

INTRODUCTION

THE MAKING OF A GLOBAL LITERARY PHENOMENON

It seems like everyone knows someone who is a Harry Potter fan. You might even be one yourself. I confess that I am a Harry Potter fan. I've pre-ordered and read my copies of all the books, listened to them on CD and seen all the movies. Then I've done it all again. There's something about the story of Harry Potter that people love, and so do I.

My path to becoming a Harry Potter fan was similar to most other fans before and after me. My mother heard about Harry Potter from her boss at work. His children told him about the series. He read the books and loved them and started to spread the word. I remember scoffing at my mother when she first started raving about the children's fantasy series she was reading, but my husband listened and started reading, too. The next thing I knew, my husband was hooked and trying to convince me to read the Harry Potter books as well. Initially, I resisted. The story simply didn't sound like something I would enjoy reading. The thought of reading a children's fantasy story was not one I considered.

That all changed one day when my husband and I were in the car driving to enjoy dinner out at a local restaurant. My husband had just started listening to the first Harry Potter audio book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, during his commute to and from work (something I later found to be an excellent method to reduce road rage, but that's another story entirely). The first Harry Potter audio CD was still in the disc player when we got in the car to go out to dinner, so when I turned on the radio, the CD picked up from where it had left off when my husband arrived home from work. I reached to switch the CD player off and the radio on when my husband stopped me and asked me to just take a second to listen. I acquiesced, and during that 10-minute drive, I was hooked. That's all it took. J.K. Rowling's world of Harry Potter was that magnetic. I started reading the first book that night,

and I haven't looked back. In fact, I've become just one more voice in the all-powerful Harry Potter word-of-mouth marketing campaign.

This all happened at the same time the Harry Potter buzz was growing online. I can't remember the exact timeframe when my family members were slowly bitten by the Harry Potter bug, but it was probably in late 1999 before the fourth book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, was released in 2000 and before the first movie was announced that same year. That's when the Harry Potter buzz exploded globally, and I know I was a part of the "club" before that explosion.

However, you certainly don't have to be a Harry Potter fan to recognize the significant impact the brand has had on global business and society. Even if you've never read a Harry Potter book or seen a Harry Potter movie, the brand's influence on the world cannot be ignored. But how did a *children's fantasy* book come to be so influential? It all started with a great product.

Great products or brands are born, nurtured and allowed to grow and thrive with gentle pushes in the right direction allowing them perhaps to falter but ultimately flourish. It is this theory that is at the core of the success of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. In *Harry Potter: The Story of a Global Business Phenomenon*, I break down the story of J.K. Rowling and the Harry Potter brand to better understand how a children's fantasy book could become a global brand worth over \$4 billion. As it turns out, Harry Potter did not become a global phenomenon overnight, but what factors were in place to catapult J.K. Rowling's book about a boy wizard into first a cult brand and later an icon? And can the success of Harry Potter be duplicated? These are just some of the questions I'll tackle in this book.

The story of J.K. Rowling and her beloved Harry Potter began in 1991 with a series of serendipitous events. Many of the great inventions of our time have been discovered after a series of unplanned events, and now one of the great brands of our time can be added to that list. However, serendipity did not lead to instant success for J.K. Rowling. Instead, it took Rowling seven long years to write and publish the first book in her seven-book Harry Potter series, and during that time she lived in near-poverty.

Ultimately, Harry Potter was published and allowed to grow and thrive at the hands of people who believed in the product as an inherently good one. From J.K. Rowling's literary agent, the Christopher Little Agency, to her publishers in the United Kingdom and the United States, Bloomsbury and Scholastic, respectively, and the movie studio

that would bring Harry Potter to the big screen, Warner Bros, everyone who touched the story of Harry Potter loved it and believed in it. Having the strength of a good product behind her allowed J.K. Rowling to work from a position of power as brand guardian over the stories and characters of her Harry Potter series. I assert that it was those two elements that laid the foundation for the success of Harry Potter.

With a good product in hand, the forces behind the Harry Potter brand simply had to let consumers experience it. The story of Harry Potter appealed to consumers of varying demographics as a classic story of a fallible hero coming of age while fighting good versus evil, and it has been credited as luring children (and many adults) away from television and video games and back to reading. There was a need in the marketplace for a product like Harry Potter, and fans instantly became emotionally involved in the story and characters, leading to devout loyalty to the Harry Potter brand. Harry Potter fans have been called evangelists, fervently preaching the wonders of Harry's magical world and feeling compelled to convert non-Harry Potter readers into fans.

