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"Kathy's back, and her new book is simple, brilliant,  
and useful. What else do you need to know?"

—Seth Godin, author, *What To Do When It's Your Turn*

# BADASS

Making  
Users  
Awesome

**KATHY SIERRA**

“In *BADASS*, Kathy Sierra—one of our brightest business minds—offers up a surprising insight into what makes certain offerings shine in a competitive marketplace. Believe it or not, many people don’t care how awesome your product is. Instead, they care about how awesome they are when they use your product. If you can tap into that motivation, you’ve got gold. This books shows you how.”

—Daniel H. Pink, author of *New York Times* bestsellers *To Sell Is Human* and *Drive*

# BADASS

## Making Users Awesome

Imagine you’re in a game with one objective: a bestselling product or service. The rules? No marketing budget, no PR stunts, and it must be *sustainably* successful. No short-term fads.

*This is not a game of chance. It is a game of skill and strategy.*

And it begins with a single question: given competing products of equal pricing, promotion, and perceived quality, why *does* one outsell the others?

The answer doesn’t live in the sustainably successful products or services. The answer lives in those who use them.

Our goal is to craft a strategy for creating successful users. And that strategy is full of surprising, counter-intuitive, and astonishingly simple techniques that don’t *depend* on a massive marketing or development budget. Techniques typically overlooked by even the most well-funded, well-staffed product teams.

Every role is a key player in this game. Product development, engineering, marketing, user experience, support—*everyone* on the team. Even if that team is a start-up of one. Armed with a surprisingly overlooked science and a unique POV, we can reduce the role of luck. We can build sustainably successful products and services that rely not on unethical persuasive marketing tricks but on helping our users have deeper, richer experiences. Not just in the moments *while* they’re using our product but, more importantly, in the moments when they *aren’t*.

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## Pre-release comments about *Badass*

“Kathy Sierra wants you to understand this: If your users like themselves better when they use what you make, they’ll recommend it with a fervor money simply cannot buy. No one gets this more clearly than Sierra, and *Badass* is her way of helping you get it too.”

**Clay Shirky**

Author of *Here Comes Everybody* and *Cognitive Surplus*

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“In *Badass*, Kathy Sierra—one of our brightest business minds -- offers up a surprising insight into what makes certain offerings shine in a competitive marketplace. Believe it or not, many people don’t care how awesome your product is. Instead, they care about how awesome they are when they use your product. If you can tap into that motivation, you’ve got gold. This book shows you how.”

**Daniel H. Pink**

Author of New York Times bestsellers *To Sell is Human* and *Drive*

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“Do NOT let the breezy presentation of the ideas here convince you that the ideas themselves are lightweight. They’re not. Kathy Sierra has become an expert in where expertise comes from, and with in this book she’ll show you how to make your product’s users experts. Or, as she puts it, *badass*, which is the perfect label for Kathy and for this book.”

**Andrew McAfee**

Cofounder of MIT’s Initiative on the Digital Economy and coauthor of *The Second Machine Age*

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“Every once in a while, someone comes along who sees the world more clearly, and helps you to do the same. Every time I read Kathy Sierra, or hear her speak, I feel smarter, more thoughtful, and more caring. She has that gift of making everyone around her better. But what’s even more special, the “better” she helps you with is the ability to help other people get better! Genius!”

**Tim O’Reilly**

Founder and CEO of O’Reilly Media

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# Badass

Making Users Awesome

*Kathy Sierra*

Beijing • Cambridge • Farnham • Köln • Sebastopol • Tokyo

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by Kathy Sierra

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[TI]

This product **must** be a best seller. Or else.



### The Challenge

*Prologue*

- 1 Think Badass
- 2 The User Journey

How does he do that?  
Perfect every time.



### What Experts Do

- 3 Science of Badass
- 4 Building Skills
- 5 Perceptual Exposure

They said it would be easy.  
This can't be right...



### Help Them Move Forward

- 6 Remove Blocks
- 7 Progress + Payoffs

I never thought I'd  
be able to do this.  
It's amazing.



### Support Cognitive Resources

- 8 Design
  - 9 Reduce Cognitive Leaks
  - 10 Escape the Brain's Spam Filter
- Epilogue*

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**The Challenge**  
▼  
**Prologue**

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**Imagine this happened to you**

You **must** make a bestseller. **Or else.**

Imagine someone forced you to create a new bestselling product or service.

**What would you do?**

Oh, one don't count on a  
big marketing budget  
No PR meet a tour  
No fancy launch party



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**One more thing...**

You can't simply be the lowest-priced. This has to be about sustainable success.

The clock is ticking. Everything depends on whether you can make a sustainable bestselling product or service.

**Where do you start?**

**What questions do you ask yourself?**

Some companies equally priced, equally priced products. Why are some products far more successful than others?

