



# Hit Makers: How to Succeed in an Age of Distraction

*Derek Thompson*

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**Hit Makers: How to Succeed in an Age of Distraction** Derek Thompson  
**NATIONAL BESTSELLER**

"This book picks up where *The Tipping Point* left off." -- **Adam Grant, Wharton professor and *New York Times* bestselling author of ORIGINALS and GIVE AND TAKE**

Nothing "goes viral." If you think a popular movie, song, or app came out of nowhere to become a word-of-mouth success in today's crowded media environment, you're missing the real story. Each blockbuster has a secret history--of power, influence, dark broadcasters, and passionate cults that turn some new products into cultural phenomena. Even the most brilliant ideas wither in obscurity if they fail to connect with the right network, and the consumers that matter most aren't the early adopters, but rather their friends, followers, and imitators -- the audience of your audience.

In his groundbreaking investigation, *Atlantic* senior editor Derek Thompson uncovers the hidden psychology of why we like what we like and reveals the economics of cultural markets that invisibly shape our lives. Shattering the sentimental myths of hit-making that dominate pop culture and business, Thompson shows quality is insufficient for success, nobody has "good taste," and some of the most popular products in history were one bad break away from utter failure. It may be a new world, but there are some enduring truths to what audiences and consumers want. People love a familiar surprise: a product that is bold, yet sneakily recognizable.

Every business, every artist, every person looking to promote themselves and their work wants to know what makes some works so successful while others disappear. *Hit Makers* is a magical mystery tour through the last century of pop culture blockbusters and the most valuable currency of the twenty-first century--people's attention.

From the dawn of impressionist art to the future of Facebook, from small Etsy designers to the origin of Star Wars, Derek Thompson leaves no pet rock unturned to tell the fascinating story of how culture happens and why things become popular.

In *Hit Makers*, Derek Thompson investigates:

- The secret link between ESPN's sticky programming and the The Weeknd's catchy choruses
- Why Facebook is the world's most important modern newspaper
- How advertising critics predicted Donald Trump
- The 5th grader who accidentally launched "Rock Around the Clock," the biggest hit in rock and roll history
- How Barack Obama and his speechwriters think of themselves as songwriters
- How Disney conquered the world--but the future of hits belongs to savvy amateurs and individuals
- The French collector who accidentally created the Impressionist canon
- Quantitative evidence that the biggest music hits aren't always the best
- Why almost all Hollywood blockbusters are sequels, reboots, and adaptations
- Why one year--1991--is responsible for the way pop music sounds today
- Why another year --1932--created the business model of film
- How data scientists proved that "going viral" is a myth
- How 19th century immigration patterns explain the most heard song in the Western Hemisphere

## **Hit Makers: How to Succeed in an Age of Distraction Details**

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# From Reader Review Hit Makers: How to Succeed in an Age of Distraction for online ebook

## Bobbie says

What makes something in our culture popular? Thompson takes the question and rolls it around in his palms, kneading and stretching it with a range of different examples and stories and ideas.

Although he sometimes pulls the mixture too thin by adding extra characters (particularly in the second half) or fluffing out the page count (the Star Wars section feels overlong) this is an enjoyable pop science romp with an intellectual nod.

Thompson does a great job of taking a question for which everybody wants an answer ("how can you manufacture popularity?"), and doing something hard: hinting at a complicated network of answers that reflects reality, not giving the simplistic solution that a pop-biz writer would dig out.

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## Maddie says

I received an advance uncorrected proof of Hit Makers: The Science of Popularity in an Age of Distraction from a Goodreads giveaway.

I haven't made a habit of reading much non-fiction in the past, because I've often found it either too dry, or, if interesting, poorly argued. Hit Makers didn't suffer from either of these issues, in my opinion. The book was both engaging and well-written (though it did have a handful of errors that I hope will be corrected before it hits shelves).

The stories that Derek Thompson chose to include were compelling and served as strong support for his claims about popular culture and the genesis of hits. Ultimately, I wouldn't say that the book contained any earth-shattering revelations -- the conclusion seemed to be that hits are largely the result of luck and catching the right break at the right time -- but over all it was still a good read for the novel anecdotes and clear explanations of *why* popularity is so unpredictable.