The widespread availability of the internet in the late 1990s played an integral part in the success of Harry Potter. As word-of-mouth marketing drove the Harry Potter brand to cult status, the emergence of Web 2.0 (the social web) and social media networking helped drive it to become a phenomenon. The internet provided a place where fans around the world could discuss Harry Potter. Add to that social networking the fact that Harry Potter was written as a seven-book series with one core set of main characters, little to no gap in time between books and a single main story arc, and the stage was set for the online buzz to skyrocket. Fans were left wanting more of Harry Potter as they waited for the next book (and later the next movie) in the series to be released, and as a result, they met online to discuss back stories and hidden elements within the books as well as speculate on future story lines.

As the online buzz soared, J.K. Rowling's role as brand guardian inadvertently played a part in boosting that buzz even higher. Rowling was very particular about the brand extensions pursued for the Harry Potter brand. She frequently turned down merchandising opportunities or took a lower pay in order to retain control over the Harry Potter brand. Unbeknownst to her at the time, she was making a highly strategic move. Not only was she protecting her brand so its image or message would not be inconsistently communicated in the eyes of

Harry Potter's fans, but she was also limiting her fans' access to Harry Potter and leaving them wanting more.

At its core, a series can be a great marketing tool in itself, if the original product is a good one. Many of the most successful dramatic television shows have used the cliffhanger or serial format to keep fans wanting more and talking about and speculating on the stories within them. The seven-book Harry Potter series is a quintessential example of a product that left consumers wanting more and therefore was perfectly positioned for tease and perpetual marketing tactics to push that desire for more and the buzz surrounding it to an unprecedented level. Each component of the Harry Potter marketing plan fueled the next, and each element teased consumers with just enough information to pique their interest and get them talking but not enough information to give away any secrets. Maintaining secrecy around the Harry Potter plot became a task practically suited only to the most highly planned military operation, but together, J.K. Rowling, Bloomsbury, Scholastic and the numerous players involved in producing the Harry Potter product managed to keep a tight grip on security.

Harry Potter is not the first brand that has become a phenomenon nor will it be the last. However, prior to the success of Harry Potter, no one recognized the potential a children's book series, or perhaps any book, had to touch so many people around the globe and boost profits for so many players in the literary and business worlds. One could cite other phenomena such as *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* as brands that have certainly risen above cult status to become global icons, and interestingly, their rise to iconic status includes many similarities to the growth in popularity of the Harry Potter brand (*Star Wars* will be discussed more in Chapter 2 and *Star Trek* in Chapter 11).

Now that Harry Potter has set the stage for marketing a literary icon, it's interesting to consider if other authors, books or literary brands may have missed their own opportunities for similar success. Could an author like Dan Brown, whose *The Da Vinci Code* sold an estimated 70 million copies, have eclipsed even the omnipotent Harry Potter if his book was originally marketed as part of a series with tease and perpetual marketing? Only time will tell if a strategy to take advantage of the brand's previous success will be planned and executed in such a way to be successful in the future.

In the meantime, there are many other authors waiting in the wings to take over with their own novels and series now that Harry Potter has come to an end. The stage has been set, and the path has

been etched out. Others simply need to follow those same steps to achieve success. If their products are fundamentally good and fulfill existing needs, then it's only a matter of time until the next Harry Potter makes its way onto the literary scene. Can the success of Harry Potter be repeated? Can that success be manufactured? These are just some of the questions I'll discuss, but I do assert that by understanding the five main components to the success of Harry Potter, there is a strong possibility of another literary work becoming a phenomenon in the not so distant future. Those five components are:

- A good product
- Emotional involvement
- Word-of-mouth marketing and an online buzz
- Tease and perpetual marketing
- Brand consistency and restraint.

A need exists already, and there is a void to fill. It's just a matter of who will step up to the plate with a good product in hand to fill that gap.

Unlike the fictitious world of Harry Potter, achieving success equal to the Harry Potter brand in the real world does not require magic, but it does require people who believe in the product and solid business and marketing plans. *Harry Potter: The Story of a Global Business Phenomenon* will shed some light on the established path to success.

*Lumos!**

* In the Harry Potter books, wizards use the *lumos* spell to generate light from their wands.