

# KIRKUS REVIEWS

## TITLE INFORMATION

### ASSEMBLAGE

*The Art and Science of Brand Transformation*

Emmanuel Probst

Ideapress Publishing (240 pp.)

\$28.95 hardcover, \$9.99 e-book

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## BOOK REVIEW

A comprehensive look at the nature and practice of branding.

Once upon a time, companies developed their brands solely for recognition purposes and distributed them through limited and well-worn channels, as Probst makes clear in the groundwork for his impressive new book. A farmer or a small-town shop owner might respond to a particular brand by buying a product, but the relationship usually went no further than that. But now, as Probst asserts, “We consume all these goods because marketing convinces us they make us happy, loved, and esteemed, but too many products make us feel happy one moment and miserable the next.” The author begins by noting what most consumers already understand: Brands “can foster meaningful relationships with their customers by being more empathetic and delivering a personalized experience.” But he quickly expands his discussion to include far more cultural and psychological elements. He contends that the advent of the internet has split most of us into three people—the real, digital, and virtual selves—which sometimes makes it difficult to remember who we really are. This conflux of identity and advertising is a note struck throughout the book, which repeatedly cites the ubiquity of a new mode of advertising. “People who want to express their ‘real me’ are more engaged with brands online and are motivated to co-create brand value,” he explains. “They become brand advocates.” All of this is in service to what Probst calls “contextual commerce,” the modern phenomenon of instant gratification that consumers expect—being able to “buy anything at any time without interrupting their lives.”

Readers of Probst’s *Brand Hacks* (2019) will remember his snappy prose style and quick pacing, but nothing in that earlier book will prepare them for the manic, thrilling sweep of this new book, which begins as a discussion of the ways branding must adapt to the demands of the present moment and steadily expands into nothing less than a penetrating portrait of an entire culture. Indeed, one of the most interesting and challenging main takeaways of the book is the extent to which branding has *become* the entire culture, for good or ill. “Consumers no longer expect brands to merely market their products,” he writes, “but to provide reliable and accurate information, take a stance on social issues, and make a positive contribution to society and the community.” In these pages, Probst takes the inner workings of consumer marketing and transforms them into an utterly fascinating snapshot of the way we live now. As Probst notes, the playing field has never been broader. “Small brands used to be hindered by few retailers carrying a limited number of brands along with their private labels. E-commerce has solved this by giving anyone access to an audience,” he writes. “Amazon shelf space is unlimited.” The author touches on everything from recycling and “green” initiatives to amateur-dominated social media platforms like YouTube or Instagram to the “woke” movement, and he illustrates his points by referencing TikTok trends and celebrity endorsements. Probst’s combination of agile writing and insightful observations makes most other books on modern branding look both overly circumspect and woefully incomplete.

A fascinating—and surprisingly fun—wide-angle look at advertising.

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