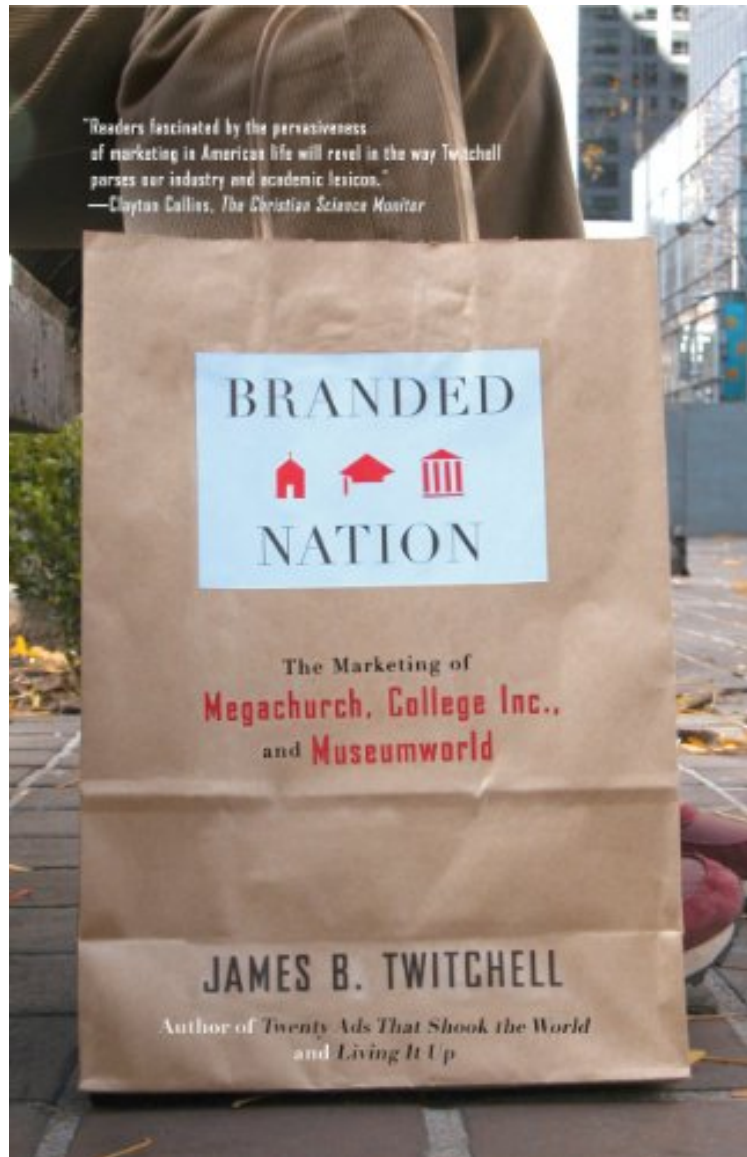


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Branded Nation: The Marketing of Megachurch, College Inc., and Museumworld

James B. Twitchell

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James B. Twitchell : Branded Nation: The Marketing of Megachurch, College Inc., and Museumworld before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Branded Nation: The Marketing of Megachurch, College Inc., and Museumworld:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Consumer Led NationBy rodboomboomThis is insightful work which makes the case for the domination of our country by marketing, making the consumer choice king. The author

uses the three cultural areas of church, college and museum as examples. Being very much close to the church, I can vouch for the pervasiveness of this unbiblical seige. Having a degree and experience in the advertising/marketing corporate world as well as a MDiv. degree and now pastor, I can attest to its dominance now in much of Christianity. It is unbiblical. The Bible does not expound this effective way of moving products and services to consumers. Jesus was not a marketing man. His application of this business philosophy has permeated so much of the rest of the USA culture, here documented in the college and museum world. These are outside of my areas of expertise, so I will refrain from any comment, other than to say that Twitchell's analysis and commentary is both creative, substantive and entertaining. Truth is being replaced by image, and the media is the message! This is truly one to read and contemplate.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. BookBy Sewilletts This book was well written and easy to understand. It was a required reading for my college marketing communication class.

