THE POWER OF UNPOPULAR

A GUIDE TO BUILDING YOUR BRAND FOR THE AUDIENCE WHO WILL LOVE YOU (AND WHY NO ONE ELSE MATTERS)

ERIKA NAPOLETTANO
Praise for The Power of Unpopular

“Being popular may get you elected to public office, but if you want to be successful in business, you need to understand the power of being unpopular. Erika Napoletano clearly and cleverly lays out the path to unpopularity, a critical new paradigm for business success.”

—Carol Roth, Business Strategist and New York Times Best-Selling Author of The Entrepreneur Equation

“Erika has kind of screwed it up here. She’s written an incredible book about being unpopular which will be popular. That’s just amazing. I love brands that take a stand, that have passion and aren’t afraid to turn some people away. Erika has written the guide on how to do just that. The power of passion and community is one to be reckoned with but few understand. Take my word—this is the book that gets it.”

—Scott Stratten, Unpopular Author of UnMarketing: Stop Marketing. Start Engaging

“The dreaded ‘unpopular.’ Why the hell do we accord it all manner of awfulness? Who ever convinced us that popular = good, unpopular = bad, majority rules, end of story anyhow? In business or in your personal life, it’s finding your right people that matters. That’s inbound marketing at its best. Figure out whom you serve and what you do for them and paltry issues like competition basically disappear! When you’re unpopular with all of the right people—the ones who don’t want, need or understand what you have to offer—the ones who fall in love with you will eventually show up at your door. In her hilarious, witty, read-out-loud-to-your-friends prose, Erika is that idyllic best friend you can rely on to slap you back into a reality that ‘they’ never told you about.”

—Laura @Pistachio Fitton, Inbound Marketing Evangelist, HubSpot and coauthor, Twitter for Dummies

“Erika has written the no-nonsense, reality-driven and must-read book for anyone dreaming of starting their own business. Her writing is infectiously fun and her advice must be taken to heart by those who wish to succeed. You’ll laugh, cheer and be inspired!”

“Erika Napoletano has one of the most distinct and unique voices in business writing and this book reinforces those qualities from page one. And the fact that she is an entrepreneur grounds her stories and makes them not only engaging, but real. I mean, she walked away from six figures, said goodbye to her bosshole and set out on her own. At its core, that’s what this book is about—taking risks, being bold, embracing failure, and snuggling up to the notion of being unpopular. A spirited and intelligent book that should make every business person dedicated to rethinking ‘unpopular.’”

—Amy Cosper, Vice President and Editor-in-Chief, Entrepreneur Magazine

“This is the first business book in a long time that grabbed me by the throat and pulled me into it. I couldn’t stop reading it because it spoke to me . . . no, it sang to me! Erika Napoletano is clever though. She wrote a book here that you think is about being proud to be unpopular, but is really more about being someone who always matters to the right people, not someone who sometimes matters to just anyone. In a world that is not an end sum game, this book helps make you a winner.”

—Jason Falls, Author of No Bullshit Social Media: The All-Business, No Hype Guide To Social Media Marketing and CEO of Social Media Explorer

“I’ve got two rules for effective marketing: (1) Try to please everyone, and you please no one. (2) The natural corollary of the first rule, which is if no one hates you, you’re doing it wrong. With The Power of Unpopular, Erika Napoletano gives you a modern field guide to building a rabidly passionate group of fans, not just customer, clients, or prospects. Beyond knowing her stuff, Erika practices what she preaches better than just about anyone out there, which is why we all need this book within arm’s reach at all times.”

—Brian Clark, CEO, Copyblogger Media

“A brilliant concept, powerfully delivered. I’ve already ordered six copies for my closest friends.”

—Seth Godin, Author of We Are All Weird

“If anyone understands the power of Personality: Unleashed, it’s Erika. But where most people mistake snark for grit and substance, Erika actually understands core elements of a strong, irreverent brand, and makes a compelling business case for being unapologetic about who you are (because that’s what your audience really wants from you). It’s about damn time that someone did.”

—Amber Naslund, Former Vice President of Strategy, Radian6 and coauthor of The Now Revolution
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ERIKA NAPOLETANO
For every entrepreneur who’s ever wanted to let a freak flag fly.

And for my parents—who not only always let me fly mine but who also took me shopping for fabric so I could make my own.
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Acknowledgments

There are countless people who not only contributed to my ability to be somewhat of an authority on the concept of “unpopular” but also facilitated it landing on the pages in front of you.

My parents, for instilling in me that owning things is a fringe benefit that stems from doing things and for encouraging me to become a doer. And for never offering blind support—you taught me to ask questions, gave me the tools to ask better ones, and helped me discover that having an opinion isn’t poison.

Jason Schippers, for helping me own my ink and for being the first person to ever review the proposal for this book (and having done so, not telling me to burn it). You are missed.

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The Tattered Cover Bookstore in Denver, where I hammered out countless chapters and took refuge in the stacks when I had writer’s block.

All of the book’s contributors, a huge thanks for letting me inside your businesses and sharing your respective pieces of the deliciously unpopular pie.