The advance copy that I received listed the release price at \$28.00 USD, which is honestly much more than I would be willing to pay for it (or any other book of its type, really), especially because it's not the kind of book that I think anyone would be likely to read more than once. That said, it was entertaining and informative, which is what I think all books like it should strive to be. Hit Makers isn't a book that I probably would have picked up on my own, but I enjoyed reading it and would recommend it to anyone interested in pop culture and the "science" behind media trends.

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## ????? says

I started this book to come down after reading "The Gene", which was far more demanding and beefier than this one. "Hit Makers" is a good read, but not really all that educational. The book's primary question is "what makes a thing popular?", and I enjoyed the approach of the author.

Every chapter looks at something that became a hit, be it a song, a household product, a movie, etc. It's a good collection of anecdotes, well written as you'd expect from a professional journalist who writes of publications like the Atlantic.

In the end, while I enjoyed the reading of the book, at the end I felt like I just read a really long, nice article on the Atlantic. There's not much of a takeaway, except maybe for Raymond Loewy's MAYA (most advanced yet accessible) concept, which in itself isn't that mindblowing anyway. So if you were hoping that this book would reveal some secret formula or real wisdom as to how to make your product a huge hit, you'll be disappointed, but then that'd be a foolish motivation in the first place.

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## **Nelson Zagalo says**

Thompson writes very well, and is able to engage us in stories and facts. He's a journalist and uses this book to go much further than he could with just simple articles. You'll be surprised and gain a lot of insight into contemporary culture, which will make you think about what you like and dislike and why.

This is not the dry academic book, it uses very good storytelling and lots of techniques to maintain the reader interested. On the other side it encompasses too many perspectives, approaches and cultural production that makes it impossible to deliver the promise made by the title. There's really no science in these pages, but only lots of stories, causalities and correlations. Even if Thompson starts with determination and convincing us, bit by bit he acknowledges the impossibility of the task he purposed to achieve. Therefore it's up to you, the reader, to extract the best from it, and build your theories on how successes are made.

A more in depth review was made for my blog: <https://virtual-illusion.blogspot.pt/...>

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## **Bob says**

*Summary: Explores what makes a hit, and explodes some of the myths around hits such as the idea of something going "viral."*

How does something become a "hit?" Anyone creating a work of art, propounding an idea, promoting a candidate, launching a new product would like to know. Derek Thompson, a senior editor at The Atlantic, was curious about this phenomenon and out of his research come countless stories about everything from Brahms Lullaby to Fifty Shades of Grey.

Brahm's Lullaby is a case in point of the kinds of things Thompson explores in this book. It sounds very much like an Austrian folk melody--familiar elements with a gentle surprise and a "hook." Thompson observes that it has both the novel and the familiar and that this combination is crucial for a hit. Thompson explores the MAYA rule of designer Raymond Loewy, MAYA standing for Most Advanced Yet Acceptable. He implemented this principle on everything from mimeographs and trashbins to bullet-shaped train locomotives, Coldspot refrigerators, and Lucky Strike cigarette packs. Advanced yet familiar--and they all sold like crazy. Thompson goes on to show how this applies to music, movies like Star Wars, the rise of vampires and cable news, and phenomena like Taylor Swift and the laugh track on comedies.

The other crucial element is distribution. Brahm's Lullaby became a global phenomenon because of German

migrations to North America and elsewhere in the second half of the nineteenth century. Thompson explodes the myth of something going "viral." Instead, what often makes the difference is when a few figures who already have an audience promote something, millions here and then it takes off. And there is a hidden side of "dark broadcasters" whose unseen influence helped build the awareness of people like E. L. James of Fifty Shades fame. On the flip side, success is sometimes isolating the particular audience with an affinity to your product--homophily. What may be critical is knowing who are the friends of your audience. And sometimes, it is plain chaos, where Rock Around the Clock becomes the first rock 'n roll hit when a young boy, Peter Ford, buys the record, and a few months later through his father, Glenn Ford, plays the record for a director filming a movie titled Blackboard Jungle. The rest is history as a record (a "B" side!) that had gone nowhere suddenly became the anthem of a generation.

What makes this book fascinating is that Thompson is a prolific story gatherer, introducing us to everyone from an obscure, but wealthy Impressionist artist, Caillebotte, whose collection became the Impressionist canon, to the people who have launched our social media blockbusters. He explores the backstory behind Game of Thrones and Mickey Mouse and the evolution of reading from books to the News Feed. He also raises profound questions about the transforming influence of the little plates of glass we carry about with us that connect us to the world, that both inform us, and constantly transmit information about us to those trying to shape the next "hit."

