to back it up. Although the format of the book was very polished I think the contents could use some work. There were a lot of arguments and ideas in the book which was good and bad. It let you know a lot of information quickly but, almost felt like I was just reading a list of his opinions sometimes. Overall, I wouldn’t tell anyone to stay away from this book but, I would recommend some others I’ve read recently over this one.