15 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Marketing Where You Least Expected It By Rob Hardy James Twitchell has written extensively on advertising and consumerism, and knows that consumers are not logical. If we were, he says, we would know that we needed, say, a laundry detergent, and would research to see what detergent was best, perhaps checking to see what the boffins at Consumer Reports might recommend. Then we would take the recommendation to the grocery store, where we would see a very restricted number of possible logical choices. It doesn't work that way for detergent, nor, these days, does it work that way for churches, museums, or universities. In Branded Nation: The Marketing of Megachurch, College Inc., and Museumworld (Simon Schuster) Twitchell has written a funny and scary evaluation of the pervasiveness of marketing in American life beyond the grocery shelves. The problem with laundry detergents is that there are plenty of them, offered by many suppliers, and most of them are interchangeable. There is very little difference between them, so it is necessary for the manufacturers to create a story about the brand, how it is "clothesline-fresh", perhaps, or how the power-granules go to work on stains. Twitchell's thesis is that schools, museums, and churches are all supplying pretty much the same thing, and to up their market share, they are telling stories about themselves (branding) and as good consumers, we are going along with them. We think that museums have a higher calling than competing for a market share, that they don't really pay attention to the turnstiles, and that they are "... only the custodians of, shhh, please be quiet, don't touch, the deep truth." However true this may have been in the past, it is no longer. There has been a huge growth in the numbers of museums, the theme of a surplus of goods, though we don't usually view museums that way. The "modern, formal, self-conscious museum" is not what people go to as much as they go to theme exhibits, like "Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the theme is the brand and holds the emotion. For decades there have been more college students than seats in the classroom, so the marketing had to begin. Harvard wouldn't admit as much, but it has a great brand. Twitchell (who is a professor of English at the University of Florida, an institution that does not avoid some withering remarks here) sniffs at the Harvard record, which he says lacks real substance. What's good about Harvard is not what comes out, but what goes in: "the best students, the most money, and the deepest faith in the brand." In churches, the product, epiphany or salvation, is undifferentiated, producing cut-throat competition for the stable forty percent of people who go to church regularly; this number does not go up, so churches are taking customers (sometimes known as parishioners) from one another. Twitchell examines the brand shifts in Protestantism that are the same as when Sam's Club comes to town: warehouse churches, of no particular denomination, on the outside of town with huge parking lots. It is disconcerting and amusing to hear of these important spheres of life described in marketing terms, but Twitchell knows the lingo. All of them, for instance, are LBEs, or Location Based Entertainments. While his evaluations may be controversial, this is no polemic; Twitchell does not find branding bad; other marketing systems are simply antiquated. Brands have become motivators, "the basis not just of interactions but of interior actions." He thinks that identification with brands may be the way we will continue to spread common knowledge and beliefs, and that it thus may be the foundation of community. States are practicing branding (for instance, in advertising as vacation destinations), and countries are, too. Twitchell quotes a CEO who is looking at the big picture: "What makes us good at selling soap can help us sell America." Perhaps so, but even Twitchell speculates that the story of America, which could be best summarized as "complexity" may at this time be overwhelmed by the perceived story of "an arrogant rogue."

Branding, says James Twitchell, is nothing more than commercial storytelling; brands are the stories that are associated with products. (For example, the special taste of Evian, says Twitchell, is in the brand, not the water.) Branding has become so successful, so ubiquitous that even institutions that we thought were above branding, antithetical to branding, have succumbed. Such cultural institutions as religion, higher education, and the art world have learned to love Madison Avenue or lose market share. Of course, most ministers, university presidents, and museum directors will insist that branding has nothing to do with them, but as Twitchell brilliantly demonstrates in this witty, insightful examination of three of our most important cultural institutions, wherever supply exceeds demand branding follows. The rise of the megachurch epitomizes branding in religion. From its inception the megachurch was designed not to compete with other churches but to bring in the "unchurched," especially men, worshippers who might otherwise be home watching television or strolling through the mall on a Sunday morning. The megachurches have