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## What's different about the bestsellers?

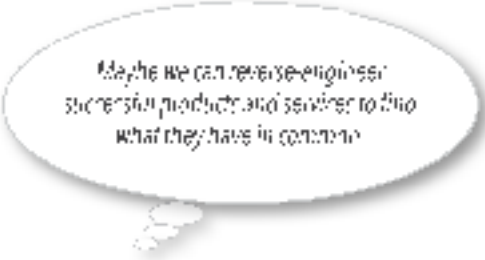


Our search for a formula begins with a question: why do *these* keep selling but *those* don't? What attributes do the bestsellers have that their competitors don't?

If we can't use marketing and lowest price, what else could fuel the success of bestselling products and services?

Something they *do*?  
Something they *are*?  
Something they *have*?

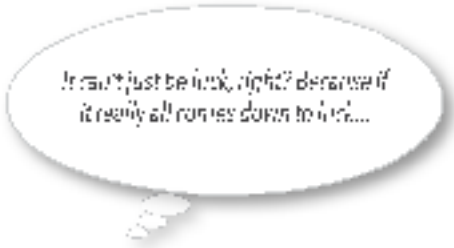
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Maybe we can reverse-engineer  
successful products and services to find  
what they have in common.

We need to find common attributes across products  
and services that are sustainably successful. There must  
be something we can use to make a formula...

***What's our big fear?***



It can't just be luck, right? Because if  
it really all comes down to luck...

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**Luck always plays a role**



***Our job is to shrink  
the role luck plays.***



We don't have the luxury of rolling  
the dice and crossing our fingers.  
We must increase our odds.

*When it's not luck or marketing  
at lowest prices... what is it?*

*The Challenge*  
▼  
*Prologue*

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## Does the best product win?

Does desirability increase as a function of quality?



We use "desirability" here to include not only what we want-but-don't-have, but also what we have-and-want-to-keep/replace.

When you remove luck, marketing, and price from the equation, is it quality that drives desirability?

Is it simply *best product wins*?

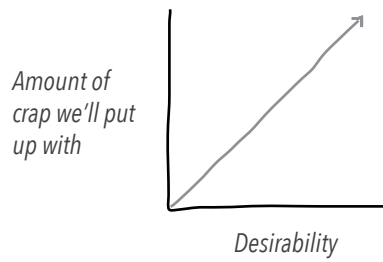
And if it's *quality* that drives desirability, who defines "quality" and "best" for a particular product or service? Is it based on objective measurements of craftsmanship and materials? Is it about speed or durability? Beauty? Strength? User-friendliness? How does our definition of quality shift, depending on the product type and market demographics?

No, there are too many examples where "best" is not the bestseller...

The Challenge  
▼  
Prologue

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**This is also true**



***Tolerance for problems is a function of desirability***

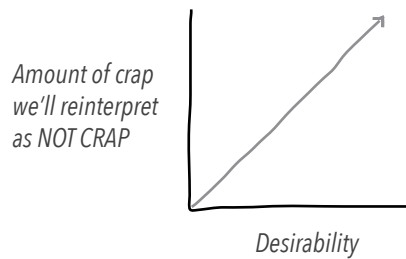
Even if we *could* define “quality” in some useful, objective way for a given product or service, if we *really* like something, we’re willing to accept flaws, problems, issues, even a higher price.

Quality can drive desirability.  
Desirability can drive (perceived) quality.

*And high desirability makes us willing to do more than just **tolerate** flaws...*

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## And this is also true



### Reframing problems as **not**-problems is a function of desirability

Desirability changes our perception of “flaws.” The more we love something, the more likely we are to not just *tolerate* problems but reinterpret them as *not* problems.

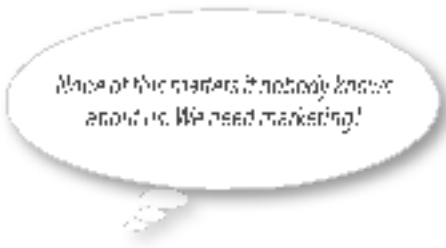
We minimize, downplay, deny.  
We spin bugs as features.

### **Product/service love is (nearly) blind.**

For our formula, we’ll have to look somewhere else. *Quality* (whatever that actually means) doesn’t guarantee *desirability*.

If **highest quality** isn’t our answer, where else can we look? If the goal is **desirability**, what makes that happen?

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None of the markets it nobody knows about us. We need marketing!

Just because we don't have a marketing budget doesn't mean we're not doing marketing. But when we look at sustainably successful products and services, the common attribute is not their marketing.

We can all name high-profile massive marketing failures (think: Windows B).

But our challenge explicitly rules out a big marketing budget. Out-spending the competition on marketing is not an option. but what's the alternative!

