

Executive Book Summaries®

Earn It

Unconventional Strategies for Brave Marketers

by **Steve Pratt**



Contents

Chapter 1: Earn Attention. Do the Work and Reap the Rewards

Page 2

Chapter 2: Do the Opposite. The Mindset of Earning Attention

Page 3

Chapter 3: Opposite Strategy. Balance The Job and The Gift

Page 4

Chapter 4: Opposite Creation. Blow Their Minds

Page 5

Chapter 5: Opposite Marketing. Build Audiences for Your Content

Page 6

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

How can marketers and brands genuinely capture consumer attention in a world where audiences are constantly bombarded with content and traditional ads often repel more than they attract? The key is to move beyond the disruptive advertising model and start building real trust and connections with the audience.

In *Earn It: Unconventional Strategies for Brave Marketers*, author Steve Pratt argues that attention must be earned, not hijacked. Drawing on his experience as co-founder of branded podcast agency Pacific Content, Pratt explains how brands can create content people want to engage with, content where value and trust are central, instead of offering only gimmicks and noise. In a marketing environment obsessed with shortcuts, Pratt challenges professionals to embrace creativity, generosity, and commitment when they engage with their audience.

Earn It is for marketers who want their work to be welcome and appreciated, not ignored or blocked. It's a guide to marketing that respects the audience, builds loyalty, and delivers long-term results.

IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY:

- Learn why unique, creative work stands out in a sea of sameness.
- Teach professionals how to stop using interruptive ads and instead start engaging through value-driven content.
- How to avoid the pitfalls of mediocrity by committing to bold, audience-first strategies.
- How brands can balance business goals with genuine audience benefits.

Chapter 1: Earn Attention. Do the Work and Reap the Rewards

This book is your guide to a better way of marketing. This is your path to getting oodles of attention from exactly the people you seek to reach. This is also a challenge: you have to earn it! Earn the attention by resisting the urge to interrupt your audience with annoyances. Earn it by instead choosing to blow their minds. Earn it by thinking differently.

A Guide to Using This Book

Almost everything in this book embraces unconventional approaches and doing the exact opposite of the status quo.

Embracing the strategies discussed here will change the way your customers see your brand and business. And applied well, these strategies will allow you and your teams to do the best, most creative, and most fulfilling marketing, communications, and creative work of your life.

THE PREMISE: The World's Most Valuable Commodity Is Attention

Everyone in content and marketing wants attention. With so many options and having been hoodwinked one too many times, consumers don't just give their attention away to anybody.

The problem is that most of us don't know how to earn it.

In the context of earning attention, the best and most desired outcome is to build trust and create relationships.

The Earning Attention Framework

Unusual, differentiated thinking and solutions are at the heart of almost all content and creativity that earns attention.

Copying what's popular is boring. Being safe, generic, or corporate is boring. Talking about yourself, your company, or your products and services is boring. And boring earns zero attention. If you want to earn attention, embrace a philosophy of Doing the Opposite.

The "Do the Opposite" Framework

There are four stages in the process of successfully earning attention:

1. Mindset: you need to approach every aspect of your work through a filter of earning attention and Doing the Opposite.
2. Strategy: you need to craft a plan that is uniquely

yours, achieves a business result, and is highly valued by your audience.

3. Creation: you need to produce differentiated, memorable content.
4. Audience Development: you need to efficiently and effectively let your intended audience know about what you've created and measure how much they enjoy it.

KEY CONCEPT: There Is No Easy Way

When it comes to attention, trust, and relationships, there are no shortcuts. You have to earn it.

In his book *The Puzzler*, A.J. Jacobs dives into the mystery of why so many people around the world love solving puzzles. A famed puzzle maker explains the magic of puzzles in three characters:

? → !

The problem is represented by the question mark. The process of solving the problem is represented by the arrow. And the eureka moment of solving the puzzle is represented by the exclamation mark.

The arrow—the process—is where the magic happens.

KEY CONCEPT: Balancing The Job and The Gift

A Venn diagram where The Job/The Business Outcome partially overlaps with The Gift/For the Audience is an ideal visual representation of what we are hoping to create when we want to earn attention.

KEY CONCEPT: Attention Drives Results

Consider the customer journey when a marketer starts with the mentality of earning attention instead of stealing, interrupting, buying, or capturing it.

- Earning attention creates value
- Consistent value creates trust
- Trust creates relationships
- Relationships create customers and purchasing decisions

People buy from people and companies they know. People get to know and like people and companies if they trust them. And people begin to trust other people and companies when they consistently and proactively create value for others.

