

Entrepreneur & Business Memoirs and Biographies

BY JESSICA TEISCH

O PRAH, MARTHA STEWART, STEVE JOBS—more than household brands, these business tycoons-cum-celebrities also represent lifestyles. Apple? Think different. Nike? Just do it. Home Depot? Do it yourself. Starbucks? To inspire and nurture the human spirit—one person, one cup, one neighborhood at a time.

Business books can be dry. But the entrepreneur memoir or biography, while providing a business education, of sorts, can also give insight into how entrepreneurs think, create, and build lifestyle and consumer brands. Some, like Virgin's Richard Branson's *Losing My Virginity*, speak to larger-than-life adventures. Others, like Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz's memoir, share distinct strategies for creating specific consumer experiences.

Focusing on the mid- to late-20th and 21st centuries (no Andrew Carnegie here), we've highlighted a few standout memoirs and biographies. They're both for the budding and the experienced entrepreneur, as well as for the reader who enjoys what are, at heart, human-interest stories.

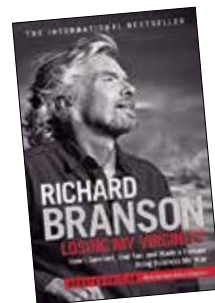
Memoirs

Losing My Virginity

How I Survived, Had Fun, and Made a Fortune Doing Business My Way

By Richard Branson (1998)

Branson's motto is, "Screw it, let's do it," and that is exactly how he's lived his life and run his various Virgin-branded companies: Virgin Music, Virgin Atlantic Airways, Virgin Cola, Virgin Megastores, and scores more—from bridal wear to financial services. Whether you like him or hate him, there's no doubt that Branson is one of the great business gurus of our time. A visionary, he started companies despite entrenched—but significantly, complacent—competition. This colorful, unconventional autobiography follows Branson's journey, from his en-



trepreneurial ventures as a dyslexic high school dropout through his 40s. It also chronicles his flamboyant life: his adventures in hot air balloons and travel, his love life, his spectacular successes and failures. “More than any other element,” he writes, “fun is the secret of Virgin’s success”—a principle, he writes, business schools fail to teach. *Finding My Virginity* (2017), Branson’s second memoir, covers his previous two decades, including his personal adventures, his hobnobbing, and his charitable endeavors to the creation of the commercial spaceflight service, Virgin Galactic.

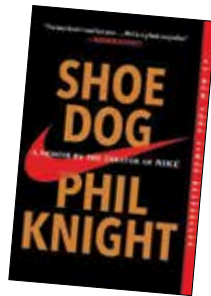
Shoe Dog

A Memoir by the Creator of Nike

By Phil Knight (2016)

More than once the whole enterprise looked like an impending failure. In this *New York Times* best seller, Knight chronicles his rise as Nike founder and board chairman.

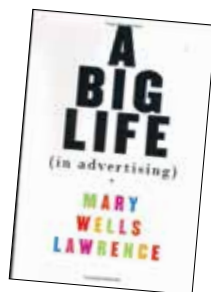
Today Nike’s annual sales exceed \$30 billion, but, in 1962, the then 24-year-old entrepreneur, just out of business school, had a “crazy idea” with a simple mission: import low cost, high quality running shoes from Japan. Borrowing \$50 from his father, Knight started selling the shoes out of his car. He writes of his risks and triumphs, personal struggles and setbacks, and competition and score settling. Knight also tells an incredible story about his partnership with legendary track coach Bill Bowerman. Not a business book per se, *Shoe Dog* is, rather, a candid, heartfelt memoir with insights about entrepreneurship. “It reads like pure adventure story, boys facing steeper and steeper challenges and finding ways through, often by the skin of their teeth,” noted *Complex*. “As Knight collects the misfits and oddballs who become the core of his growing company, *Shoe Dog* is more like *The Lord of the Rings* than a typical mogul memoir.”