Let's ask some "friends"...



Here's what my "friends" and social media consultants say:





**A strategy based on out-friend or out-trend the competition is exhausting and fragile.**

What does an out-friend/out-trend strategy hope to “win”?

**The brand engagement arms race.**

They're on Pinterest? We need to be there. They've got YouTube videos? Let's do that too. And oh, look, yet *another* new social network where our brand needs a “presence.”

Trying to stay one *follower*, one *like*, one *meme*, ahead of competitors is *not* a robust, durable strategy. It is *not* a sustainable path to long-term success.

And is “engagement” *really* what we want?



And when you grow up, you'll get to **engage with brands!**

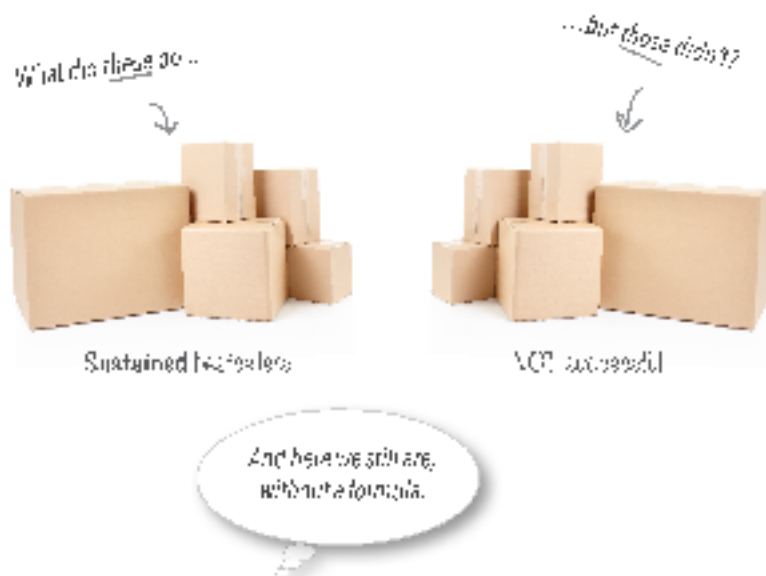
If it drains our energy to out-engage our competitors, imagine what all this brand engagement does to our users?

On their deathbed, nobody will say:

***"If only I'd engaged more with brands."***

If we can't out-spend, out-friend, or out-trend the competition, how else can we build desirability?

## Which brings us back to... how?



If we can't out-spend, out-friend, or out-trend the competition, what's left?

What does make a difference? What are the attributes of the long-term bestsellers?

**This. The bestsellers had this:**



Every moment of every day, somebody mentions something they *love-could-not-do-without*. Whether face-to-face or in blogs, reviews, discussions, tweets, comments, updates, texts, photos—people talk.

Sustained bestsellers are recommended.

***And it makes all the difference.***

In this book we mean “recommended” *literally*. When we say *word of mouth (WOM)* think *only* of honest, non-*incentivized* comments about either the product or the results the user got with it.

When people talk about a brand's contest to win an iPad, or a funny viral video, they're talking about the brand's *marketing*, and that's *not* the word of mouth we're looking for.

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## Word of Mouth

**92%** say they trust recommendations from friends and family above all other forms of advertising

**70%** say they trust online consumer reviews, the second most trusted recommendation above all other forms of advertising.

Source: Nielsen's Global Trust in Advertising report  
<http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/reports/2012/global-trust-in-advertising-and-brand-messages.html>

The answer begins here.  
True, *trusted* recommendations.

**Not** faked, bribed, or bought.

**Not** a brand masquerading as our “friend” on social media.

It doesn't have to be from a person we actually know in real-life, but it must be from someone (or something) we trust *more* than we trust a brand. And most of us still trust a total stranger on Amazon more than the “brand friend” we “like” on Facebook. (That we “liked” for a chance to win an iPod.)

Note: Amazon reviews aren't entirely trusted either, thanks to well-publicized stories of fake positive reviews by the author or fake negative reviews by a rival. *Even in the face of potentially fake reviews, we still trust them more than we trust the brand's own messages.*

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It's still not the Big Question: if a  
certain word of mouth that drives sustained  
success, what drives word of mouth?

Why do users recommend it these...



Sustained bestsellers

...but not those?



NOT successful

If the common attribute of sustained bestsellers is  
"recommended by trusted sources," the real question is:  
**what inspires those recommendations?**

The Challenge  
▼  
Prologue

## First, a pop quiz:

Which would you rather have a user *feel*?

Which of these would be a better predictor of sustained success?

Which of these feelings inspires more honest word of mouth?

*Imagine you were forced to pick just one\**



\*Yes, "it depends" but think of it as, "in general, this one would probably be the best reflection of success."



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