It is here that I thought Thompson was at his most thought-provoking. He describes in the chapter "Interlude: 828 Broadway" visiting Chartbeat, that gave instantaneous feedback about reader behavior on websites. Downstairs from Chartbeat was the venerable Strand Bookstore. He asks "Does great art begin with feedback, or does it start with the opposite--a quiet space, devoid of distractions, where creators can turn the spotlight inward and make something mostly for themselves?" As both bibliophile and a new generation writer fluent with the online world, he wrestles with the implications for himself:

*"I've come to see that I need the feedback loop, the standing ovation and devastating silences that can greet an online article. But when I circle a pile of books at the Strand, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that perhaps the best writers also knew to just do the work and forget, for a moment, that anyone would ever read their reverie. They mounted a stage production in their minds, but just for them, something palatial and private, like a daydream" (pp. 280-281).*

The irony I'm struck with as I read Thompson's work is that excellence and originality in writing, art, music and innovation are not always what is rewarded. He observes the absence of good taste, and that the biggest hits are often re-boots of the familiar. The challenge today is that instantaneous nature of the feedback. Was it easier to practice artistic integrity when most likely you wouldn't be famous, a "hit," until after you were dead? You might struggle with poverty as you "did the work and forgot." But were you tempted so greatly to bend the work to the feedback loop? Maybe this has always been the tension in which artists live. Perhaps it is a good thing that there is an element of randomness in all this or we might all be tempted too greatly, and all art and endeavor be reduced to pursuing the "hit."

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## Andreea Chiuaru says

Una dintre c?r?ile la care o s? m? întorc mereu ca referin?? atunci când va trebui s? vorbeasc? despre lecturi care m-au inspirat. Pentru c?, de?i pe alocuri a? fi vrut-o ceva mai concins?, la final, am avut impresia c? absolut tot ce am aflat s-a legat frumos ?i cu sens. Recomand!

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## **BookOfCinz says**

Solid 3.5

This book sets out to answer two questions:

1. What is the secret to making products that people will like-in music, movies, television, and more across the vast landscape of culture?
2. Why do some products fail in the these marketplaces while similar ideas catch on and become massive hits?

For the most part two questions were not definitively answered because, those are two very ambitious questions for anyone to answer. However, the data was well presented, engaging, thought-provoking and informative.

As a digital marketer, I learned a lot from this book. I recommend anyone who is in marketing and advertising to give this book a read. Also, if you are curious at heart, you will love this book.

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## **Rose says**

I am utterly confused why this book is so highly rated. My current hypothesis is that it falls for the trap of popularity driving familiarity (and driving distribution) and thus more popularity...this theory of familiarity is one which he spends a good deal of time discussing and rehashing. After 2/3 of the book, I have not found a single aha moment and it has been a slog to even get this far. I have enjoyed other books in this genre (Outliers, Give & Take, etc.) so I was surprised I couldn't find enjoyment in this one. I think there are two things that are making it impossible for me to finish this book: (1) the author's writing style feels particularly obtuse (he writes about his process of writing this book) (2) there is no analysis - since he is covering a smattering of topics within one book, it just boils down to a disjointed collection of anecdotes and high-level overviews

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## **Reaz says**

The book started off interesting enough, but increasingly, my recurring thought was: "OK, I get it. I get it. Move on to the next point."

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## **Lori L (She Treads Softly) says**

Hit Makers: The Science of Popularity in an Age of Distraction by Derek Thompson is a very highly recommended examination of popularity of things and how and why they gained their status. This is an engrossing look at popularity. Thompson has a comfortable writing style that is full of anecdotes and examples. He creatively ties widely divergent topics together in a fascinating, entertaining format.

Nothing really "goes viral." There is a reason why a song, movie, book, app, etc. became popular. Thompson explores "the psychology of why people like what they like, the social networks through which ideas spread, and the economics of cultural markets." As he succinctly points out, people are both "neophilic - curious to discover new things - and deeply neophobic - afraid of anything that's too new. The best hit makers are gifted at creating moments of meaning by marrying new and old, anxiety and understanding. They are architects of familiar surprises." So, *Hit Makers* asks two questions: 1. What is the secret to making products that people like - in music, movies, television, books, games, apps, and more across the vast landscape of culture? 2. Why do some products fail in these marketplaces while similar ideas catch on and become massive hits?

