

AND  
LIZ  
SONS  
GARDEN  
IDEAS  
BLUES

BY JEFF SNOWDEN



Gin, Incense and “Deacon Blues”  
a book by Jeff Snowden

Forward by Robert Maurer

Edited by Gideon C. Kennedy

Snowden Tatarski  
480 East Broad Street, Suite 017  
Athens, Georgia 30601  
[www.sn-ta.com](http://www.sn-ta.com)

Copyright © 2006 by Jeff Snowden

All rights reserved,  
including the right to reproduction  
in whole or in part in any form.

Contributions by Matt Chastain, Katherine Fink, Meredith Maurer, Mike Sink  
and Richard Tatarski

Legal consultation from Jon Andersen, Andersen Law Firm

Design and layout by Richard Tatarski

This book is laid out in Helvetica Neue and Chaparral Pro on 55# Westminster  
Natural using Adobe InDesign and Adobe Illustrator CS2.

Manufactured in the United States of America

This book is dedicated to the coaches, teachers, bullies, pledge brothers, friends, rockstar idols, preachers, mentors, professors, family and wonderful wife who help shape my world and who put up with me being in it.

And to my most excellent business partner Richard, who reminds me daily why we choose this business.

## Contents

Forward	8
Legal Note	12
Preface	13
<b>O N E</b> Gin, Incense and “Deacon Blues”	15
<b>T W O</b> The Mutual Dependency of Brands and People	21
<b>T H R E E</b> The Hedgehog and the Scorpion	25
<b>F O U R</b> Everything Connects When You’re in L.A.	31
<b>S I X</b> Getting Old School	41
<b>S E V E N</b> The Art of War	47
<b>E I G H T</b> The Deep and Creepy Side of Research	51
<b>N I N E</b> Marketing Research Rockstar	55
<b>T E N</b> The Brand Archetype	59
<b>E L E V E N</b> Closing the Gap Between Product and Message	63
<b>T W E L V E</b> The Simple Truth about Food and the Consumer Relationship	67
<b>T H I R T E E N</b> The Car and House Theory	73
<b>F O U R T E E N</b> Strategy Creep is Out to Get You	79
<b>F I F T E E N</b> Ahhh...the Tried and True	85
<b>S I X T E E N</b> The Tagline Conundrum	93
<b>S E V E N T E E N</b> The Great Advertising Smell Test	99
<b>E I G H T E E N</b> Reality - It’s the New...well...Reality	107

<b>N I N E T E E N</b>	
<u>Creative that Wins</u>	111
<b>T W E N T Y</b>	
<u>The Sounds of Sunnyview</u>	115
<b>T W E N T Y - O N E</b>	
<u>The Painful Death of Good Ideas</u>	119
<b>T W E N T Y - T W O</b>	
<u>Profundity from a Journalist</u>	123
<b>T W E N T Y - T H R E E</b>	
<u>The Hardest of Hardsell</u>	127
<b>T W E N T Y - F O U R</b>	
<u>Goooooo Commercial Carpet Cleaning Company! Sick 'em!</u>	133
<b>T W E N T Y - F I V E</b>	
<u>The Marketer's New Clothes</u>	139
<b>T W E N T Y - S I X</b>	
<u>Selling to the Sellers</u>	147
<b>T W E N T Y - S E V E N</b>	
<u>Eating My Words</u>	153
<b>T W E N T Y - E I G H T</b>	
<u>A Few More Than the Two Words Most Marketing Gurus Deserve</u>	157
<b>T W E N T Y - N I N E</b>	
<u>The End of Media, Huh? Are You SIRIUS?</u>	163
<b>T H I R T Y</b>	
<u>Red Beans and Line Extension</u>	167
<b>T H I R T Y - O N E</b>	
<u>Marketing Even When You Don't Have To</u>	173
<b>T H I R T Y - T W O</b>	
<u>The Two Roads in the Woods</u>	179
<b>T H I R T Y - T H R E E</b>	
<u>The 800-pound Gorilla</u>	185
<b>T H I R T Y - F O U R</b>	
<u>The Brave New Agency, the Whole Brand Experience and Tomorrow's Marketing Frontier</u>	189

## Forward

As I have grown older and hopefully wiser, I have found that the quality of a person's life is ultimately defined by the quality of relationships that are developed with all the people with whom that person comes into contact. The folks who consistently build quality relationships seem to possess a life that is full of joy, prosperity and contentment. It is one of abundance - almost overflowing. On the other hand, the folks who flout quality relationships seem to have more than their fair share of brokenness, anxiety, stress and frustration. An emptiness within them never seems to get filled.

