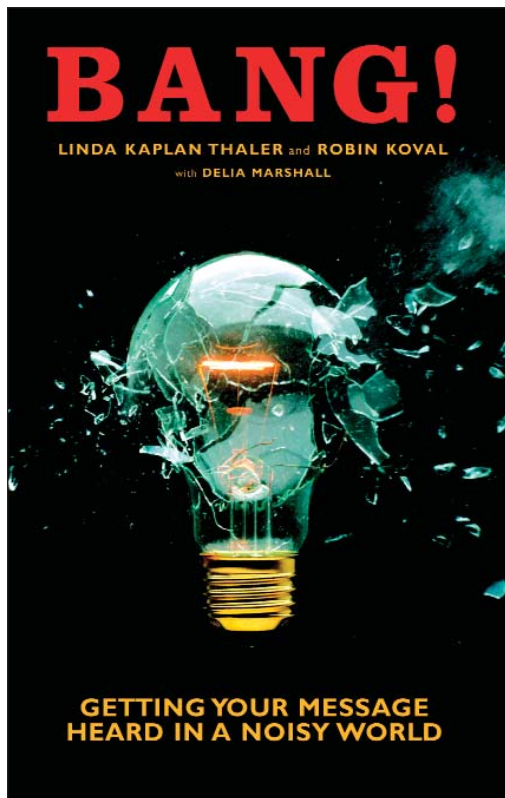


BOOKS



Bang! With Little Fizzle



Bang!: Getting Your Message Heard in a Noisy World

By Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval
Reviewed by Josephine Rossi

In my line of work, I see a lot of books. Colleagues often poke their heads into my office and joke about the growing stacks of new releases encircling my desk like a fort. Topics vary: management for dummies, how to argue with your boss, training with magic. If you can think of it, I guarantee that someone wrote a book about it. And chances are it's lurking here in my office.

Selecting a title each month for review isn't always easy. Sometimes, an industry guru or a famous CEO comes out with a publication and the decision is a no-brainer. Other times, I'm forced to make an educated guess at what will

become the next *Harry Potter* of the business world. Those books that don't make the grade are condemned to the bottom rung of my shelf, then later are transported to the depths of the ASTD library to finish out their sentence.

That fate was exactly what I had planned for Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval's new book, *Bang!: Getting Your Message Heard in a Noisy World*. My instinct to be the book's judge, jury, and executioner kicked in as soon as I read the cover flap. I think my initial reaction was, "No way, not another book about 'thinking outside the box.' Straight to the bookshelf with you!"

If This, Then....

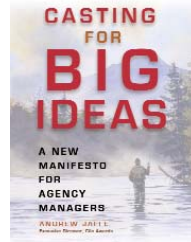
If you liked *Bang!* (see review), you might like these releases about advertising and marketing.

Casting for Big Ideas:

A New Manifesto for Agency Managers

By Andrew Jaffe

(John Wiley & Sons, 2003, US\$29.95)



Managing a successful advertising agency is a challenge, and connecting with customers difficult. Jaffe discusses balancing creativity and financial feasibility, revamping media planning, and refocusing account management.

The Future of Advertising: New Media, New Clients, New Consumers in the Post-Television Age

By Joe Cappo

(McGraw Hill Trade, 2003, \$24.95)

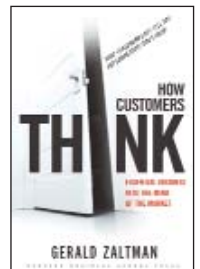
Cappo takes an in-depth look at the advertising industry and its future. He discusses advertising's relationship with television and outlines strategies for running a profitable business.

How Customers Think: Essential Insights Into the Mind of the Market

By Gerald Zaltman

(Harvard Business School Press, 2003, \$29.95)

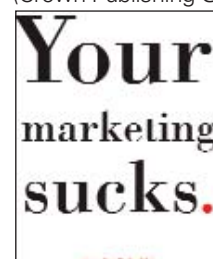
Ninety-five percent of the thoughts that influence our purchasing habits occur beyond our awareness. Zaltman introduces scientific techniques that help expose information hidden inside consumers' minds.



Your Marketing Sucks

By Mark Stevens

(Crown Publishing Group, 2003, \$24)



Either your marketing delivers return-on-investment, or "it sucks." Stevens explains how to become an Extreme Marketer and get a positive ROI.

Fortunately, after a barrage of press releases and media mentions, my democratic side took over, and I decided to give the book a deeper look. What I found is an amusing and richly illustrated account of how a small advertising firm landed and delivered various recognizable marketing campaigns. And while the authors advocate a familiar break-all-the-rules approach to getting your message across, they do so by illuminating the opportunities and pitfalls of common thinking and management styles.

A professor once told me that the key to compelling prose is to *show*, not *tell*. That concept is sorely lacking in many business-related publications. They fail to demonstrate the depth of their ideas because they bombard the reader with bulletted text and stiff advice. That instructional quality also tends to make those books a bit verbose and boring. *Bang!*, however, is anything but dull. It's an entertaining romp, teeming with anecdotes about the Kaplan Thaler Group's rise to become the fastest-growing advertising company in the United States. Some of the stories are about the agency's fledgling days, struggling with small corporate budgets and an even smaller office space. But the authors wisely weave in the trials and errors of other organizations, basically eliminating the over-the-top, schoolgirl bragging potential that this success story obviously has.

Thaler and Koval's presentation of the Big Bang theory—that "started out as an idea and rapidly went on to take over the cultural universe"—is neatly constructed and doesn't come off as preachy or condescending. Managers and staff alike can benefit from the sage advice of these two advertising darlings. Moreover, their innovative suggestions speak to any professional in dire need of a competitive, creative edge. They incorporate ideas from bestselling authors, researchers, and even psychologists to drive their points home. What's better is that these women openly state that you

have to know the rules in order to break them. That means that you still have to do your homework; there's no Cliffs Notes version of hard work.

I was extremely pleased to read some of the women's comments concerning work environment and management styles. Among their suggestions are to reward employees for a job well done, not just for a promotion, and to have a small, open office set up so that ideas can percolate with interaction. But my favorite proposal is to foster a work environment that allows for mistakes and bad ideas. When workers know it's OK to mess up, they're more willing to take creative risks. That's how KTG came up with Clairol's risqué "Totally Organic Experience" for its Herbal Essences product line.

The only minor complaint I have about the book is in its style. Thaler, a sort of narrator, describes most of the accounts in a conversational tone. She often interjects her own humorous details and diction into the text. While that indeed gives the book its intended fun, casual feel, the stereotypical hip New Yorker bit becomes a little trite and sometimes jarring after a few chapters. I doubt that it will surprise readers to find out that these women work in Manhattan, Mecca of the advertising industry. Nor is it a shock that they have notable and influential friends. There's no need to lambaste readers with inside references and jokes about the city and its residents.

I give *Bang!* three and three-quarter coffee cups for its concepts and entertainment value. It's a fun read that teaches something about getting noticed.

Bang!: Getting Your Message Heard in a Noisy World, by Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval. Currency Books: New York. 235 pp. US\$24.95

Circle 290 on reader service card.

Josephine Rossi is books & basics editor for T+D; jrrossi@astd.org.