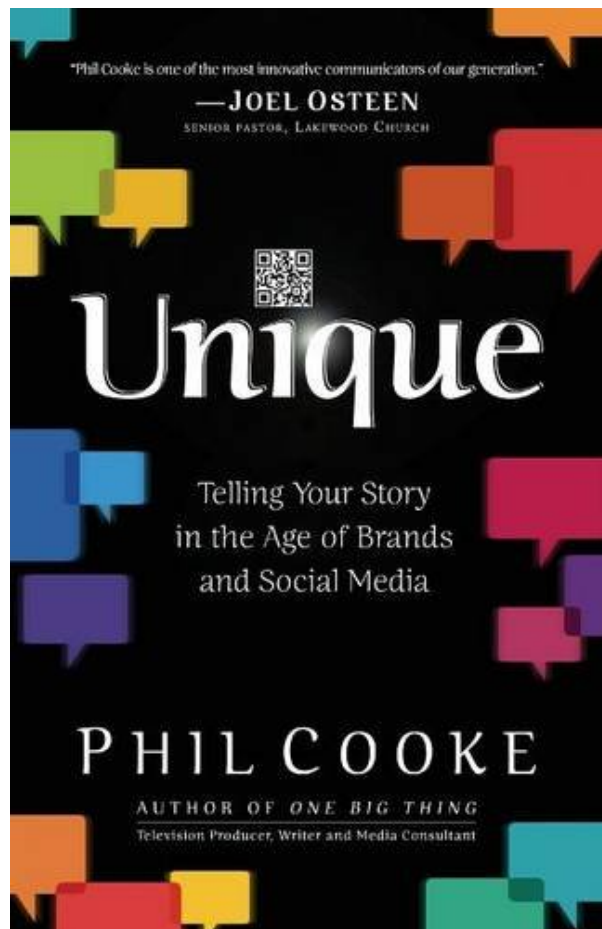
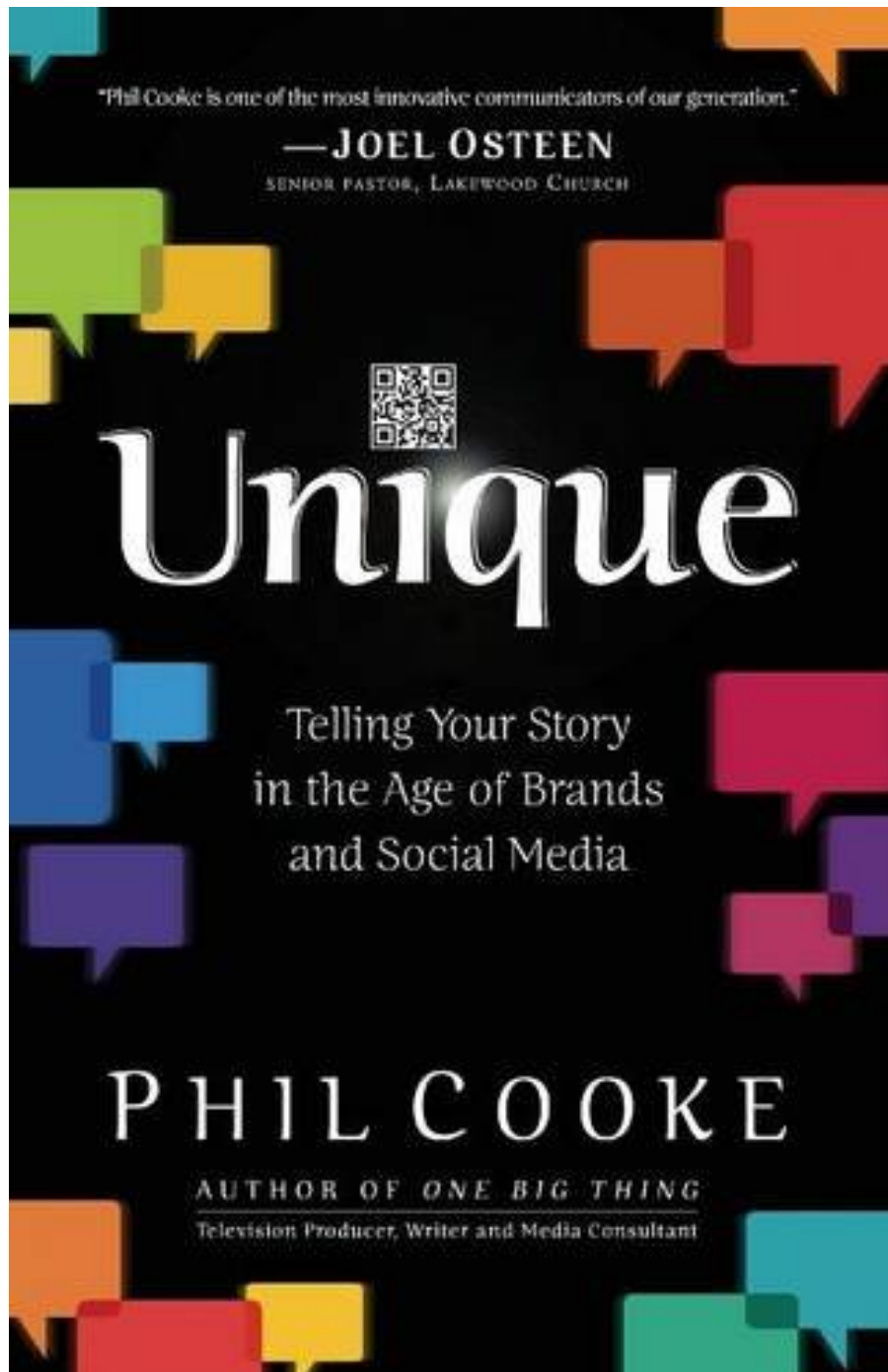