Just as the quality of an individual's life is based on the quality of their relationships, so too a company's long-term success is a result of the quality of the relationships it creates. Here I am talking about relationships with customers, with employees, with financial stakeholders, with strategic partners and with the various communities in which they do business. The quality of a company's relationships shows up in sales trends, in spending efficiency and effectiveness, in the quality of their people, in their stewardship and in their bottom line profits.

Whether we talk about just individuals or the sum total of individuals, goods and services that make up a company, a lot of hard work goes into creating and maintaining quality relationships. Yet, from my observations, the folks who seem to do it right all practice three common behaviors. First, as they enter into a relationship, they listen to the other person in order to truly hear what is in their heart and on their mind. I am talking about the kind of communication that is normally face-to-face, where feelings are out on the table and in which real understanding, trust and commitment can be built. This commitment to active listening and honest communication continues throughout the life of the relationship. Second, folks who do it right take what they hear, digest it and then make promises that they not only intend to keep, but ones they are capable of keeping. Said another way, they create realistic expectations and then they consistently meet or exceed those expectations. Finally, the folks who do it right always seem to demonstrate they truly care about the well being of the other person. This caring is shown not only by what they say, but also by how they act. They seem to be all about creating relationships in which both parties consistently emerge victorious.

Because I have always tried to build my life and build the companies I have been a part of on quality relationships, I am so thankful that God introduced me, my family and my business partners to Jeff Snowden and the entire ST team. You see, they do it right.

I first met Jeff through his stepmother, Kathy Skillen. Kathy was working as a Senior Account Executive on the direct sales team of a company where I was the President/CEO. At our annual awards banquet, I mentioned to Kathy that my daughter Meredith (Meri) was a student at the University of Georgia in Athens and that she had just been accepted into the Grady School with plans on majoring in Advertising and Public Relations. Before we could talk any further, I was asked to come to the podium to start the ceremonies. Kathy and I never finished our conversation that night.

Several days later, my phone rang and the fellow on the other end introduced himself as Jeff Snowden from Snowden Tatarski in Athens, GA. After telling me how he had gotten my number, he mentioned that he had an intern position open and wondered if my daughter, Meri, might be interested in interviewing for the position. What Jeffrey didn't realize was the fact that my daughter wouldn't interview with him until I had first interviewed him. You see, I am one of the fathers that believe the expression, "Show me your children's friends and I will show you your children's future." I also believe that sentiment to be true of companies as well. In essence: Show me a company's strategic partners and I will show you that company's future. Trusting your brands to someone is like trusting them with your children. After about an hour, I felt that Jeffrey and the folks at ST were good enough for my daughter. Meri began working there several days later. A wonderful personal relationship began that day. I didn't know then that a professional relationship was soon to follow.

Several months later, my wife Barbara and I visited Meri for a three-day weekend at UGA. When we arrived Friday afternoon, Meri asked us to meet her at Snowden Tatarski to be formally introduced to the team. After introductions, I asked the group if they would mind showing me their work. It was like asking grandparents if they would mind showing pictures of their grandchildren! Some time later (probably about three hours later – it seemed a blur), I checked my watch only to discover that we were about to be late for our dinner reservations. I closed the meeting by extending a business proposition to the team. I began by bringing them up to date regarding some positive changes in my career. “Recently, I assumed responsibility as President/CEO of a consumer packaged goods company. While many of the brands are growing nicely, there are several important brands, large and very profitable ones, that seem to be tired. They are not growing. They have become stagnant. They need some new life breathed into them,” I told them. I then asked, “Would you be interested in learning more about these brands, meeting the VP of Marketing who is responsible for these brands and working with him to develop a plan of action that could turn these brands around and get them growing again?” “We can begin tonight!” they all responded in one single voice of confidence and enthusiasm. I dined peacefully as they rushed to tell their wives that they would be home late that night and for many more to follow.

Three weeks later, the team arrived at our corporate headquarters located in New Orleans. I had assembled the entire marketing department along with representatives from operations and sales to hear the presentation. In the past, this group had heard many “pitches” from high-powered New York agencies, from agencies throughout the South and the Midwest and, while I was told there was always some “creative and business nuggets” to be had, never was there anything “truly creative – nothing particularly new and innovative.” This time proved to be different. The group was blown away.

Over the next few months, award-winning advertising was created and aired; sales promotion plans were created, presented to the field and executed. Additionally, packaging ideas, PR ideas, consumer promotion ideas, new product ideas were all presented and evaluated. Excitement grew. The relationship grew. Most importantly, however, the brands themselves grew. A high-quality personal relationship had now become a profitable, high-quality business relationship as well.

