



Frenemies: The Epic Disruption of the Ad Business (and Everything Else)

Ken Auletta

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An intimate and profound reckoning with the changes buffeting the 2 trillion global advertising and marketing business from the perspective of its most powerful players, by the bestselling author of *Googled*

Advertising and marketing touches on every corner of our lives, and is the invisible fuel powering almost all media. Complain about it though we might, without it the world would be a darker place. And of all the industries wracked by change in the digital age, few have been turned on its head as dramatically as this one has. We are a long way from the days of Don Draper; as *Mad Men* is turned into *Math Men* (and women--though too few), as an instinctual art is transformed into a science, the old lions and their kingdoms are feeling real fear, however bravely they might roar.

Frenemies is Ken Auletta's reckoning with an industry under existential assault. He enters the rooms of the ad world's most important players, some of them business partners, some adversaries, many "frenemies," a term whose ubiquitous use in this industry reveals the level of anxiety, as former allies become competitors, and accusations of kickbacks and corruption swirl. We meet the old guard, including Sir Martin Sorrell, the legendary head of WPP, the world's largest ad agency holding company; while others play nice with Facebook and Google, he rants, some say Lear-like, out on the heath. There is Irwin Gotlieb, maestro of the media agency GroupM, the most powerful media agency, but like all media agencies it is staring into the headlights as ad buying is more and more done by machine in the age of Oracle and IBM. We see the world from the vantage of its new powers, like Carolyn Everson, Facebook's head of Sales, and other brash and scrappy creatives who are driving change, as millennials and others who disdain ads as an interruption employ technology to zap them. We also peer into the future, looking at what is replacing traditional advertising. And throughout we follow the industry's peerless matchmaker, Michael Kassan, whose company, MediaLink, connects all these players together, serving as the industry's foremost power broker, a position which feasts on times of fear and change.

Frenemies is essential reading, not simply because of what it says about this world, but because of the potential consequences: the survival of media as we know it depends on the money generated by advertising and marketing--revenue that is in peril in the face of technological changes and the fraying trust between the industry's key players.

Frenemies: The Epic Disruption of the Ad Business (and Everything Else) Details

Date : Published June 5th 2018 by Penguin Press

ISBN :

Author : Ken Auletta

Format : Kindle Edition 368 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Business, Abandoned



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From Reader Review Frenemies: The Epic Disruption of the Ad Business (and Everything Else) for online ebook

Adriana says

I was interested in the topic and the guy is obviously an expert, but it was too "inside baseball" for it to be useful to me.

Felipe CZ says

A look at how the internet age has forced the advertising industry to change and adapt, becoming more scientific than creative. Six billion people worldwide use smartphones, outdating other media. Companies like China's Tencent have developed platforms where people can meet, buy and share, gathering their trends and preferences' data along the way. The ability to track what people do online has made it possible to measure advertising campaigns' effectiveness and also divide audiences in smaller segments that can receive an customized advertisement campaign. But this big data collection is not always easy, and it also threatens our right to privacy, making the Internet giants our "frenemies". But understanding this helped Trump win the election, when his team engaged Cambridge Analytica, a data mining firm. They compiled 4,000 data points on each individual with the potential to support Trump, and then pumped money into social-media campaigns that went to target these individuals directly, and that is how he circumvented mainstream press and took his own message to potential supporters. So now cost-effective campaigns that make use of personal data bring effective results and are today's strategy.

Graeme Newell says

I've always enjoyed Ken Auletta's books. He is one smart author and always provides deep insights into complex topics. This book dives deep into the world of media, entertainment and advertising.

Seismic changes are happening as consumers seek to escape the legacy practice of interruption and annoyance marketing. Subscription services such as Hulu, Netflix and Amazon Prime are booming. More people than ever are willing to pay money each month just to escape the din of advertising's assault on the senses.

This book is packed with amazing insights. Auletta reveals the many trends that are morphing the advertising landscape and the many new players eagerly seeking to carve out a share of the profits.

I learned a lot, but this book took some real work to get through. Auletta's other books did a great job of methodically guiding customers through a story. He masterfully made complicated topics understandable.

