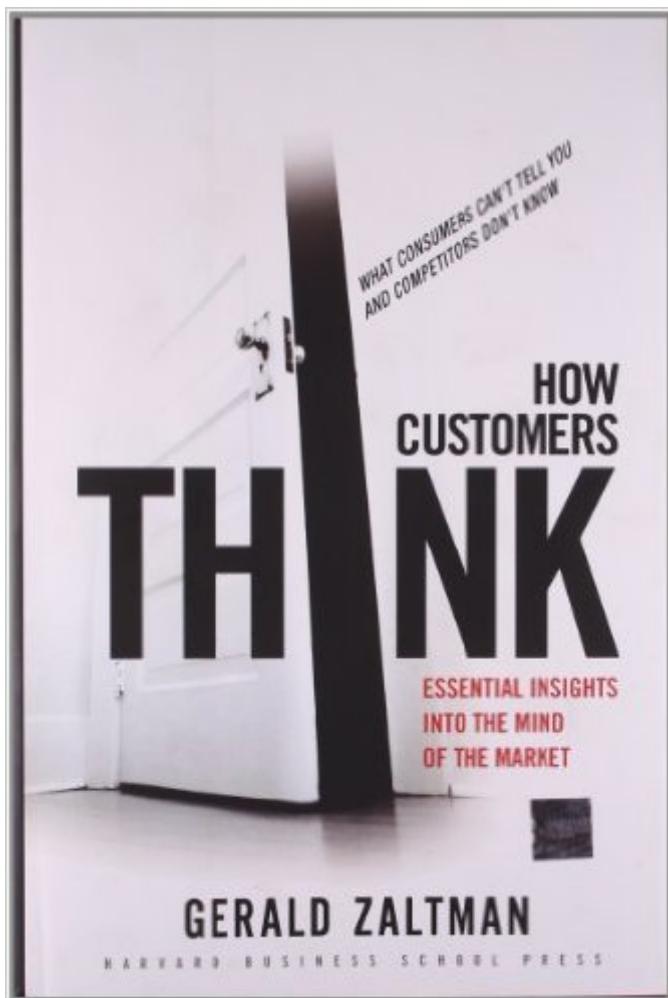


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How Customers Think: Essential Insights Into The Mind Of The Market



Synopsis

How to unlock the hidden 95 per cent of the customer's mind that traditional marketing methods have never reached. This title provides practical synthesis of the cognitive sciences. Drawing heavily on psychology, neuroscience, sociology, and linguistics, Zaltman combines academic rigor with real-world results to offer highly accessible insights, based on his years of research and consulting work with large clients like Coca-Cola and Procter & Gamble. An all-new tool kit: Zaltman provides research tools - metaphor elicitation, response latency, and implicit association techniques, to name a few - that will be all-new to marketers and demonstrates how innovators can use these tools to get clues from the subconscious when developing new products and finding new solutions, long before competitors do.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Few would have any argument with the central thesis of this book. Most new products fail rapidly in unexpected ways, suggesting that a misunderstanding of what is required by customers is part of the problem. Professor Zaltman goes on to suggest that his patented approach to considering more aspects of customer thinking (especially emotion, associations and context) can help improve matters. The book argues successfully that most marketing research methods are misused (usually by being applied to solve the wrong class of problem). He also does a fine job of explaining how marketers' attitudes and opinions create myopia that prevents them from learning what they need to know. There is extensive material in the book about how the brain works in the context of purchasing decisions. For those who are familiar with brain research, there is little new here. As someone who

has worked in marketing research for over 30 years, I found the explanation of how to do better to be abstract and often counter to my own experience with extensive one-on-one open-ended interviews. Let me share a few examples. First, he states that consensus maps (a graphic expression of the universal considerations and order that consumers go through to make a purchasing decision) of how consumers think almost always emerge after 10 interviews . . . far short of statistical norms. That finding made me wonder if the maps are done too abstractly to capture the richness of customer thinking. Second, all of the examples of specific brands seemed to relate to an adult making a decision with the item in front of her or him. Yet, many consumers arrive at the grocery store (for example, since much of the book is about food products) with a shopping list in hand.

Consumer research is a \$6 billion business. But the ROI on research expenditures is being questioned as never before. This is ironic given that advances in information technology has vastly expanded analytic capabilities and increased customer data by an order of magnitude. Jerry Zaltman's *How Customers Think* offers fresh insights into why companies are increasingly frustrated by consumer research. Drawing on contemporary brain research, he exposes fatal flaws in the hallowed premise in traditional consumer research that asking customers about their motivations is the best way to get clues about their future behavior. Zaltman points out that surveys, questionnaires and focus groups fail to get behind the curtains of consciousness. This can prove fatal for a marketing program because at least 90% of mental activity that leads to perceptions, thinking and decisions takes place outside the conscious mind. However, traditional research and marketing largely ignores the contents of the unconscious mind. Why is this so, when contemporary brain research has learned that this is where motivations as well as perceptions and decisions originate? Because lacking an understanding of how minds work, researchers and marketers must depend by default on consumers' conscious rational responses. However, disconnects between what consumers consciously think and what they feel at deeper levels often lead to marketplace failure. Zaltman reconnects the emotional, feeling dimension of consumers' minds (right brain as it were) with the perceiving, thinking (left brain) dimension of their minds to yield a holistic picture of customers' minds.

For most of its pages, "How Customers Think" is a silly book which conceals shallow content with glib explanations, pseudo-scientific rationales, and marketing / management jargon. Since it assumes the basic principles of marketing research without explanation, it is not useful to a

beginning research practitioner or buyer. However, an experienced practitioner will find some interesting ideas, provided (s)he is willing to spend some time cutting through fluff to get to the meat. The book's greatest flaw is its author's misconception, common to many authors in marketing and related fields, that books about marketing should themselves be examples of marketing. Much of the book reads like advertising copy for the marketing research methods and management principles expounded by the author. This slick style tries, but fails, to conceal a serious lack of content. Most of the book's content falls into one of three categories, all useless. The first category: explanations of traditional qualitative questioning techniques, such as projection using pictures or collages. These methodologies are rehashed without any really new content or in-depth explanation. The second category: discussion of recent findings from cognitive science, along with case studies showing how these findings lead to better MR methods. Unfortunately, the author's own understanding of cognitive science is too shallow, and the connection between cognitive science and his successful case studies so tenuous, that one suspects cognitive science is nothing more than window dressing intended to sell services to clients. The third category: principles for successful business management.

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