Thompson covers a wide variety of pop cultural blockbusters ranging from and including Brahms lullaby, the impressionist canon (yeah, the Impressionists, as in painters), ESPN, Cheers and Seinfeld, Star Wars, Rock Around the Clock, Fifty Shades of Grey, Game of Thrones, Etsy, Facebook, the laugh track, Vampires, Disney Princesses, and much more. Even more interesting is how he ties so many different hits together to explain what they became hits. One principle that governs almost all hits is MAYA: Most Advanced Yet Achievable. "MAYA offers three clear lessons. First: Audiences don't know everything, but they know more than creators do. Second: To sell something familiar, make it surprising. To sell something surprising, make it familiar. Third: People sometimes don't know what they want until they already love it."

The incident that created the impressionist canon took me by surprise, and yet it makes perfect sense. Thompson shows how "the impressionist canon focuses on a tight cluster of seven core painters: Manet, Monet, Cézanne, Degas, Renoir, Pissarro, and Sisley - the Caillebotte Seven. When painter and collector Gustave Caillebotte donated his art collection upon his untimely death, his donation helped to create the impressionist canon. The power of repeated exposure, whether it is paintings that are exhibited or other things is a powerful tool in determining what is a hit.

What makes a song succeed? "Even at the dawn of the American music business, to make a song a hit, a memorable melody was secondary to an ingenious marketing campaign." Interesting, but clearly true.

I wanted to pump my fist and yell "Yes, this!" when Thompson points out, and rightly so, that "there is such a thing as too much familiarity. It's everywhere, in fact. It's hearing a catchy song for the tenth time in a row, watching a movie that is oh so predictably uncreative, or hearing a talented speaker use overfamiliar buzzword after buzzword. In fluency studies, the power of familiarity is discounted when people realize that the moderator is trying to browbeat them with the same stimulus again and again. This is one reason why so much advertising doesn't work: People have a built-in resistance to marketing that feels like it's trying to seduce them." I have experienced this many times over the years (mindset or grit, anyone?) Recently when the video for a women's conference kept repeated the name of the event throughout the video as a buzz word, all it did was annoy me and strengthen my determination to not attend.

This is specifically for readers. Many of you will understand: "When people read, they hear voices and see images in their head. This production is total synesthesia and something close to madness. A great book is a hallucinated IMAX film for one. The author had a feeling, which he turned into words, and the reader gets a feeling from those words - maybe it's the same feeling; maybe it's not. As Peter Mendelsund wrote in *What We See When We Read*, a book is a coproduction. A reader both performs the book and attends the performance. She is conductor, orchestra, and audience. A book, whether nonfiction or fiction, is an 'invitation to daydream.'"

Disclosure: My review copy was courtesy of the Penguin Publishing Group.



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## **Jordan Weissmann says**

This is just a really excellent pop science book. Thompson is a talented story teller and lovely writer who breezily explains the psychological and economic forces that shape what we like. It's wide-ranging; he uses the making of Star Wars, impressionist art, ESPN, Disney, 50 Shades of Gray, early Rock n' Roll, and much more to illustrate the academic theories the book explores. It's full of wonderful little insights that explain things like why CNN went so overkill on Trump coverage during the primaries, or why catchy speeches mirror good song writing. At the same time, it resists oversimplification in a really satisfying way. If you're interested in the business of culture, or really culture period, I'd give it a read.

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## **Robin Tierney says**

Many good case studies and thoughtful observations.  
My notes (not a review) follow.

Hit Makers:  
The Science of Popularity in an Age of Distraction

By Derek Thompson

Facebook has irreversibly changed news delivery and is the key news source today. Ad supported, so must find ways to catch and keep your attn enough to scroll through ads.

Reactivity: when ppl know their behavior is being watched, they change their behavior (and not only how they report it). FB watches readers without their explicit awareness that they are under surveillance. This reveals what ppl really want to read.

Facebook likes, shares and comments pour into an algorithm that is constantly reordering the feed to surface the most relevant stuff at the top. It creates somewhat of a modern personalized newspaper, a daily tabloid. It's a media juggernaut.

FB =some angry when learning FB manipulated News Feeds to make them see more positive or negative news. People who saw more positive posts contributed happier content. People who saw more negative stories adopted negative tone in their posts. Suggesting that moods can be contagious.