“Creative Bravery” is the term used to describe whether you as a brand or content creator are willing to make a real show.

KEY CONCEPT: The Graph

In the early days of Pacific Content, my cofounders—Jenny Ouano, Chris Boyce, and Rob Leadley—and I were trying to come up with an easy way to demonstrate a repeatable path to successful content from brands.

In a burst of inspiration, Rob, our CFO, drew a basic XY graph on the whiteboard and put “Creative Bravery” on the x-axis and “Commitment” on the y-axis. Instantly, we had a clear, memorable recipe for content success.

KEY CONCEPT: Creative Bravery

“Creative Bravery” is the term used to describe whether you as a brand or content creator are willing to make a real show. A show is something great and worthy of attention. A show is designed, produced, and edited. It is differentiated and intended to be magical for a very particular group of people. Shows are pieces of content that don’t feel like marketing because they are phenomenal, engaging experiences.

KEY CONCEPT: Commitment

Commitment is about whether or not you are willing to tell the right people that your mind-blowing, Creatively Brave content exists.

Note that you need both elements of The Graph together: you need Creative Bravery to blow their minds, and you need serious Commitment to market it and put it in front of exactly the right people in exactly the right places in exactly the right ways at exactly the right times.

KEY CONCEPT: The Bar Is Very High

The attention you’re hoping to earn comes from an audience. And if you’re not spending a lot of time thinking and learning about your audience, you’re not going to earn much attention.

The way to build an audience is also an unpleasant truth: you have to make something truly valuable. And too many of us are happy to sign off on “good enough.” “Good enough” won’t cut it if you want to earn attention. In a sea of “good

enough,” the few who are willing to be Creatively Brave and make something remarkable are the ones who earn attention.

KEY CONCEPT: Fun Matters

To earn attention, you most often need to tell stories. You need to be creative. You need to create a format that is differentiated from your competition. And depending on the format, you need to have fun while you’re making the show, because the fun factor is tangible and transferrable for audiences. Audiences like fun.

Chapter 2: Do the Opposite. The Mindset of Earning Attention

We can’t just launch into building strategy and making better marketing without getting in the right mindset. If we are going to do something different, we have to deeply understand what’s wrong with the status quo and truly believe there are better options. There are better ways to impact audiences than by interrupting them with things they don’t want or like.

The Better Way

There are progressive, innovative companies that have already realized the opportunity in front of them and decided to Do the Opposite. These companies are all making content that is as good as or better than anything coming out of traditional media companies.

They are earning huge amounts of time and attention by making awesome stuff. You can do the same. It’s time to think differently and, instead of the status quo, Do the Opposite.

Opposite Action Marketing

In marketing, what are some of the core selfish instincts? And what would Doing the Opposite look like?

- Selfishness becomes generosity.
- Urgency becomes patience.
- Short-term ROI becomes long-term ROI .

- Putting the spotlight on ourselves becomes putting the spotlight on those we seek to impact.
- Hoarding our knowledge and insight becomes giving away all our knowledge and insight for the greater good.
- And the most important shift of all: interruption becomes earning attention.

At the core of these opposite marketing actions is the creation of value for the people we are seeking to impact.

The Audience Comes First

The business model for media is to create and distribute content to attract large audiences. The product of media isn't content, it's the audience. When we think about Do the Opposite for marketing, we can take a page from media companies: put the audience first. Get to know your audience. Create content for them that they truly value. Surprise them with your generosity. Shock them with the quality of your content. To put the audience first, you have to think like an audience member.

Like versus Love

Making something that's going to blow the minds of your audience and that they're really going to love is a lot more powerful than making a thing that people kind of like.

There's a caveat, though. You can't be unexpectedly awesome and blow their minds just once.

If you want to earn attention consistently, if you want to earn trust, and if you want to earn relationships, you have to be awesome over time.

Be a Gift Giver

If there is only one question in this entire book that you answer, make it this one. This is the one to put the most thought and effort into getting right.

What is The Gift for your desired audience that only you can give? What is your Only You Gift?

Let's dissect this because it's incredibly important.

- The Gift: if you want to earn attention, you need to think about your content as a Gift that will be highly valued.
- Your desired audience: It's not a Gift for anyone. It's designed very specifically for the people you want to reach.
- Only You: when you figure out what Only You means, no one can copy you or compete with you. It's authentically you when you're the only one who can give it.

Be the Gift giver. Be generous. Be thoughtful and empathetic. Surprise your recipients with the value you offer.