Unfortunately, this book was rather disjointed. It is more a random collection of thoughts and observations on trends. It's a shame because Auletta's insights are quite prescient. The first half of the book is particularly cluttered, but it gets better in the second half.

Despite its lack of narrative, this was a refreshingly smart book. I'm quite glad I read it. It definitely gave me

new insights and has me looking at the world of media and advertising with a new perspective.

Todd Stockslager says

Review title: Mostly Mad Men, not everything else

Pervasive high speed internet access and mobile phones able to deliver content to almost every pocket have disrupted the delivery of content and advertising in the last decade, a gathering storm of cultural change. The impacts of the change are still working their way through business, entertainment, news media, and regulatory organizations, as well as the advertising agencies and related companies as Auletta focuses on here. While the book jacket promises broader discussion of the impacts (I presumed the "everything else" of the subtitle) this book focuses tightly on advertising gossip and turmoil.

Admittedly, advertising is key to the delivery of content. Since the beginning of newspaper publishing, then radio and television, advertising revenue has paid most or all of the cost of providing the content to its consumers. It seemed a fair trade of value for most of us most of the time. But then digital media, whether DVR'd content from a TV network or media streamed directly to a computer, tablet and now phone screen, gave us both the opportunity and the desire to see content without interruption. Now how do advertisers get their messages to consumers, how do ad agencies make and price advertisements, and how do networks, web pages, and other ad sellers price the space or time for them? In Auletta's account it's a chaotic scramble for survival among each group, and it often leads to ugly competition, which is where Auletta spends most of his time.

The flip side of the digital disruption is the presence of massive amounts of new and more detailed information about the consumer, the content and advertising they see, and the purchasing decisions they make based on it. Advertisers can know more about their customers, more about the success of their message, and better target messages to smaller groups and even individual consumers. But even these benefits come with chaos: new competitors like Facebook and Google, new players like big data companies (IBM is mentioned prominently), and new technologies like robotic ad buying and artificial intelligence. Again, Auletta focuses on how these changes impact the advertising industry.

The broader cultural impacts of this tectonic shift are fascinating and impact all of us, from the relatively trivial like how we access television (cable became satellite became streaming service became on-demand) to the personally important like how much privacy do we really have when advertisers and data aggregators know hundreds of attributes about us, to the politically important like how much news reporting can we trust when we don't know its source or who paid for its content. While Auletta does mention these briefly, he only addresses their impacts on the ad business, not on the broader culture.

This is one of those books I am rating lower not because it is badly written, but because it represents a failure in my selection process. I thought Auletta would talk about the impacts that are still working their way through business, entertainment, news media, and regulatory organizations, but instead he focuses tightly on the Mad Men ad industry. If that is your interest, then you will rate this book higher.

Aagave says

Marginally useful if you want to understand the ad marketplace (reading Digiday, Recode, the WSJ, the FT, AdAge, and Adweek on a daily basis will give you the same stories with more detail, though perhaps less access to Michael Kassan...). Otherwise, a disappointingly not insightful read into an electric moment in advertising.

Diego Leal says

Great overview of the ad agencies and their current challenges in today's economy where facebook and google are poised to banish them from existence.

Dancall says

A very timely analysis of how advertising has changed over the past decades, and the way that agencies are trying to adjust to it. Ken Auletta looks at the 'Frenemies' (Google, Facebook), consultancies like Accenture, software companies like Salesforce, and the new breed of agencies that are all trying to disrupt marketing and take revenue from the traditional players. I'd particularly recommend chapters 8 (about media agencies), 9 & 16 (about data and targeting), and 18 (a look into the future).

Rob Anderson says

Interesting if you follow the advertising industry or if you've worked in it, but not as deep a dive as I was hoping for/expecting. It's an odd mix of gossip tell-all (with a particular focus on what people are wearing or what they're "sipping" — lattes, martinis, etc. — in given moments) and industry analysis that only occasionally succeeds. Later chapters that address content demands, subscription services, streaming and native ads are some of the best, but it's mostly a light-weight look at some very powerful and wealthy individuals who speak mostly in annoying business jargon and take catty swipes at each other.