UNIQUE: TELLING YOUR STORY IN THE AGE OF BRANDS AND SOCIAL MEDIA BY PHIL COOKE



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Review

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— Eric Metaxas, best-selling Author

"Phil Cooke understands the power of branding. Read this book, and you will never again look at church identity the same way."

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About the Author

From religious media to humanitarian and cause marketing, Phil Cooke--consultant, strategist, and media activist--is unparalleled at helping religious and nonprofit organizations and their leaders tell their story to the world. He has appeared on MSNBC, CNBC, and CNN, and his work has been profiled in The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, and The Wall Street Journal. Phil also speaks at workshops, seminars, and conferences globally.

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Today's culture is more connected than any time in history, but all of this connectivity comes with a price. We live in a world that's become cluttered, distracted, and disrupted by social media, with the average person receiving as many as 5,000 messages a day in one form or another. If you're a pastor, nonprofit leader, artist, filmmaker, entrepreneur, or creative professional in this hyper-connected, highly distracted world, how do you get your unique idea, project, or vision on the radar of the people who need to respond?

In *Unique*, Phil Cooke, a highly respected media producer and consultant, addresses both the challenges and the opportunities of branding and social media in the 21st century. If you have a vision or message to share with the world, *Unique* provides a blueprint to cut through the clutter, communicate your story, and impact your audience.

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Most helpful customer reviews

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

I recommend all Church Leaders read this book in 2013

By jjohn

Unique: Telling Your Story in the Age of Brands and Social Media– A Review

This is an extremely interesting and helpful book on a topic that most of us have probably not given serious thought to. Indeed, a first reaction might be ‘why should I read a book about ‘branding’? Yet, the fact is after reading the book you find yourself looking at churches and organisations that you know and realising that so much of what is said here is actually very applicable to them. There is a lot here that is very profound and very hard-hitting. What is particularly helpful here is the sense that this is a useful compendium of lots of thinking on issues such as ‘image’ and ‘brand perception’. It is the sort of book that saves an awful lot of work by summarising and integrating some of the best ideas from many separate sources.

It is safe to say that the material covered in this book is far less thought over in the UK than in the States.

There are several reasons for this. The first is that most Christian churches and organisations in the UK are an order of magnitude smaller than those in the United States. The second is that the uptake of the web and technology generally amongst British churches is some way behind that of the United States. The third is the curious fact that British culture loves the amateur and is suspicious of the professional. We are uneasy about large, powerful, efficient organisations and prefer the small-scale, the bumbling, the individualistic. Ours is a nation of heroic amateurs. Remember how Sherlock Holmes and Miss Marple always outwit the professional detectives and how James Bond only triumphs when he breaks free of government supervision? Our preference for the amateur is heightened in church circles by some of our experiences of American evangelicalism, notably the more ‘idiosyncratic’ gospel ministries who have come to dominate some of the television channels. An extreme version of this disparagement of professionalism occurs with some churches and ministers who can see failure as a badge of honour. Such a view is often formulated along the lines of ‘we could have had church growth but we chose gospel purity instead’. This ‘austerity gospel’ is mysteriously able to see low numbers as a sign of divine approval. Go figure!

One potential problem in a book like this is that it is hard to strike a balance between the secular and the spiritual. So there will be those who aspire after MBAs who will complain that not enough attention has been paid to the detailed research in the secular world on how organisations function. Equally, there will be those who say that the book is not spiritual enough and that what we have is something that is all too familiar: a ‘baptised’ secular wisdom. Oddly enough this last criticism could come from two possible sources. The first would be from the ‘theological right’ which, if it believes in church growth at all, believes that it is divinely given and in almost every case the product of an outstanding preaching ministry that is faithful to the Word. The second would be objections from some charismatics who would tend to see church growth as being the province of Holy Spirit as he works in power. There are now charismatic reformed churches that would buy into both objections! Personally I thought the balance was about right here; this is neither a textbook of theology nor a manual of church business practice.