Chapter 3: Opposite Strategy. Balance The Job and The Gift

You start with a content strategy that is uniquely yours. First, you need to ask some big questions.

- Why are you making content?
- What outcome are you hoping for?
- How will you know if you're successful?

Embrace the Process

There is a strategy for developing strategy:

Problem. Process. Aha!

The process takes time. But the process delivers results.

To this day, I still embrace the multi-day, in-person strategy session model. Not only do you learn a lot, get to dig into all sorts of important decision-making, and have enough time to let ideas gestate and evolve, but you also get to know, work with, and build trust with each other.

So, block off some serious time with your team before you dig into making anything. If you're taking two or three days to craft an amazing content strategy, you want the right people in the room. Who those people are depends on your organization, the scope of the project, and what outcome you're hoping to achieve.

Determining Your Content ROI

Let's start with the reason you're doing this whole thing in the first place: The Job. When customers make a purchasing decision, they are hiring a company's service or product to do a job for them. With that mindset, what is The Job you are hiring this marketing or content to do for you or your company? What is the desired result? What will success look like? A crystal-clear answer to The Job makes it much easier to design an amazing and effective Gift, which is what earns attention.

What Are You Optimizing For?

If you know the answer, you can make a lot of very smart decisions about your content strategy. You can also personalize and differentiate your content, which makes it even more valuable.

When you know what you're optimizing for, you can also

Effective marketing and brand building happens when the messages and content you put out can come from only you. When it's only you, no one can copy you.

explore how to measure the success of your content. So are your current metrics focused on your optimization goal or on common industry measurements that don't apply to your Job? What would an optimization-focused measurement look like for your content or marketing projects?

How to Make Budget Decisions

There is one other important factor to consider before we start to design the Gift to accomplish The Job—your budget. Here are some strategies for how to manage budgetary trade-offs:

- Fewer things better. When in doubt, choose fewer things better. Make less at higher quality.
- Shorter, not longer. When in doubt, make things shorter rather than longer. Leave audiences wanting more.
- Marketing is a must. If you have no money left over for building an audience and marketing your marketing, you need to scale back your content plans.
- Sustainability. Can your budget and resources sustain the production and promotion required to find success?
- The buffer strategy. The buffer strategy basically assumes that something unexpected will always happen and accounts for it by adding buffer to every aspect of production.
- Timelines. Do you have a predetermined timeline from project kickoff to public launch? In my experience, teams consistently underestimate the time required to do a proper launch.

The Gift

Creating a wonderful, magical, valuable Gift is more challenging than identifying The Job. The Gift is partly about you and partly about the audience. The part about you is figuring out who you are and what makes you special. The part about the audience is determining exactly who they are.

When you know who you are and what differentiates you from everyone else, and when you know exactly whose attention you're hoping to earn, you can figure out a Gift that your desired audience values highly and that can only come from you. This will henceforth be known as your Only You Gift.

Differentiate Your Brand and Content

What differentiates you as a company? There may be no more important question to ask and answer, not only for your business overall, but also for your strategy to earn attention. What makes you special? What separates you from your competition? Why do customers choose you instead of anyone else?

Effective marketing and brand building happens when the messages and content you put out can come from only you. When it's only you, no one can copy you. Potential customers know who you are relative to others and what makes you special and interesting.

Chapter 4: Opposite Creation. Blow Their Minds

To earn attention, you have to be worthy of attention. And as you know by now, average doesn't cut it. Mediocrity is a waste of time. Good enough is not good enough.

Social Currency and Identity Management. In Jonah Berger's book about how ideas spread, *Contagious*, the first principle is social currency: "People share things that make them look good to others" and "so, not surprisingly, people prefer sharing things that make them seem entertaining rather than boring, clever rather than dumb, and hip rather than dull."

Violating Expectations and Breaking Patterns. Patterns are predictable. A broken pattern is unexpected. We want more information when something doesn't fit our expectations and existing patterns. We want—even need—to know why.

Differentiation Research. You need to find out who else is in your space and what they're doing. You need to do some research before you decide what you're going to make, because part of building an audience is making something different from everyone else.

Ecosystems > Platforms. This is important: your goal is to define yourself by your differentiated content focus. You don't want to define yourself by a single platform.

Head, Heart, and Legs. Talking about designing for Head (Your content needs to be smart), Heart (Your content needs

to make your audience feel things), and Legs (Your content needs to be sustainable for the production team and to have continued value for the audience) before you start creates a clear mindset of what a successful outcome looks like.

