



Retail Voodoo  
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## **An Interview with David Lemley, author of *Beloved & Dominant Brands***

### **1. What is it about you/the book that sets it apart from other branding books?**

I've spent years helping to build brands that better-for-you consumers actively crave with their mind, body, and soul. My process has helped many brands including, REI, Starbucks, Sur La Table, and Nike become the beloved and dominant brands they are today. After working on over 300 brands, I had an a-ha moment that refocused my energy on helping those brands believe and understand that business can be a force for good by disrupting the broken food and beverage systems, and improving people's access to clean ingredients, wellness, and fitness.

The book is broken into seven chapters that cover the Retail Voodoo Brand Ecosystem model — it's a pyramid that includes all the external facing components of a marketing strategy. The theory is stunningly simple: Everything needs to be in balance or your marketing will not drive performance and create preference. The book helps brand owners, investors, and marketers audit their brands to identify any areas that are incomplete or unbalanced. That's where you should focus your attention. That's where you find opportunity.

### **2. How do you define what a “Better-for-You” (BFY) brand is?**

A BFY brand consists of 3 things:

- A belief that there is a better way (i.e. clean ingredients, sustainable farming, transparent supply chain, fair trade, etc.)
- A do-gooder spirit, knowing why they exist beyond merely making a product for a profit -- they have a cause.
- Concern for their employees and consumers, providing ways for them to belong to the brand and evangelize on its behalf.

### **3. Why did you choose this topic to write about?**

The BFY category is being flooded with opportunity, and a lot of that is happening through acquisition. Many of the investors entering this space have experience in tech, but not in food, beverage, beauty, or consumer products. So, one of the primary reasons I decided to write this book now is to give brand founder/owners, executive leadership, and investors some common language that would transition their thinking from emphasizing tactics to harnessing the power that comes when brand strategy integrates with big-picture business strategy. The book helps marketers win devoted consumers, build stronger retail partnerships, and achieve bulletproof dominance in their category.



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#### **4. How can you tell when a BFY brand is about to go from one of a kind to one of many?**

When companies come to us seeking help, it's often because they're stuck in neutral. Their innovative initial product hooked fans, but then that popularity led to trouble as retailers and other companies introduced cheap knockoffs. BFY brand owners and marketers (and their investors) want to return to glory — what we've dubbed "Beloved & Dominant" status — as category leaders with an army of passionate fans.

#### **5. What are some of the toughest problems you've had to solve in this space?**

- Differentiating product-driven brands in crowded categories.
- Future-proofing beloved brands while their category is being disrupted by innovation and changing consumer preferences.
- Restoring sagging brands by creating a strategy to increase long-term relevance and grow market share.

#### **6. What are the biggest changes in retail that have impacted BFY brands?**

Meaningful differentiation beyond features and benefits is tricky because BFY (often called natural and organic) has moved from being something exclusive that a consumer had to seek out at specialty retailers to mainstream. Need proof? Costco and Walmart are now the biggest purchasers of better-for-you products. As a result everyone is getting in on the game. Entrepreneurs and investors are looking at shorter development cycles, seeking to achieve scale and velocity as quickly as possible.

The recent shift of omni-channel and direct-to-consumer from "add-on strategies" to central and essential to growing brand relevance (and sales), has retail buyers today facing immense pressure to find products and brands that will achieve velocity and provide the retailer with good margins. And, they need the brands that actually want to be on their shelves (whether physical or virtual) and be able to explain who their consumer is, why it should matter to that retailer, how the brand intends to create awareness and interest, and what the brand intends to do to keep up with the ever-changing preferences of modern consumers.

#### **7. You discuss conducting a competitive audit as a first step. How does the audit you describe differ from what many other brands are doing today?**

The book contains several case studies and insights about how to achieve meaningful results from auditing your brand's category. It also includes unexpected questions intended to get the brand owner, investor, executive leadership and marketing teams to widen their personal lens and consider the needs, wants, and ambitions of all of the other stakeholders, the retailer's requirements and plans, and, of course, the consumer.



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Early feedback indicates that reading the book makes brand owners, executives, and investors become introspective about their business, and then ask new questions about what's possible with their business. (This is really satisfying to hear. I was so intentional about crafting the chapters to push the reader to think not just about their brand's what but its why, not just their business's now but its future.)

## **8. Tell me about the role of story is in building a successful BFY brand.**

Storytelling is the means of connecting the brand strategy with the target audience. You don't have a story if you don't understand the mind, body, and heart of the brand. And you don't have a story if you don't know whom you're telling it to.

Stories convey our culture, history, and values, and provide a means for people to unite. That's essential for BFY brands seeking traction among a group of die-hard believers.

I've said it for a long time: When crafted with care, humility, transparency, sustainability, and believability, brands are the new religion. But there has to be a story that engages and invites people to participate and belong — otherwise it's just a sales pitch. Storytelling is not about selling; it's about enrolling.

## **9. What are the biggest mistakes BFY brands make that prevent them from achieving beloved & dominant status?**

- Making a set of strategic assumptions about their marketing, audience, category, competitors, and retailer relationships – and calling it brand strategy.

- Believe that their business will continue to be successful simply because it makes products that meet well-defined needs of consumers. If you're successful, competitors will flood the market with lookalike products that make all the same claims ... and in many cases, the retailers they have worked so hard to bring along, will create private label versions and force price pressure.

- Belief that taste, function, features, and benefits make them better in and of themselves. This is the classic cause for moving from dominant by default to one of many (i.e. if your flavor, formula or ingredient is hot, it will be knocked off).

## **10. What trends are you seeing today that may change the way consumers look at BFY brands?**

Mainstream acceptance of better-for-you brands across conventional grocery and multi-unit outlets -- Walmart and Costco are the biggest sellers of natural and organic products. As a result, more people are exposed to the benefits of better-for-you offerings and the stigmas perpetuated by resistant non-believers are evaporating before brand owners' eyes. More



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and more multinationals will step into the category through acquisition of better-for-you industry darling brands, or by creating new, or elevating their flagship offerings. Need proof? Organic Cheetos.

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