A Big Life in Advertising

By Mary Wells Lawrence (2002)

Lawrence, the first female president of an ad agency, as well as the first female CEO of a company listed on the New York Stock Exchange, was a true visionary. Her memoir relives the sexy, thrilling days on Madison Avenue between the late 1950s and the 1980s, when agencies fought to represent cigarettes, T.W.A., and Alka-Seltzer and when girls were copywriters, not CEOs. Lawrence, who started as a copywriter and rose to become the head of her iconic ad agency, Wells, Rich, Greene, provides a behind-the-scenes look at some of her



successful ad campaigns, including “Plop, plop, fizz, fizz,” “Flick your Bic,” “Raise your hand if you’re Sure,” and “I Love New York.” She also sketches her clients and competitors, chronicles the progress (or lack thereof) achieved by women in advertising, and depicts her personal life, including her marriage to the president of Braniff International Airways (“the end of the plain plane”) and unconventional mothering. Charming and audacious, the “result is that most unusual of books—an entertaining business memoir” (*New Yorker*). See also *Mad Women: The Other Side of Life on Madison Avenue in the '60s and Beyond* (2012) by Jane Maas, the former Ogilvy & Mather creative director; and David Ogilvy’s *Confessions of an Advertising Man* (1963).

Personal History

By Katharine Graham (1997)

♦ PULITZER PRIZE

She ruled Washington’s political and media scene for decades, and the family newspaper she headed, the *Washington Post*, made and broke policies and politicians. In this political and business memoir about the newspaper business, Graham reveals her “personal history”: her mother’s narcissism; her wealthy father’s purchase of the bankrupt paper in 1933, and her own aspirations as a young journalist; her marriage to a poor, but ambitious, Supreme Court clerk; her rise in Washington social circles and her husband’s takeover of the newspaper; and his abuse, affair, and suicide that left Graham in charge of the *Washington Post*, which published excerpts of the Pentagon Papers and broke the story of Watergate when most women ran their households and little else. “Katharine Graham turns out to have had not two lives but four,” reported the *New York Times*, “and the story of her journey from daughter to wife to widow to woman parallels to a surprising degree the history of women in this century. It’s also a wonderful book.”

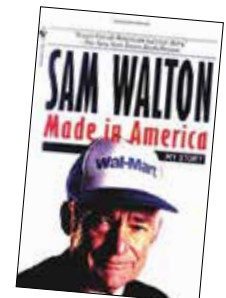


Sam Walton

Made in America: My Story (1992)

By Sam Walton with John Huey

“Here is an extraordinary success story about a man whose empire was built not with smoke and mirrors, but with good old-fashioned elbow grease,” wrote the *Detroit Free Press*. There’s perhaps no better rags-to-riches story than that of Sam Walton, who—despite his phenomenal success with Wal-Mart—never forgot his humble roots. Born in 1918 in Oklahoma and raised in



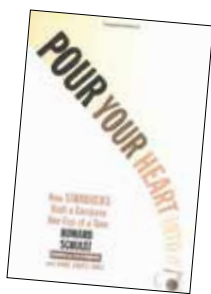
Missouri during the Great Depression, an era that greatly affected his outlook on life, Walton worked to help his family make ends meet. After college and military service, he entered the retail business, opening up a Five and Dime in a small Arkansas town, with the intent of offering lower prices and greater variety and of cutting his own costs. Learning from other businesses, Walton started building an empire of variety stores in small towns, eventually opening the first Wal-Mart in 1962. Twenty-three years later, *Forbes* magazine named Walton the “richest man in America.” Both modest and candid, as he explains the “rules of the road” both in the heartland and in Wall Street, Walton relates his own all-American success story.

Pour Your Heart into It

How Starbucks Built a Company One Cup at a Time

By Howard Schultz with Dori Jones Yang (1997)

In 1981, Schultz, then a general manager for a coffee manufacturer, visited one of his clients, a small coffee bean shop in Seattle called Starbucks. That meeting initiated his love affair with the company, which eventually led to his purchase of it. Here, Schultz offers tips on how to run a company, as well as recounting his hard-won efforts at rounding up investors, taking gambles on new products, catering to both employees and investors, and creating what we now identify as the Starbucks subculture and experience. The memoir is chatty and down to earth, and “by offering a detailed account of how Starbucks captured the psyche of its audience, Schultz reveals a purely American truism: If you can capture the imagination of your audience, you have a winner” (*USA Today*). See also Schultz’s *Onward: How Starbucks Fought for Its Life without Losing Its Soul* (2007), which chronicles his return as CEO of Starbucks and recounts what happened after 2007.