The Power of Stories

The most important way to differentiate your content and earn attention, in any format and at any length, is this: tell great stories.

Storytelling works. Over and over again. It is the single best way to earn attention, especially when tied to The Job you have hired it to do.

So before you choose stories, remind yourself of your desired Job. What is the problem you are trying to solve for the audience? What is the idea you are trying to transmit? What are the principles or values you want to espouse or be associated with? What is The Job you are hiring this story to do?

Story Beginnings

When it comes to anything you are putting out in the world to earn attention, there is nothing more important than the beginning. The ending is a close second, but here's why beginnings matter more: people will never get to the ending if your beginning stinks. If want to earn attention, your beginnings deserve extra focus.

Magic Story Elements

The Juice is the magic ingredient in a story that makes it compelling. It can be a great character, a surprising story, an unusual point of view. The Juice can take many forms and cannot be explicitly, or categorically, defined. But in your heart, you know whether your story has The Juice or not.

Chapter 5: Opposite Marketing. Build Audiences for Your Content

Marketing content is not the same as marketing products and services. It requires different thinking and will achieve different results when done well.

Marketing content is about creating anticipation and value for the potential audience member. It's about selling the audience experience, not the company creating the experience. It's about encouraging sampling, not creating millions of impressions to make an impressive reach report.

The content and the promotion need to be from you, not about you.

Here's yet another Do the Opposite portion of your journey to earn attention. I know this is potentially confusing, and even though this section on audience development is at the end of the book, audience development actually starts on the first day of strategy. Not the last day of production. Not the first day of production. The first day of strategy.

When you determine your "who," the question you should be asking is not "How do I build an audience for my show?" but instead "How do I build a show for my audience?"

Marketing and Marketability

Marketing and marketability are very different, yet often confused with one another. Adding value to the audience's life (The Gift) is the marketability factor. Marketability is whether you have made content with loads of Creative Bravery. Without marketability, your marketing efforts will be in vain. A successful show needs both marketability and marketing. And they both start on the first day of the project.

Hard Work versus Fraudulence

Unlike for other topics in this book, there are shortcuts, hacks, and cheat codes in audience development. However, they involve buying fake downloads, clicks, and views, and to me, that's fraud. If you're in the business of looking for actual humans to connect, trust, and build relationships with your brand, you need actual humans to consume your content. And there are no shortcuts, hacks, or cheat codes for that. You have to earn it.

Beyond the Launch

There is one other big mindset shift required for effective audience growth: moving beyond a "launch mentality." Marketing beyond the launch isn't just something that should be prioritized; it needs to be resourced. Marketing your content is ongoing hard work, and to do it well, you need resources in place.

Measuring Your Marketing Effectiveness

Depending on the type of content you're producing, there are different attribution solutions for tracking marketing effectiveness. Even without attribution solutions, you can cobble together experiments to determine what works and what doesn't for driving sampling.

Overall, you want to be able to tell what's working and what isn't. What is driving sampling? What is worth the effort of repeating? What is not worth repeating? And what

is worth tweaking and experimenting with to see if you can improve the results further?

Conclusion

You have completed the hero's journey for Brave Marketers! You've questioned the status quo and decided to Do the Opposite in almost everything. You've changed your mindset. You've built a differentiated strategy rooted in who you are and why you exist. You've determined The Job for your project and your Only You Gift for your audience. You've produced Creatively Brave content. You've found The Juice, championed the weird, and bucked conventions.

Every hero's journey ends with the hero returning home, changed. I sincerely hope that you are returning to your marketing and content life, changed. And I also hope you will consider becoming a champion for other Brave Marketers. Share what you learn with others. Call out tired status quo strategies that don't work. Experiment and continue to Do the Opposite whenever you can.

Prove it works.

Stay Creatively Brave and Committed.

Tell the others.



Steve Pratt is the founder of The Creativity Business, which offers consulting, workshops, and keynotes to help companies develop differentiated content, marketing, and messaging that earns attention. Steve is also the co-founder of the world's first branded podcast agency, Pacific Content. Named one of Entrepreneur's 100 Brilliant Companies, Pacific Content worked predominantly with US-based brands, including Ford Motor Company, Audible, BMW, the New York Times, and Dell Technologies.

Earn It: Unconventional Strategies for Brave Marketers by Steve Pratt. Copyright 2025 Steve Pratt. Summarized by permission of the publisher, Forbes Books. ISBN 978-1774584767. Summary published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries®. Copyright 2025 Soundview, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. For permissions and reprints, please contact service@summary.com. 47SS08C