The data allows study of individual's aspirational vs. actual behavior.

Clickbait - 2 part headlines: "Wonder about/if you think....The answer will surprise you."  
FB in last year years developed strategies to reduce curiosity-gap headlines.

McD found healthy options lure more people inside, but many of them order even more of the unhealthy choices.

What people don't know they want, til offered. Like iPhone. And also FB and Fox News.  
Superpowered media companies. Really unique categories, not just brands.

Book authors cannot observe their readers. No feedback loop. Great Gatsby was denounced a dud, but fans bought it.

Now a revolution in attn.

Good to share, downside less (critical) thinking on own.

Noephilia more upsides than neophobia. Learn.

MAYA: music for a more advanced audience is not debut album.

No printed books in 1400, no public museums in 1700, no movie theaters 1900, no radio news programs before 1920s, Before 1960s, high-grossing movies based on books.

Cheaper music tech gave access to more artists, including black talents.

In 2014, the top 1 percent of bands and solo artists earned 77% of all revenue from recorded music, and 10 bestselling tracks commanded 82% more of the market than in the previous decade.

The number of indie bookstores is up 35% since 2009.

Both empires and indies can be stronger than ever.

Merchandising...of fairy tales:

\*\* Disney owns now only animated movies of animals and princesses that made it famous, also Star Wars, Marvel Comics, Pixar....operates ESPN and ABC with partnership stakes in A&E and Hulu...owns 8 of the 10 most popular amusement parks in the world. Walt Disney, though, spent every penny on his next film in the 1920s. Kay Kamen (Herman Samuel Kominetsky) Baltimore, Russian emigre, hs dropout, juvenile penitentiary in teens, selling mink hats in Nebraska, unattractive but successful salesman, in 1920s, specialized in developing products based on movies, 1932 saw Mickey Mouse cartoon and recognized the mouse could be a star beyond movies, called walt and Roy: "let me sell your cartoon mouse." He suggested move MM out of dime store into dept stores, which was where consumers were moving. Signed to license Disney character merchandising worldwide. Hollywood regarded toys as ads for movies. Kamen saw the money in merchandising. Biggest: Mickey Mouse watch, which debuted Chicago World Fair in 1933.

Those Licensing profits enabled D to make Snow White. Second grossing sound film, and merch (coloring bks, caramels) made far more. "Industrialized fantasy."

Goebbels gave Hitler 18 mm films

Disney also recognized TV as movie theater in every home that would also promote movies. Stroke of genius: sold TV show to network only if invested in his park too. 1952 ABC smallest network invested in ? of the park Disney Land. Disneyland show first ABC show in the year's top 10. One episode previewed 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, 2nd highest gross movie 1952. Leveraged postwar baby boom. Theme park opened 1955. ABC later sold shares back...1995 D bought ABC.

Bought Star Wars and Marvel and produced lavish familiar surprises. - new chapters of old stories.

Lion King musical.

Brand empire.

Indies - internet frees from traditional gatekeepers. New channels. Free distribution hubs.

Network is power.

=====

Brahms lullaby key elements of repetition and then gentle surprise. Borrowed a popular Austrian folk tune

and bedecked it with concert hall grandeur. His lullaby was an instant success not because it was incomparably original, but because it offered a familiar melody in an original setting. Most people are simultaneously neophilic - curious to discover new things - and neophobic - afraid of anything too new. Popularity spread over years back tech, lack of technology. No radio signals. No digital.

What is the secret to making products that people like - music, movies, TV, books, games, apps?

Why some cultural products fail and other ideas catch on?

Instagram: art and gave early versions to San Fran tech tycoons - influencers, who posted several I photos on Twitter. Elite social network.

Ben-Hur celebrity audience premiere 1959. Hollywood record most expensive production budget and most expensive marketing campaign, became second-highest-grossing movie in history at that time, behind Gone with the Wind.

Claude Monet The Japanese Footbridge blue bridge over emerald green...NGA even kids recognize.

Gustave Caillebotte 1897 submitted impressionist The Floor Scrapers to the Academy of Fine Arts in Paris. Acclaimed, but Monet is who we know today. Monet same exhibit 1976. French govt initially refused donation of his artworks. C didn't try to sell, though new wealth created space for new tastes like Impressionism. So, lacked exposure. And Monet and Renoir produced more....M 2,500, R 4,000 works.