Further Reading

SHARK TALES: HOW I TURNED \$1000 INTO A BILLION DOLLAR BUSINESS | BARBARA CORCORAN (2001)

IDEA MAN: A MEMOIR BY THE COFOUNDER OF MICROSOFT | PAUL ALLEN (2011)

GRINDING IT OUT: THE MAKING OF MCDONALD’S | RAY KROC WITH ROBERT ANDERSON (1977)

THE MARY KAY WAY: TIMELESS PRINCIPLES FROM AMERICA’S GREATEST WOMAN ENTREPRENEUR | MARY KAY ASH (1984, 2008)

JACK: STRAIGHT FROM THE GUT | JACK WELCH, JOHN A. BYRNE, MIKE BARNICLE (2005)

BUILT FROM SCRATCH: HOW A COUPLE OF REGULAR GUYS GREW THE HOME DEPOT FROM NOTHING TO \$30 BILLION | BERNIE MARCUS AND ARTHUR BLANK (1999)

I LOVE CAPITALISM!: AN AMERICAN STORY | KEN LANGONE (2018)

IACOCCA: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY | LEE IACOCCA WITH WILLIAM NOVAK (1984)

RESTAURANT MAN | JOE BASTIANICH (2012)

Biographies

The Everything Store

Jeff Bezos and the Age of Amazon

By Brad Stone (2013)

◆ FINANCIAL TIMES AND GOLDMAN SACHS BUSINESS BOOK OF THE YEAR

Amazon’s founder, Jeff Bezos, was inspired by Walmart’s example of delivering low prices to customers and profits to shareholders by wringing every possible dime out of suppliers. Stone, who covered Amazon for many years for *Businessweek*, has crafted an impressive story about “the merchandiser’s dream of the everything store—a store with infinite selection.” He tells a rather traditional tale about monopolistic retail by a wildly ambitious, ruthless man whose large, consumer-oriented bets transformed the industry. In so doing, he exposes many of the fascinating, conflict-ridden details of Amazon’s corporate culture and complex distribution and shipping operations—while omitting commentary on the fallout that his e-commerce revolution has had on book publishing and bookstores overall. Stone also provides a thorough look at Bezos’s childhood and influences. “If you aren’t up to speed on the Bezos playbook,” wrote *Fortune*, “then you aren’t current with what it takes to start or run a business.” See also Richard L. Brandt’s *One Click: Jeff Bezos and the Rise of Amazon.com* (2011).

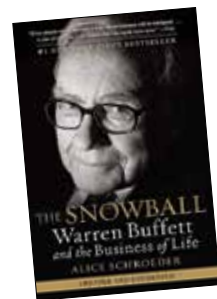


The Snowball

Warren Buffett and the Business of Life

By Alice Schroeder (2008)

Buffett, the Oracle of Omaha and the mastermind behind the success of the nearly mythical Berkshire Hathaway, is one of the world’s richest men (a reputed \$62 billion upon the book’s publication). But what makes him tick? Even as a child, he was fascinated with money and numbers, saving enough from a paper route to buy a farm while still in his teens. Now, despite being a billionaire many times over, Buffett still lives in the modest Omaha home he bought more than 50 years ago. Schroeder paints as complete a picture of the obsessive, private finance titan as readers are likely to get. “Whenever my version [of events] is different from somebody else’s, use the less flattering version,” Buffett told Schroeder. And in *The Snowball*, she obliges. “What [Schroeder] delivers is the portrait of a middle-American Midas with enough

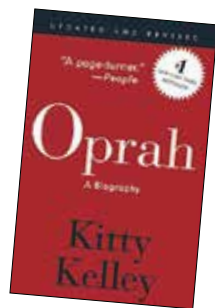


anxiety about parents to rival Hamlet's" wrote the *Houston Chronicle*. "Her tendency to psychologize is the one notable flaw in what is otherwise an excellent and highly enjoyable look at the business titan." (★★★★ Jan/Feb 2009) See also Roger Lowenstein's *Buffett: The Making of an American Capitalist* (1995).

