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# The Book of Taylor Swift—5 Lessons in Embracing Market Disruption From a Pop Phenomenon

By Dev Patnaik

*Taylor Swift's Eras Tour doesn't just display her brilliance as a performer or marketer—it shows us how to overcome the biggest challenges facing business today. In this article, Dev Patnaik shares the five lessons we can learn from how Swift deftly navigates this era of growing complexity and fragmentation.*

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Steve Jobs may finally have a worthy heir: Taylor Swift.

Before you scoff at the notion that a 33-year-old pop star could be compared to a business legend like Jobs, try attending one of her concerts.

Her record-shattering Eras Tour doesn't just display her brilliance as a performer—it's showing us how to overcome the biggest challenges facing businesses today.

Swift doesn't have the greatest voice, the best songs, or the slickest dance moves. But calling her concert a show is like calling the Taj Mahal a building. The Eras Tour is projected to be the first tour to break \$1 billion in ticket sales and has

generated a windfall effect on local towns and businesses that's been dubbed "Tayloronomics." The fervor she stokes among her predominantly female fans, or "Swifties," has to be seen to be believed. It's the Beatlemania of our times.

Like Jobs, Swift isn't merely selling a product. She's shifting the whole culture. She's figured out how to navigate the big disruptive market forces that many businesses are struggling—and mostly failing—to come to grips with. At a time of growing ambiguity, complexity, and fragmentation, she's shown an ability to connect deeply with her customers, give value back to her team, and ensure that her business is resilient over the long term.

Swift is such a unique talent that it's impossible for mere mortals to emulate her. But, just like with Jobs, that shouldn't stop us from learning the profound business lessons she's teaching. Here are the top 5:

### **Lesson 1: In the age of microtribes, find—and be true to— your tribe.**

It used to be relatively easy to come up with a cool product and sell it globally. Not anymore. The splintering forces of social media have helped drive consumers into ever smaller microtribes, whose members identify with a specific set of tastes and interests.

Swift is a tribe-building sensation. Her massive base of fans shares an intense mutual connection, making her concerts feel like a 70,000-strong high school reunion. Concertgoers often say they've never felt as safe as they did at her shows. The Swifties are all in on her and their shared values. Swift engenders this devotion by being authentic and vulnerable. She tells real stories from her life and doesn't try to present herself as perfect.

The lesson for businesses: Build your tribe by focusing on shared values, and then communicating with authenticity and transparency. This is especially important at a time when it's much harder to get away with saying one thing and doing another.

### **Lesson 2: As traditional distribution channels dwindle, take charge of your customer connection.**

Traditional sales channels are becoming more strained and vulnerable. Big retail stores are declining and third-party sites dilute companies' market power.

Swift has worked hard to establish a direct connection with her fans through her own [taylorswift.com](https://taylorswift.com) site. It sells items that fans can't get anywhere else. In addition to giving her control over pricing, this delivers an ever-growing trove of customer data that enables Swift to strengthen her relationship with fans even more.

It's the same reason Nike has invested so much into its DTC digital strategy while cutting its ties to third-party retailers like Zappos

The lesson for businesses: Seek more value by strengthening direct relationships with your customers.

### **Lesson 3: As people don't just buy things but buy *into* things, lean into experience over product.**

Swift understands that her industry's product—music—has become commoditized as providers like Spotify practically give it away. She can't rely on her songs alone to drive revenue growth.

So she invested in building an experience unlike any other. Her shows meld storytelling, stagecraft, and technology to create an experience so intense that some Swifties report post-concert amnesia. Swift tells stories and adds elements of suspense, such as playing “surprise songs” at every show. Her concerts have become true interactive experiences where fans dress up and trade friendship bracelets.

The lesson for businesses: Find ways to make your customers co-participants in an experience, rather than just mapping out their journey and trying to solve their pain points. Create coherent, compelling narratives around your brand.

#### **Lesson 4: In a “woke”/MAGA world, let stakeholder centricity guide you.**

As our culture wars intensify, companies are finding themselves frozen in the headlights. They know they need to take a stand on social issues, but they risk a backlash if they miscalculate. Hiding isn’t the answer. The answer is to take a stand, but only when it’s aligned with the values of your key stakeholders.

Swift doesn’t wade into every issue, but she has steadily shown up on subjects like abortion, voting rights, and Donald Trump. This hasn’t significantly weakened her appeal because she’s been conscious about bringing her fans with her as her identity evolves. Swift also stands out for genuinely valuing her stakeholders—her fans, local communities and the army of workers who make her shows possible. She reportedly gave her truckers \$100,000 tips and funds food banks in cities where she performs.

The lesson for businesses: Take care of the stakeholders who are core to your purpose and identity. This will set you up to be more resilient and sustainable over the long term.

#### **Lesson 5: When new technology threatens disruption, quickly figure out if and how you should embrace it.**

Technology is disrupting businesses at a faster rate than ever. Unfortunately, many leaders will either jump too quickly on the bandwagon without considering whether doing so will make sense for their brand, or wait far too long to see if they should invest.

While others waste time debating, Swift understands the need to get ahead of these changes. But not without purpose. Her goal is always to unite and interact with her community in exciting ways, not to simply be at the cutting edge. In her 1989 World Tour, Swift was one of the first artists to take LED walls and LED bracelets to create an immersive experience that transports the crowd into her stories.

Not only has she elevated that experience in her current Eras Tour, but she has also incorporated TikTok to extend and modify the experience. When her fans created a dance for *Bejeweled*, she took notice and incorporated it into her on-stage choreography. Rather than blindly adopting new technology, Swift carefully evaluates if it will help her create a deeper connection with her fans, and if so, she builds it in seamlessly.

The lesson for businesses: Understand new technology and its potential to enhance or detract from the experiences of your key stakeholders. And if you do embrace it, do so with a clear purpose.

Just when we need them most, the qualities required to navigate these disruptive forces are hard to find among today's leaders. Taylor Swift has proven to not just be a savvy popstar, but a future-focused leader who is changing the game. You don't need to be a Swiftie to learn an awful lot from how she operates and to try putting those lessons into practice.

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