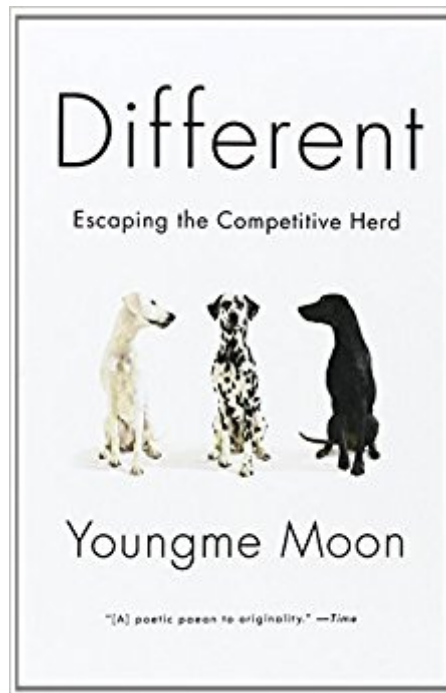




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# **Different: Escaping The Competitive Herd**



## Synopsis

Why trying to be the best *“competing like crazy”* makes you mediocre Every few years a book *through a combination of the author’s unique voice, storytelling ability, wit, and insight* simply breaks the mold. Bill Bryson’s *A Walk in the Woods* is one example. Richard Feynman’s *Surely You’re Joking, Mr. Feynman!* is another. Now comes Youngme Moon’s *Different*, a book for *“people who don’t read business books.”* Actually, it’s more like a personal conversation with a friend who has thought deeply about how the world works and who gets you to see that world in a completely new light. If there is one strain of conventional wisdom pervading every company in every industry, it’s the absolute importance of *“competing like crazy.”* Youngme Moon’s message is simply *“Get off this treadmill that’s taking you nowhere. Going tit for tat and adding features, augmentations, and gimmicks to beat the competition has the perverse result of making you like everyone else.”* *Different* provides a highly original perspective on what it means to offer something that is meaningfully different *different in a manner that is both fundamental and comprehensive.* Youngme Moon identifies the outliers, the mavericks, the iconoclasts *the players who have thoughtfully rejected orthodoxy in favor of an approach that is more adventurous.* Some are even *“hostile,”* almost daring you to buy what they are selling. The MINI Cooper was launched with fearless abandon: *“Worried that this car is too small? Look here. It’s even smaller than you think.”* These are players that strike a genuine chord with even the most jaded consumers. In fact, almost every success story of the past two decades has been an exception to the rule. Simply go to your computer and compare AOL and Yahoo! with Google. The former pile on feature upon feature to their home pages, while Google is like an austere boutique, dominating a category filled with *“extras.”* *Different* shows how to succeed in a world where conformity reigns *but exceptions rule.* From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“...to give a bullet-point summation of takeaways is to deny the real value of this lovely book.”—Harvard Business Review From the Hardcover edition.

Youngme Moon is the Donald K. David Professor at Harvard Business School. One of HBS's most popular teachers, Dr. Moon has received the Student Association Faculty Award for teaching excellence on multiple occasions. Dr. Moon's research focuses on innovative consumer-marketing strategies and her work has been published widely, including in Harvard Business Review. From the Hardcover edition.

Youngme explores what makes brand boring and what makes them inspirational in this book about breaking away from your competition. She highlights 3 brand types that achieve this called: 1. Reverse brands- like when Google put out a homepage devoid of the million things AOL and Yahoo! had 2. Breakaway brands- when Sony branded AIBO not as a robot but a pet and reframed how we thought of the product 3. Hostile brands- Like the Mini Cooper which focused on how much smaller it was than you thought when it came to North America which was big car focused She says that most brands are actually a bit of all of these and that these aren't the only categories brands could fit in to either. The big takeaways are that you shouldn't get caught up in just expanding your services (the augmentation trap in her words) and that you need to stop and think about how you can run against the trends to stand out. Is this worth your read? If you're looking for a bunch of practical advice and workshop material to break your brand away then no. If you're looking for a mostly interesting discussion on branding and a look at some interesting brands then yes it's worth a read.

True to its thesis, this is somewhat of a hostile, breakaway take on the typical marketing book. The narrative approach is not for everyone, but for this reader, it worked: no overly-simplified bulleted

lists and platitudes and shallow solutions that border on self-help like so many business best sellers, but more of a conversation that meanders, dips unabashedly into personal anecdotes, and in this view accumulates more substance as a result of that approach. Topic is breakaway, reductive, and hostile brands, and what "differentiation" really means in product marketing, why most consumer product categories show no meaningful differentiation, and how most products tend to be slaves to adding features and multiplying product offerings which historically leads only to mediocrity and blurry consumer overload. One quibble: The examples are good but they're also (mostly, one exception being a Japanese reference) obvious business school case study fare, and they feel somewhat dated; would love an update, and would enjoy hearing more from this author's compelling, modestly insightful voice.

Youngmee Moon's "Different" was an easy and educational read. PROS: Not too robotic (flows as in conversation) yet structured enough, a lot of examples to bring her points to life CONS: In all honesty, there isn't that much content in the book other than what the cover says - "Escaping the competitive herd". She talks about "heterogeneous homogeneity" where proliferation of category "differentiation" has resulted in sameness and gives Laundry detergent as an example. (Tide regular, Tide with bleach, Tide this, Tide that - product expansion by addition/multiplication) That's really about it. Other chapters sort of beat this dead horse over and over in slightly different ways, but doesn't add additional insight. To be honest, the discipline of marketing is case-by-case business and cannot be taught in a classroom or a book in my opinion - so I do give kudos to Prof. Moon for trying to make this book as entertaining and not so generic as much as possible. People new to marketing/branding might find this still a great read, but ppl with marketing experience/business education may find this shallow.

"There is a homogenous nature in competition and the need to set your brand apart. This book describes differentiation through reverse positioned branding, breaking away branding, or hostile branding to separate and distinguish a business entity from its competition. Providing live communications to your customers not only disrupts the brand category but also provides value." - Graduate student comment. Different was used as a required text in the graduate Design Management program at the Shintaro Akatsu School of Design at the University of Bridgeport.

Should have been a ten page paper. The messages are not breakthrough or new. I also did not

appreciate the author's concentrated efforts of using fancy word (where better fitting alternates were widely available) and the more than occasional HBS name dropping. We KNOW you teach at HBS, we don't need to be reminded needlessly. The detail on referred cases (at the end of the book) adds one star to otherwise one-star book. In summary: A few good approaches, but not enough material to make those into a book

The ideas in this book have shifted the way I think about brands. The observations are at once stunningly obvious and completely surprising. And perhaps most striking of all is that the writing itself is fresh, unusual and a downright pleasure to read. Throughout the several hours I spent reading this, I found myself alternately dropping my jaw in surprise, nodding my head in agreement, and grinning with pleasure. This should be required reading for all business leaders who perceive their businesses - or wish to make their businesses - as "different."

This is the classic over-stretching of a HBR article to sell books. The book can be summarized in "there are three categories of approaches to develop brands that are different... But there could be more."

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