Mathematician George David Birkhoff proposed formula for writing poetry.

People are born average and die unique.

Humans prefer own faces.

Some landscape details seem universally appealing across backgrounds and cultures: clean-looking water, mountains divided by snaking rivers and forests cut by trails that slink away toward a vanishing point. These details signify something human ancestors would have loved to see: a navigable path through the chaos of nature.

Radio airplay products of testing and distribution strategies that ran on sheet music and shoe leather.

SPotify playlist by Napster cofounder Sean Parker credited with launching Lorde's "Royals" 2013.

Tastemakers. Call Me Maybe didn't take off for a year until Justin Bieber praised it on Twitter.

HitPredictor (iHeart Media, the largest owner of radio stations in the US), predicts based on playing a hook from a new song to online audience 3 times -- to capture the catchiness in a vacuum, numerical rating. But: every year catchy songs don't become hits.

2016 politics changed. Candidates Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio had the elite party support but flamed out.

Trump spent the least on advertising, outrageous statements kept him top of the news cycle and exposure resulted in landslide primary. ...he'd earned \$3 billion in free media, more than his rivals combined.

Gatekeepers lost power with so much 24/7 media.

Maybe big flat screens helped re: exposure.

Rating game: think of a movie, count 7 things you like, the rating typically goes down. Even tho thinking of reasons to like it? Disfluency - the less is more effect. When asked to m= name more positives, harder to think about and less comfortable feeling transferred to the object of their thinking.

Raymond Loewy, father of modern design, French orphan 1919 shop in AMerica: sports car modern train, Greyhound bus, Coca-Cola fountain, Lucky Strike cigarette pack. Art made a comeback in the 1920s, people began waning not just practical but beautiful. Mimeograph machine 1929 commented control looked like

mold on tired Gorgonzola, redesigned. Cars, like the Studebaker Coupe - long angular headlights like eyes. Designer laureate of mid-century America. Even NASA's Skylab space station. Recognized the genius of egg. He designed to match people's habits. Talked to housewives about Armour meats. Talked to passengers on trains for months. MAYA most advanced yet acceptable. Balance surprise and comfort.

Artwork: ppl like a challenge if they think they can solve it.

Tetris most popular video game tetra and tennis. Then Minecraft

Sweden is Silicon Valley of pop music technology: dozens of number one singles by Backstreet Boys, Katy Perry, Taylor Swift, exporting catchy melodies to the world since ABBA debuted 1970s. Max Martin super-producer. Amazing song doctor.

Familiar melodious with smart fresh new instrumentation.

Take a spoken phrase, repeat it at a common interval, the spoken words can evolve to sound like music. Give a random phrase a key, time signature, syncopation and rhythm.

Spotify accidentally discovered people like 'new' playlists that include songs they already heard/liked.

Brains: earworms, jingles. Sequence of repetition and variation. Novelty burst. Reflected in global music patterns.

Bye Bye Miss American Pie.

Call and response MLK speeches, songs...ppl remember songs for their chorus. Hook in speeches too.

Increased simplicity of American rhetoric is not dumbing down, but aim to reach broader audience, so emulating other populist forms of mass entertainment, like music.

Repetition has made aphorisms sound true. "if it doesn't fit, you must acquit....an apple a day keeps the doctor away.

Dale Carnegie: Arguments: If you lose it, you lose it; and if you win it, you lose it. Happiness doesn't depend on outward conditions. It depends on inner conditions..

To be interesting, be interested.

Pitch of the voice, rhythms - all speech is composed of microscopic melodies and undiscovered songs.

EXPOSURE (hustle)

REPETITION

Shared experience - goosebumps

Speeches -- Yes we can, repetition of epistrophe. Speechmaking tricks: rhetorical inversion: It's not the size of the dog in the fight; it's size of the fight in the dog,

AB:BA

Shakespeare and George Lucas (American Graffiti, Star Wars, wrote scripts by hand on lined paper) both master assemblers of old allusions. Not original.

Re-watch movie like Harry Potter, The Shawshank Redemption for the details.

Anthropologists study rituals, psychologists study patterns of behavior.

Sharing...art...feel loved, like Brahms, nostalgia and goosebumps, warm us up.