The businesses featured as case studies, for not building your businesses to the lowest common denominator and creating something that made me excited to learn more. You left me inspired, and I can only hope my words did justice to what you’ve built and continue to refine.

All the people who told me I was too fat/mouthy/old/loud/crass/unpopular . . . you were entirely right. Thanks for helping me find my audience . . . because it sure ain’t you.

To you, my readers. This includes fans of Redhead Writing, readers of my Entrepreneur Magazine column, all of the sites who have given me a guest voice, and those who have downloaded, picked up, or checked out this book. You’re the reason I get to do what I love for a living, and I’ll never, ever forget that.
Introduction:
Lessons Learned from a Lippy Lady on an Airplane

In September 2011, I boarded a cross-country flight bound for Miami—I had a speaking engagement. Excited about going to Florida for the first time in several years, I settled into my window seat, grabbed a magazine, and quickly found myself joined by a woman in her 50s or 60s; her husband took the aisle while she sat in the middle. They were, to say the least, a chatty couple. Once approved electronic devices were okayed, I popped open my laptop and got to work on the finishing touches for the following day’s presentation.

“Well,” middle-seat lady said, “that’s some salty language you have there.”

She was referring to a slide that was taking up my whole screen that said, “I fucking hate PowerPoint.” Let’s not talk about the fact that she was reading over my shoulder.

I simply responded yes, it was—that I have a brand that allows me a certain latitude with language. Since 2007, I’d built a pretty decent following dishing out straightforward thoughts on business and life through a blog and, more recently, a column in Entrepreneur Magazine. I’m known for being what some might consider blue and others plainspoken, hence the words she was reading on my screen. After some not-long-enough gaps in conversation where I was able to go back to working on my presentation, she says:

“I notice that you’re single.”

“Umm . . . yes,” I reply. “I am.” Smile. (My left hand is devoid of adornment.)

Then, gesturing to my left arm (which was facing her), she followed with, “Well, I imagine that kind of limits the dating pool for
you a bit,” wagging her finger in and up-and-down fashion along with a squint in her eyes that said she didn’t want to get too close to it. “It” was the three-quarter-sleeve tattoo on my left arm.

I simply replied with the best response I could conjure at 36,000 feet:

“All I’d be interested in dating in the first place.”

She then offered something to the effect of, “But of course! Oh, I didn’t mean . . . [insert assorted lameness here]” and promptly went back to her Sudoku book and badgering her husband about the volume on his headset.

**And That’s Why We’re Here**

If you picked up this book in hopes of finding some *Kumbayah*-flavored business hug, you’ll be disappointed. Starting, running, owning, and building a business is a path filled with an inordinate amount of bullshit, and you’re signing up for many a sleepless night. My seatmate on the plane had it spot-on, annoying and abrasive though she may have been. I don’t want to do business with everyone, whether in the personal or professional sense. I am unpopular (which she made quite clear). And that’s something I’m going to take to the damned bank.

There’s plenty of crap you can download online that will shove *Kumbayah* down your throat, prices ranging from free to *oh-my-god-it’s-how-much?* You might even find it on the shelf relatively close to where you picked up this book or clicked to download it to your e-reader. I’m about unpopular thoughts and blunt advice—it’s how I’ve built my business and brand, and this book is where they’re delivered. So if you’re exhausted with overnight success stories and looking for some practical insights designed to help you:

- Figure out who you are.
- Know what you bring to the table.
- Understand why you’re different.
- Determine why the hell people should care about any of those things.
Read on.

I left all the crap out of this book so the editors wouldn’t have to cut it out and you wouldn’t be pissed about buying a book filled with crap. I’m going to have my critics about the way I share my thoughts, but hey—that’s what makes me ME. The best I can ever do for you if you think that owning and running a business is what you want to do with your life is help you embrace you and leverage that single, kick-ass asset into something that will:

- Make you smile when times suck.
- Laugh hysterically when business is great.
- Make you nimble enough to shift your business in the direction that you need to at any given time in your career.

Businesses and brands begin with the people behind them. They’re not logos or flashy websites, and a Twitter account or Facebook page won’t thrust you into success beyond compare. If you’re wondering if the path of entrepreneurship is for you, go grab a copy of Carol Roth’s *The Entrepreneur Equation*. Some people are better suited to days with greater structure, being a salaried employee, and part of a more corporate team environment—and there’s nothing wrong with that. It’s just a metric ton different than choosing to be an entrepreneur and building a brand from the ground up (or tearing an existing one apart and rebuilding it for the better). If you’ve decided that you can’t think of anything you’d rather do with your days than deal with the B.S. inherent in business ownership and brand building, buckle up your shit and let’s get to work.

**What’s the Deal with Unpopular? Is it the New Popular?**

No, it’s not the new popular. Popular is what we’re leaving behind because, to be quite honest, it’s not a tool you even need in your toolbox. It’s not even a tool at all.

Every brand that’s perceived as popular in the marketplace is unpopular with a very specific demographic. Don’t believe me? Take a poll and listen to the responses. Ask a group of people how they feel about Coca-Cola and Pepsi. Apple versus Microsoft. The New York