been phenomenally popular, none more so than Willow Creek Community Church, just south of Chicago, one of the oldest megachurches, which Twitchell analyzes in *Branded Nation*. Colleges and universities have embraced branding as they have grown more alike. Especially among the top schools in the country, the student bodies, the faculties, often even the campuses themselves are practically interchangeable. What distinguishes each school is the story it tells about itself. Now every institution of higher learning has its image organizers, its brand managers, usually in the admissions or development offices, whose job it is to make their institution seem different from all the rest. Even museums, with their multimillion-dollar Monets, have seen the advantages of branding. The blockbuster exhibitions often put familiar paintings in a new context, that is, they provide a new narrative, branding the art. Museums keep expanding their stores, placing them not just near the entrance on the ground floor but throughout the museum, in the galleries themselves. Some museums, such as the Guggenheim, even franchise themselves, turning the institution itself into a brand. In short, high culture is beginning to look more and more like the rest of our culture. In perhaps his most subversive observation, Twitchell doesn't condemn the branding of cultural institutions. On the contrary, he believes that branding may be invigorating our high culture, bringing it to new audiences, making it a more integral part of our lives. Not since *Bobos in Paradise* has there been such a trenchant, provocative analysis of our world.

From *Publishers Weekly* Twitchell (*Lead Us into Temptation*) has made a name for himself explaining how market forces of consumerism have shaped all of American culture, but here he focuses on three key locations: the church, the university and the museum. He begins by boiling down the mystique of brand identity to a sort of "commercialized gossip," a collection of stories that companies tell customers about their products in order to make them distinguishable from one another. Some brands do such a good job of holding our attention that they become cultural icons in their own right, so it should come as no surprise that our highest cultural institutions use the same techniques to assert themselves, especially when millions of dollars are at stake. Twitchell breezily guides readers through churches the size of community colleges and museums filled with Harley motorcycles and Armani wardrobes, showing how the gatekeepers are working the crowds like Barnum to draw in even greater audiences. Twitchell's prose never degenerates into mere crankiness, and he draws out even the most erudite points with casual ease and good humor. His own secure brand identity will ensure the support of regular readers, while his ease of entry can do much to increase his customer base. Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From *Bookmarks Magazine* Twitchell's basic premise—that organizations live and die based on brand recognition—isn't new. In recent years, publishers have churned out dozens of marketing books trumpeting the importance of brand recognition. What sets *Branded Nation* apart is Twitchell's richly detailed examination of how religious, educational, and cultural institutions are jumping on the branding bandwagon. Twitchell, a University of Florida professor and the author of previous books on advertising and culture, takes a couple of lumps from critics who found some parts of his newest work reductive or incomplete. But overall, Twitchell's persuasive arguments and enviable story-telling ability make *Branded Nation* an enjoyable and enlightening read. Copyright copy; 2004 Phillips Nelson Media, Inc.

From *Booklist* Twitchell, professor of English at the University of Florida (Gainesville) and the author of several books on culture and advertising, shows how branding and marketing have infiltrated American culture. Churches, universities, and museums now must use the power of advertising merely to survive. A new breed of megachurches, exemplified by Willow Creek Community Church, located 30 miles northwest of Chicago, treats parishioners as consumers. The 4,540-seat auditorium resembles a Cineplex theater, with a sound system rivaling a rock concert's venue. The sermon is Christianity Lite, and you can pick up a copy on CD on your way to the food court. Our universities and museums, too, are catering more to popular tastes to draw in the paying public. Curricula have become less diverse to appear more mainstream, it is getting easier to get into all but a handful of Ivy League schools, and museums are displaying motorcycles along with Monets. Twitchell is not overcritical of this trend, yet he makes us aware that the merchants have entered the temples and there is no turning back. David Siegfried Copyright copy; American Library Association. All rights reserved