Myths: Lucas read Joseph Campbell who said most famous stories share same basic narrative arc - a monomyth with Moses, Jesus, Buddha and Beowulf (and now, comic book heroes).

Lucas described Star Wars as a western set in outer space. Empire Vs. rebel epic turned into space fantasy. Plus Flash Gordon.

Some elements of popular narrative patterns: nostalgia, goosebumps, cliffhangers, enchant, hero's journey has empathy and challenge and transcends.

Superhero, apocalypse, vampires (based on myth believed to be true), stop unstoppable horror. Rom com: 3 acts.

Cake: salted caramel. Picasso. A great creator knows the rules and can find the sweet-spot exceptions.

Slipstream.

Age 33 when many stop listening to new artists on Spotify.

Women characters less prevalent and lower status. Bias: remain loyal, fidelity. Double standard.

Now some revolutionary ideas mainstream in 20 years like gay marriage.

Less legible font made people more careful readers (Moses take on ark...when Noah)  
Attention limited.

Popular names. For 100s of years, first names traditions vs. fashions.  
And clothes were costumes frozen in time.

Laver's Law: Indecent (10 years before its time), Shameless (5), Daring (1 year before), Smart (current fashion), Dowdy 1 year after, Hideous, 10, Ridiculous 20, Amusing 30, Quaint 50, Charming 70, Romantic 100 years after, Beautiful 150 years.

Laugh track conceived in controversy, became a social norm, and is dying a cliché.

Art dates to 50,000 BCE, cave paintings, pictograms, but then 10s of 1000s of years for humans to develop anything approaching an alphabet. Cuneiform in Sumeria and hieroglyphics in Egypt both date to about 3000 BCE.

Language evolved from ideograms - shapes represent ideas, to phonetics, with letters representing sounds. Literacy rates France not cross 50% til 1800s.

Gutenberg press.

1990s Cambrian explosion of communications technology. First text 1992 "Merry Christmas and 8 years later half the country owned a cell phone. 1995 60% of US adults said never heard of the internet. Snapchat 2011. Modern pictograms - emojis.

So now changing fashions for talking and what talking means.

Teenager - emerged as powerful influencer in mid-20th century. Confluence of trends in education,

economics and technology. Rise of powerful culture, independence, empowered by cars to mobile tech (text to Tinder). Could afford logo clothes too. Tv shows teenage stereotypes and aspirational characters. Teens became the market's neophiles, the group most likely to accept a new musical sound, clothing fashion or technology trend.

\*\* Rock Around the Clock, Bill Haley (half-blind self-taught guitarist) comets...1952 Crazy Man, Crazy. 1953 Rock Around the Clock, Essex label's founder ripped up the music in front of Haley when rejected, so to Decca. But Decca required them to record 13 Women song about man who is custodian of a harum after H-bomb destroys the world. Rock was B-side, forgotten, until a teenager bought it and his dad Glenn Ford when filming Blackboard Jungle, director Richard Brooks visited, wanted a jump-jive song reflecting the generation to kick off the movie, 1955 kids dancing in theater. Chaos theory in play.

Mona Lisa fame assisted by a thief...1911 newspapers, missing a few years, then Marcel Duchamp made replica with mustache L.H.O.O.Q., pronounced letters in French is dirty homophone.

Ads movie studios in 1980 spent 20 cents for every \$1 earned at box office, now 60 cents.

In 1996 none of 10 biggest films were sequels or superhero movies and films based on comics accounted for just .69 of the box office. In each year so far this decade, most of the 10 top-grossing films were sequels, prequels or reboots. 2016 releases, 4 superhero films (Captain America: Civil War, Deadpool, Batman v. Superman and X-Men Apocalypse accounted for 29% of total box office. Lesson from old serials or modern TV: if you find a story that clicks, keep producing new episodes.

\*\* 50 Shades of Grey...viral myth. Twilight. FanFiction. Twilight recast protagonist Edward as a dork yet dominant sex god...raunchy motifs, collage artist like George Lucas, unusual assemblage to create story both surprising and familiar. A FanFiction.net fan recast Edward as CEO with flair for bondage...retitled 50 Shades of Grey by E.L. James. Broadcast and reached a lot of people, not viral / infectious. Author maintains a distinction: that it's not viral if people choose to embrace the idea. DivaMom and other evangelized the e-book. Not thru newsp, but less traditional and still powerful channels. Vintage agent following, relaunch as paperback. 50 Shades Darker and Freed. Best Romsnce nominated 2011 based on do many Goodreads reviews. Morning show interviews. Lots of nonreaders bought and discussed it. Then WSJ and NYT praised its success. Cultural phenomenon. Sex is about power.