Peter O'Kelly says

A couple reviews:

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/05/bo...>
- <http://adage.com/article/opinion/fren...>

(Note that the criticism about the book not addressing the abrupt departure of Martin Sorrell, WPP's founder and former CEO and a central figure in the book, doesn't apply to the Kindle edition, which was updated after the dead-tree edition went to print.)

Some excerpts/articles adapted from the book:

- <https://medium.com/s/story/the-battle...>
- <http://niemanreports.org/articles/the...>
- <https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals...>

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Patrick Pilz says

I liked his 'Googled' book a lot. This book was a little much for me. A mixture of soap opera and business book in the context of advertisement, commercials and promotion in general. As a non-fiction book, it does not really emphasize enough the business aspects and provides little help to the reader to decide better where to spend the advertisement dollars. Instead, the book highlights betrayal, complexity and the life stories of the dominant players in the sector.

If you are a marketing professional AND you are working for one of the Fortune 500 companies, you may get a kick out of this one.

John Hopkins says

I started this book with some excitement, after hearing the author in a long interview on the radio. He vividly described the damage that's been done to news media by changes in the advertising landscape -- a subject that greatly interests me. But the book is filled with inside baseball about bigshots and disrupters in the advertising industry. The industry's changes and recent impact on media really were not explored here. Perhaps that will be Auletta's next book. Meanwhile, if you want to know what became of the "Mad Men" world, this one might be the one for you.

Blair says

I was quite disappointed with this book.

Advertising is one of the first industries to embrace and/or be affected by the digital revolution and it is evolving at an incredible rate. It is not being turned upside down for the second time now, despite being an early adopter of digital. As such, advertising - if analysed by a skilled writer - could be a good case study on how digital is reshaping business and how lessons from advertising might influence other industries.

While "Frenemies" highlighted some of the trends in the business - the rise of in-house agencies, publishers setting up ad agencies, digital giants providing alternative forms of advertising, consulting firms entering the "Traditional" advertising space - it was very superficial and almost gossipy, shaping its point of view from interviews done with a narrow range of players (and overly on Michael Kassan) and not delving into the "reasons why" these trends are occurring.

What I was looking for was some analysis and thoughts about the possible opportunities and outcomes of the expected changes in advertising - besides the fact that most of the heads of the large holding companies are ageing without specified successors. This type of value added thinking is sorely lacking in "Frenemies" which is more of a collection of interviews than anything else.

Give the book a pass.

Charlie says

A major disappointment. I was hoping this book would spend more time shedding light on the trends underlying the massive shifts transforming the media world, but alas was not to be. Just about everything shared in this book is common knowledge to everyone in the industry, so perhaps the target for this book is the general public. More than anything, the book conveys that Ken Auletta has made friends with some of the most influential folks in the media industry, from MediaLink/Kassan and Millard, to facebook/Everson, to WPP/Sorrell, to Publicis/Levy, Omnicom/Wren and a host of other luminaries. And when you take a few steps back after reading the book, you can't help but feel it is first and foremost an homage to Michael Kassan and MediaLink. Now Michael and MediaLink deserve all the love Auletta bestows upon them, but that doesn't make for an informative book. If you want a more compelling assessment of the media world, definitely go to Andrew Essex's "The End of Advertising" or Tim Wu's "The Attention Merchants".

Tom Zacharski says

I don't know how many people I've recommended this book to now. Working at Google I found this book to be the closest ever to describing my daily job as the author tackles issues surrounding media agencies, creative agencies, consulting companies playing in the field of programmatic advertising, and, of course, the role Google and Facebook play in the entire media ecosystem. It's a very good read for anyone interested in what's going on in advertising and the media industries and how the usual business models are being disrupted by innovation and digital marketing. Ken Auletta brings the industry closer by profiling some of the biggest names in the industry - Sir Martin Sorrell, Michael Kassan, Irwin Goetlieb, Carolyn Everson, and many others. I was a bit disappointed not to see the Google names in there - the author explained it by saying he already wrote a full book about Google (indeed, "Googled 2.0"), however that was back in 2009 and in those nearly 10 years a lot has changed in the industry. Nonetheless - great read for anyone in the industry, highly recommended!

Shahab says

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