Let me close by adding some thoughts from the award winning speaker and writer Charles “Tremendous” Jones. Mr. Jones wrote, “What you will become in five years will be determined by what you read and who you associate with.” I like those thoughts. They remind us of how important it is to make the right choices about the people with whom we build relationships, personal and professional, and particularly the ones we entrust with things that are precious to us. These words also remind us of the choices we should be making about the kind of things with which we fill our minds. You have some important choices to make – big ones that can influence your personal success and the success of your company. Choose your reading material and your strategic business partners wisely. A good place to start is by reading this book and then meeting with Jeff Snowden. I did and my family and my business are all better off as a result.

Robert Maurer  
President/CEO (retired), Standard Coffee Service Company

## Legal Note

Our attorney is a good and spirited man with a hearty appreciation for the world of communication. Considering such, he advises us that all comment and critique of actions, companies and efforts is fair game as scholarly review so long as we precede each potentially sensitive comment with “In my opinion,” or follow it with, “bless their hearts.” Therefore all comments in this book are “in my opinion” and, if it hurts a few individuals feelings, well...“bless their hearts.”

J.M.S.

## Preface

My mind writes in several modes and I don't argue with it. Each mode seems hardwired, soldered there from the years of sullen editors and 30-second TV scripts. The five-paragraph essay. The 15-, 30- and 60-second television or radio commercial. The web banner. The full-page. The postage stamp for advertisers who want it just large enough to see the logo, but not large enough to really do anything else. As you can see, the multi-chapter book is not on the list, which made writing this a bit of a challenge.

The challenge, however, was met with an old friend. One of my favorite formats in which to write is the full-page for newspaper. It is a delicacy rarely served and one I savor for its full and satisfying nature. At about 1300 words, the full-page newspaper is the perfect length to make an impact, a point, a case and a summation. It allows room for set up, pitch, homer and beers after the game, and I love it. I think you will, too.

Thanks to this force-fed format, you can enjoy this book in little digestible bits that should not take long at all for you to read. Don't worry if you forgot the last chapter. Each chapter is its own story and you can always read the old chapter over again on that next trip to the beach or the commode.

This book advocates for many approaches and from many directions on how one should successfully accomplish the task of marketing. The subject matter can naturally be a little dry so I made it to my own recipe, of which I hope you'll approve. Be forewarned, it's a little spicy.

When you finish that last page I hope you will see marketing with slightly different eyes, as well as know more than you ever have (or possibly ever wanted) about whisky, mayonnaise, my family, the Conch Republic, French shoes, red beans and "Deacon Blues."

At the very least, I hope you will have had at least as much fun reading this book as I did writing it.

Jeff Snowden



## C H A P T E R   O N E

# Gin, Incense and “Deacon Blues”

I have known Mike Sink for many years. Growing up, we lived in the same neighborhood, 15 houses apart. In college, we lived two blocks away. We have worked at more than five jobs together, including Wendy’s, Big Jim’s Christmas Tree Farm, UPS, Cloudt’s Bakery, and Snowden Tatarski. He is a dear, close friend and we have seen and shared a lot.

The upside of sharing a lot together is all the fun, happy memories of times past. The downside is when one friend decides to air all your dirty laundry in a book, which is what I am about to do to Mike. OK, not all his dirty laundry, but what I have to share with you probably should be some kind of guarded secret.

This will require just a little more setup.

Mike and I both went to the University of Georgia after junior college. When we finally arrived, we were older students and had to work to mesh in with the kids that had already been there for two years. We both joined fraternities and shared the awkward distinction of being “that old dude” in our pledge classes. Eventually, we began to blend in and take on the college life.

Both Mike and I had serious girlfriends in junior college and the relationships had not survived the transitions. The prospect of dating in college at a new school and within a new peer group where you are “that old dude from Slappy’s pledge class” is, to say the least, daunting. But Mike had an ace up his sleeve and that is the crux of this book.

Mike creates the whole experience.

In college, there were plenty of times when young ladies would come over to simply hang out. Mike’s house was the place where everyone congregated before going to a party and so often a brood of young coeds was around, just meandering and mingling.

On a given night, you would find Mike sipping a gin and tonic and dubbing a tape of a live Phish show, when some little, unsuspecting butterfly would land in his web.

“Hi, I’m Katie” (or Amy or Christy or Courtney or Laurie, basically any name that ends with an e sound).

Katie would then realize, though not be alarmed by the fact, that she had just fallen in the web. The incense was burning on the desk, making Mike’s the only room in the house that did not smell of rotting mac and cheese, burning oregano and dog vomit. On the end table, a fresh gin and tonic. And then, the words from the next song came on cue:

“I’ll learn to work the saxophone / I’ll play just what I feel / Drink Scotch whisky all night long / And die behind the wheel / They got a name for the winners in the world / I want a name when I lose / They call Alabama the Crimson Tide / Call me Deacon Blues.”