Cholera, bacterial, London greatest city in world and massive cesspool of disease, 1854 outbreak, John Snow interviewed hundreds of sic and healthy families, plotted cases on map. Not infected by miasma - invisible airborne poisons. Traced epidemic...beer offer immunity? -- no, because water was boiled in fermentation process. It was not air or spreading between households, but water source -- same pump.

Helps to have celebrities tweet, like Justin Bieber..

Ratings experiment - inverted top popular songs, buyers downloaded them. Popularity begets pop. Digital world: everyone can see what the world's watching. Pokemon GO.

Getattention and get people talking.

Social groups, share qualities but starting with neighborhood.

Moonies. Cult...united in opposition.

Tinder creator SMU Dallas, asked sororities and then frats to DL app. Do not disappoint the girls, because they're waiting for you!

People like to share what's weird about themselves. Not what's ordinary.

Prognosticate

Convergence (apple 2007)

Rupert Murdoch insisted dad adapt Brit TV show Pop Idol.

Warren Buffett Cassandra housing crash.

Cable TV, reality TV

AMC go for quality, Matthew Weiner The Sopranos.

Find an original voice, compelling characters that audience wants to wear their sin - superheroes and antiheroes - extra-ordinary.

Focus groups might have told Lena Dunham's Girls be nicer to friends. So HBO doesn't. The Sopranos and Six Feet Under were two dark strange explicit for broadcast. Game of Thrones. Docs like Unlocking the Cage.

Mad Men enabled AMC to pick up Breaking Bad, one of TV's most acclaimed shows.

Betting. Calculated risks.

Cable networks are brands.

New Business.

People flocked to cheaper newsp with shorter pluckier stories, like the Daily Mail sensation in Great Britain when debuted 1896. Tabloid ethos. Affected venerable papers like Washington Post and NYT, more sports and blood to keep up with readers' tastes.

Gallup interest in reader interest gauging began 1928. Believed readers lied in surveys. Determined front page hard news not more popular than inside features, women most read style and beauty pictures, most men liked the cartoon on front page.

TV supplanted np, and they had to compete even harder.

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## **Anton says**

Solid 4+ nonfiction. Key messages are quite simple - but very enjoyably delivered. Definitely recommended

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## **Leo Walsh says**

"Hit Makers" by Derek Thompson is an excellent, Malcolm Gawell-like book that examines what makes a hit. Using examples from many fields, from technology to "Star Wars" and pop music, Thompson settles on early 20th century Raymond Loey's formulation as best: We like things that are Most Advanced Yet Approachable: MAYA.

He shows how George Lucas used MAYA, creating "Star Wars," a mashup of western, "Buck Rogers," WW II fighter film, pulp sci-fi and comic books. What's more, Lucas consciously took Joseph Campbell's idea of the 'monomyth,' that every myth is essentially a retelling of the same story, and used that to create the plot.

Thompson goes on to apply the MAYA concept to dozens of other fields. What's more, unlike many writers

of the self-help books like this, he also acknowledges the role of luck. For despite being great and a perfect example of MAYA, a work may fizzle due to a lack of network. He uses many examples garnered from the tech industry (Instagram and dating sites) to illustrate.

Most intriguing, though, is how Thompson destroys the notion of "viral marketing." Since there are many marketing gurus who purport to teach the secret of creating a viral marketing campaign. They sell the idea that anyone can become viral. They sell the idea of the digital utopia where one person infects the people he or she knows, saying "Dude, you have got to read this new book." This is the one-to-one (or many-to-many) theory of virality. When in truth, research shows that things that become viral do so because an already popular figure tweets praise for a book, song, movie, post, etc. So despite the hype, web 2.0 is just like the pre-web. Marketing is still a one-to-many affair, with celebs with a huge following creating the "virality."

All told, a fun and thought-provoking pop-science/ self-help/ marketing read. Four-stars.

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### **Mike Zickar says**

The book is a melange of interesting ideas and threads that, I felt, lacked a grand unifying structure. It was as if the author got excited about uncovering a new idea and left the thread that he was pursuing to go down another path.

An interesting read despite this criticism. . .

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