Oprah

By Kitty Kelley (2010)

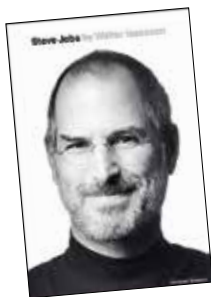
This one is more personal dish than business memoir, but it's so entertaining we thought we'd include it. Kelley, the doyenne of unauthorized celebrity biographers, dismantles the near-untouchable media mogul and philanthropist Oprah Winfrey, as she delves into her poverty-stricken childhood (some of the tales eyebrow-raising), her tumultuous relationships, her battles with weight, her controlling persona, and her vanity. Much of Kelley's muckraking rehashes Oprah's sexual abuse, her adolescent pregnancy, and the nature of her close relationship with Gayle King. Kelley, who relied on past interviews and conducted her own (though not with Oprah herself) also claims to know Oprah's biological father's identity. "This coup, the only real 'Gotcha!' in Ms. Kelley's *Oprah*, is the kind of reportorial discovery on which Ms. Kelley has built her giant-killer reputation," noted the *New York Times*. Gossipy, salacious, and scathing, Kelley's book is what we might expect: "a compendium of minutiae ... some of it is delightful," wrote the *New Yorker*. "Kelley's most plausible insight is that Oprah has, from the beginning of her career, been propelled by a nearly messianic belief in herself." Fact or fiction? We'll let the reader decide.



Steve Jobs

By Walter Isaacson (2011)

"Jobs's genius could be very hard on the people around him," wrote *Time*, "and Isaacson is not afraid to say so." Jobs—who revolutionized personal computing, music, digital animation, phones, and more, but who could be idiosyncratic, excessive, and cruel—craved perfection. He chose Isaacson as his biographer, knowing that the author would depict him warts and all. Isaacson conducted more than 40 interviews with Jobs, as well as hundreds more with friends, family, colleagues, and competitors (including a particularly juicy session with Bill Gates) to depict Jobs's career and personal life. The portrait is at times unflattering, particularly when it comes to Jobs's cruel treatment of



colleagues and the early denial of a daughter he had in his 20s. But despite his faults, Isaacson concludes that Jobs—by connecting science, technology, and engineering to the arts—was "the greatest executive of our era, the one most certain to be remembered a century from now." (★★★★ Jan/Feb 2012) See also *Becoming Steve Jobs: The Evolution of a Reckless Upstart into a Visionary Leader* by Brent Schlender and Rick Tetzeli (2015) and *iWoz: Computer Geek to Cult Icon: How I Invented the Personal Computer, Co-Founded Apple, and Had Fun Doing It* by Steve Wozniak and Gina Smith (2006).

Mademoiselle

Coco Chanel and the Pulse of History

By Rhonda K. Garelick (2014)

French fashion designer Gabrielle Bonheur "Coco" Chanel ruled Parisian haute couture for half a century. How did a orphaned peasant girl become a global icon of luxury and cultural royalty? Garelick argues that Chanel used her charm, ambition, and body to attract the attention of wealthy and powerful admirers (including an English businessman, a Romanov heir, and a Nazi officer). Early on, these men helped bankroll her millinery shop and then aided her growing fashion empire. Garelick chronicles Coco's relationships (marrying well always eluded her), her controlling personality, and her politics. She courted the Third Reich even while the Jewish Wertheimer family held majority ownership of her wildly successful fragrance Chanel No. 5. Garelick argues that Coco "absorbed and filtered elements of European history that she discovered through her social and erotic encounters," including Fascism, and "transformed these filaments of history into her designs." "Garelick paints a detailed, wry and nuanced portrait of a complicated woman that leaves the reader ... blissfully mesmerized and confounded by the reality of the human spirit" (*Washington Post*). See also Axel Madsen's *Chanel: A Woman of Her Own* (1993) and Justine Picardie's *Coco Chanel: The Legend and the Life* (2009).



Further Reading

ELON MUSK: TESLA, SPACEX, AND THE QUEST FOR A FANTASTIC FUTURE | ASHLEE VANCE (2015)

FRONT ROW: ANNA WINTOUR: WHAT LIES BENEATH THE CHIC EXTERIOR OF VOGUE'S EDITOR IN CHIEF | JERRY OPPENHEIMER (2004)

JUST DESSERTS: THE UNAUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHY OF MARTHA STEWART | JERRY OPPENHEIMER (1997)

BARBIE AND RUTH: THE STORY OF THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS DOLL AND THE WOMAN WHO CREATED HER | ROBIN GERBER (2009)

EMPIRE STATE OF MIND: HOW JAY-Z WENT FROM STREET CORNER TO CORNER OFFICE | ZACK O'MALLEY GREENBURG (2011)

MICHAEL JACKSON, INC.: THE RISE, FALL, AND REBIRTH OF A BILLION DOLLAR EMPIRE | ZACK O'MALLEY GREENBURG (2014) ■