Two points to consider. First, although I think the language can be defended I think that in places it is slightly offputting to those who are suspicious of the wisdom of Mammon being applied to church. Ironically, the very word ‘brand’ is actually not a ‘good brand’; for many people it conjures up unpalatable imagery of advertising and marketing. It would be interesting to think how the book would be different if it talked about ‘identity’ rather than ‘brand’.

A second, and related, note is that if the issue of identity was to be pursued further then there is an enormous wealth of theological material to consider. So, for instance, in the Old Testament God's people Israel are deliberately given a distinct identity centred on circumcision, dietary rules, the keeping of the Sabbath, the injunctions against marriage outside the community and the location of a single cultic worship site. Was 'Israel' or 'Jewishness' in effect a 'brand'? If you think about it, such an exclusive identity was of course absolutely necessary in the Old Covenant setting: some measure of exclusivity was needed in order to prevent dilution and extinction. Where this becomes interesting is in the New Covenant where many (most? all?) of these distinguishing features are put aside as God's people now become inclusive rather than exclusive. Again, what was the Christian 'brand' perceived as in antiquity? We surely have enough data from the early church on this. In some ways it must have been very negative think of Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 1:26,27 "Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong." Yet it seems that there was a positive side to the Christian brand; it gave unity, a sense of belonging, even a feeling of family to people who had no such links. I suspect there are some very interesting theological/sociological works on this aspect. If the theology was to be considered further then it would be interesting going through the Gospels, Acts and the Letters to see places where 'the brand' is defended. Was the rather traumatic demise of Ananias and Sapphira because God was protecting 'his brand'? On a more human level the decision to create the office of deacons in Acts 6 could be seen as a response to a problem which was threatening 'the brand.' It would be interesting to think these things through.

These minor points aside: there are some extremely useful points in this book and I really think it could be read – possibly even should be – read by all who run churches or Christian organisations. Most ministers and managers of small Christian organisations probably bumble along from crisis to crisis: there's a book somewhere on the 'Purposeless Driven Church'. I certainly know one church well [mine] which has come to define itself in purely negative terms: it is the church of the lowest common denominator; a fellowship that is neither too reformed nor too charismatic. It is all too common in many congregations of different theological settings to find people from a business background struggling to contain their irritation at how badly managed aspects of their church are, not least issues of identity. Another point that could have been developed is the way that the economic crisis in the West over the last four years has discouraged serious issues about what as churches we are doing and why. Most organisations have worked on the basis of crisis management with no greater ambition than budgetary survival.

So a good read and given the pace of change definitely something to keep an eye on. A second edition in another ten years is going to be extremely interesting!

Reverend Canon J. John

[...]

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent branding manual for faith oriented organizations

By Craig Mathison

"Unique" by Phil Cooke aims directly at faith oriented people and organizations and offers simple yet powerful perspectives on branding. By setting up the concept of a brand as simply, "...what people think of when they think of you," he effectively defuses some of anticipated resistance that faith oriented people might have to the notion of branding. Then he helps the reader understand how inadvertently we create a confusing story that makes it difficult for others to understand who we are and what is unique about what we are doing. Perhaps best of all, Cooke stops us many times along the way and asks us to reflect on what we are digesting. "Unique" is in book form but because of these reflection points and the easy to follow steps

Cooke offers, it functions more like a manual. It gives you the necessary hooks on which you can hang the information and then shows you exactly what to do with that information.

"Unique" is a thorough rewrite and update of Cooke's 2007 book, "Branding Faith." He has gotten over his earlier grumpiness about the pervasiveness of smartphones and other electronic devices and has also readily grabbed onto the hows and whys of social media. While "Unique" is not a substitute for the professional assistance that most faith oriented people and organizations need in their branding processes, it thoroughly prepares them so that they can better understand those processes, more fully participate in them and maximize their impact. The result can be that the great story faith oriented folks want others to think about when they think about them is in fact the consistent story that others think about, pray about, give to and share with others.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Eye opening for the age we live in

By Robin

I found Dr. Cooke to be enthusiastic, funny, informed and likeable. I had attended a class where Dr. Cooke was the professor and we had his book as required reading. I loved the class and the book is an extension of his class. He is a smart man with lots of proven ideas on branding, digital and social media for ministry of the 21st century. I found his class and book to be refreshing and exciting because he made learning this information seem possible to implement in ministry. I told Dr. Cooke that Jesus had a brand too, Jesus was branded a rebel, blasphemer, worked on the Sabbath, and ate with sinners. That was His brand, not too positive ay? I do not believe pastors should have their brand, because it draws too much attention to them and not to the purpose of the ministry which is Jesus. Branding is really a new buz word for Advertising and Marketing which must be dirty words, so they had to re-name it I guess. All in all, Dr. Cooke is one cool guy, and he knows his stuff and I would hire him in a New York minute if I had enough money to hire him. This book is a must read for all Church Media leadership. We will be implementing some of the ideas in his book for our ministry.

Robin, Minister of Evangelism

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