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Meet the MasterMinds: Seven Questions for Seth Godin

"Take Leo Burnett, David Ogilvy, Bill Bernbach and Mark Twain. Combine their brains and shave their heads. What's left? Seth Godin." – Jay Levinson, author of *Guerrilla Marketing*

Seth Godin changed the language and business of marketing with his best-selling books, [Permission Marketing](#), [Unleashing the IdeaVirus](#) and [Survival is Not Enough](#). In his latest manifesto for marketers, [The Purple Cow](#), Godin shows why traditional marketing techniques are failing miserably in today's over-hyped world. Godin's answer: put a Purple Cow into everything you build and do.

MCNews: What is a Purple Cow?

Godin: *Purple Cow* is about the inexorable decline in the effectiveness of advertising and what to do about it. In essence, the ability of companies, consultants, service businesses and others to win by constantly interrupting prospects is over. It's being replaced by a focus on the remarkable.

When we have everything we need (and for the most part, we do), then it's about buying things we want. And if the services and products being offered are essentially invisible, we walk away. Remarkable products are worth talking about.

MCNews: What is your opinion on the state of marketing among professional service firms, such as consultants?

Godin: Professional service marketing is certainly among the "safest" I've ever seen. Because it appears to take no risks, it's actually quite risky. When every accounting firm runs ads that are interchangeable, then all are invisible, all are ineffective, and all fail. Without the guts to do marketing that works (and more important, to develop products that work!) then all of these firms are doomed to be sellers of commodities.

MCNews: Are there service companies that you think are great marketers?

Godin: I love the way RotoRooter uses the Yellow Pages to talk to people who really care about their service and to completely dominate that medium. I also believe that Chubb Insurance has wired word-of-mouth in their favor by targeting the wealthy. This audience is far more likely to talk to one another about insurance, and Chubb's track record of not hassling claimants makes them remarkable and easy to talk about.

On the other hand, I could list a thousand law firms, accountants and other professionals who are wasting every single penny they spend on advertising. They need to stop spending that money and invest it in a remarkable service instead.

MCNews: How can consultants get started in the attempt to find their Purple Cow?

Godin: It starts by acknowledging that it's **not** about the advertising. It's about the product you create and the way you deliver it. When H&R Block started offering refunds in advance, that was remarkable.

I met an out of work project manager the other day. We brainstormed about her job search—Boston isn't hiring many tech project managers these days. We discovered that she had a specialty in getting products out the door—especially late ones. Hence, a Purple Cow: She has now revamped what she's selling. She does "Emergency Project Management" and only takes engagements of thirty days or less for projects that are more than three months late. She's charges three times as much, but works like a maniac when she's on.

MCNews: Some think that a firm can gain a leading market position using the best practices of others. Do you believe that is a viable strategy?

Godin: I believe that's a commodity strategy. That's the very least you can do to stay competitive. The only way to grow, however, is to do something people **aren't** doing.

Look, there are only three kinds of people in the world:

--People who don't need what you sell

--People who need what you sell but are already buying that from a competitor

--People who are ignoring you

The only way to capture the attention of people from either of the last two groups is to offer something so remarkable that they, a. hear about it from their colleagues and, b. realize that they can't live without it.

MCNews: If a consultant were about to re-tool a services and marketing program, what one thing would you suggest he/she do?

Godin: Retool the **services** first. Then, the marketing will take care of itself!

MCNews: What's on your current reading list?

Godin: Right now, I'm reading about eleven books at the same time, including two books on networks in nature (did you know that fireflies in the wild flash in synch?), a book about sharpening hand tools, *Kavalier and Klay*, Guy Kawasaki's new book in progress and I'm rereading *Crossing the Chasm* for the fourth time.

MCNews: Thanks for your time.

You can find out more about Seth Godin at www.sethgodin.com.