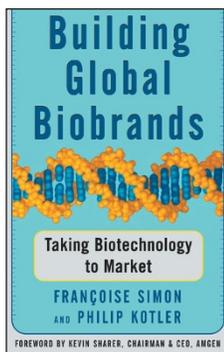


How to sell an industry

**Building Global Biobrand:
Taking Biotechnology to Market**

by Françoise Simon and Philip Kotler

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Reviewed by Donna Murray

Biotechnology and marketing are both enormously complex areas, and a book that attempts to combine both topics is never going to be an easy read. However, authors Françoise Simon and Philip Kotler have used their extensive experience to produce a book on biotech marketing that is both interesting and informative. Although the text does not shy away from topics such as nanotechnology and genetic engineering, the reader does not necessarily have to be familiar with the subjects to understand the issues discussed. A comprehensive glossary is included, which is invaluable for unfamiliar terms used in the text.

Simon and Kotler state in their preface that they have focused primarily on the biopharmaceutical sector, and the book is indeed heavily biased toward biotechnology in the health-care industry. However, they argue that their findings are relevant to all industries involved with biotech, and it would seem possible to take their findings and apply them to marketing in other areas, such as genetically modified crops.

The text covers a wide range of topics and marketing techniques, from alliances to consumer communications, and uses industry case studies to illustrate how companies responded—with varying degrees of success—to particular situations. The authors have obviously had a high level of access to the companies involved, and the case studies provide valuable insight into how companies behave and manage issues.

The book is divided into three parts. Part one looks at the current state of biotechnology and at innovations, including bioinformatics, that are driving this sector forward. Part two looks at how market identity for biotech products can be built and maintained. Finally, part three looks at some of the challenges facing the biotech industry.

Simon and Kotler state that biotechnology will be driven by the need to feed, clothe and shelter an ever-increasing world population. However, on reading the book, the overwhelming message seems to be one of profit, and it is perhaps naive to overlook the fact that the vast majority of the world's population cannot pay for the things they need. The book raises the interesting question of whether biotech companies are so altruistic that they will undertake programs to feed, clothe and

provide medicine for billions of people for little or no profit. From the evidence presented, there appears little to justify such a claim with regard to health issues. For example, although some companies offer their treatments free to low-income patients, most do not. The authors also indicate that companies are resistant to measures that would allow patients in poorer countries access to life-saving drugs and therapies. The recent debate over genetically modified (GM) food in the United Kingdom indicates that there is a high level of mistrust among the public about whether multinationals have the will to deliver the benefits of biotechnology to developing countries.

As well as a thorough analysis of biopharma, the authors offer a very succinct analysis of why the first wave of GM organisms were widely rejected by consumers. They indicate that these products were seen as being 'all risk, no benefit' and that the companies involved simply did not give enough consideration to the public acceptance problem caused by this perception. Having worked in biotech community education projects, I saw this problem with the first generation, and it has caused second-generation crops to start out with an extremely poor public image. Initial GM traits in crops were seen as being purely for the benefit of the producers, yet the companies involved seemed to expect consumers to accept them with no problems. In addition, the beneficial aspects of the crops (for example, the reduction in the use of herbicides with herbicide-resistant crops) were never made clear to the public.

When consumers see a clear benefit, there is evidence that their attitudes are less hostile. The first GM food in the UK was a tomato puree made from GM tomatoes that ripen more slowly. This resulted in a lower price, due to reduced wastage, and increased flavor. Sales of the product were good; however, it was pulled from supermarket shelves in 1999 as a result of the adverse publicity around other GM crops. Overcoming the public mistrust that has built up as a result of the mishandling of the first generation of GM crops will not be an easy task.

Simon and Kotler obviously know that they are covering a huge topic, and that many readers will find it difficult to follow some of the findings they mention. Therefore, key points are repeated where relevant in different chapters. Given that the book focuses so much on biopharma, this is important if your interests are in other areas of biotech, as you will have to apply the findings to your own area of interest. This would seem to be the book's most obvious failing. It would have been interesting to read more about the authors' views on how their findings apply to non-pharma biotech.

I was frequently intrigued by some of the technologies the authors claim are already being researched or are on their way to market. The technologies discussed range from genetically engineered spiders producing nonsticky silk—up to ten times as strong as steel—to the latest health-care developments. Such information makes the book interesting and relevant for nonspecialists. At other points, the book focuses so heavily on the US medical system that one's interest level can wane, making those chapters drag.

Finally, the book opens with a clichéd paragraph about family life in the future. This is in no way an indication of the quality of the work. I will definitely be recommending this book to young biotech companies as a reference manual. Many MBA students who have an undergraduate science degree will also benefit from such a specialist marketing book. 

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