Steely Dan’s “Deacon Blues” has such a dark and sardonic tone. It has all the mystique of a flamenco song with the dance steps recorded right in, but with the subtle jazz of Don Fagen smoothing in the time like hot asphalt filling in the cracks.

This was Mike’s game. And to a certain extent, it still is. Mike is not content with cheesy pick-up lines, tacky bravado or self-worship. Instead, Mike creates an environment and experience that is about who he is and the mystery is just too intriguing for many a Katie.

Marketers are often crappy dates. They meet you and mistake you for someone else. They pretend to be all about you, but then you don’t hear from them until they want something else. Just when you feel you can trust and rely on them, they change for the worse to chase after a younger and sexier target market. Marketers could really use a lesson from Mike.

Too often, marketers seem driven to treat the prospect like a cheap date. Because they're not listening, they misunderstand, misaddress, mislead and miss the boat all together when it comes to building a meaningful relationship with the consumer. While marketing's love life might not be as easy as the college days, lessons are out there and with a little gin, incense and "Deacon Blues," marketers could become a whole lot more attractive to Katie and a whole bunch of her friends.

Savvy customers and enhanced communication demands a closer and more enveloping experience between customers and brands. In the old days, one could just throw an ad out there and responses would come. Today, the channels of media are fractured and the consumer is so jaded from the years of being yelled at by car commercials and evening new promos that the single communication point is simply not enough. Thanks to the clutter of many misguided attempts, customers now need multiple exposures to a brand's message for it to compound and resonate. We call it the whole brand experience and its premise is to focus on the enduring relationship rather than the single sale.

## **Gin and Tonic - the right product or offering grounded in real research**

Mike drank gin and tonic because nobody else did. Being in the Deep South, most drank bourbon and Coke. Mike sought distinction and novelty over blending in. Marketers have long known that quality research can yield a distinct position yet to be taken by competitors. The sage advice: be memorable or else.

## **Incense sets the right mood**

Design and aesthetics are often deemed intangible and therefore not a priority. Consumers, however, do not give sympathy points and forgive your '70s era packaging because you spent all your money on that snazzy web portal. Consumers perceive the whole image and mandate that their whole consumer experience should be controlled.

## **Learn to work the saxophone**

The message you send out about your product cannot simply be the over-zealous sales pitch of the 1950s. Style and sophistication are rewarded in today's market and what you say and how you say it can make the difference even in commodity items. Too many messages from companies to their customers read like the investor section on their web site. Has anyone every really looked into whether or not consumers know or care who JD Power is?

A major benefit of embarking on a long-term communication relationship with customers is that companies can evolve the relationship by responding to consumers and thereby strengthen the appeal. Marketers who seek real return on the investment of the marketing dollar are wise to create campaigns that are cohesive, focused, intrinsic, encompassing and protracted.

The rest of this book focuses on the need and the techniques for creating the whole brand experience. This book is by no means an end-all and I heartily recommend you add to it from your own experience. Considering all the cost a company incurs from poorly executed efforts, the only real resources required to create the whole brand experience are bravery and heart. Bravery and heart. Two things I've come to recognize, expect and appreciate from my good friend Mike Sink.





## C H A P T E R   T W O

# The Mutual Dependency of Brands and People

The very best brands have a personality. Whether it's the gritty, salt-of-the-earth personality of Levi's or the fun-loving, free-spirited sass of Columbia sports wear, brands that act like people get treated like people, meaning they establish relationships.

Why?

Knowing that brands build relationships is one thing. In fact, it's what sent a thousand CEOs scrambling to *define the brand* to those with a stake in their company. It's a fact that has made many consultants very rich. And some of what they were saying was actually useful.

But why?

Just knowing that brands can build relationships is not enough. Many companies accept that consumers identify with the personality that surrounds a branded item or company. However, knowing that smart brand management can increase consumer affinity and knowing how to execute such are two very different things. It would be the automotive equivalent of knowing that a car needs gas, oil, transmission fluid and an assortment of other things to work, but not knowing how or why to use them. Sure, pour that gas in the trunk. That'll make it work. Companies can often be that way. The fundamental misunderstanding of how and why customers interact with a brand is at the very heart of many marketing blunders, leading to wasted ad dollars.

We believe that just as brands are dependent on consumers for their well-being, consumers often become very much dependent on the brand. I did not say "fond of" or "appreciative of," because I actually mean "dependent." Consumers become dependent on a brand for one or more of a few reasons.

## **Reason One: Predictability**

Walk down the bathroom tissue aisle at your local grocery store. Single ply. Double ply. Quilted. Scented. Those moist wipes with the little bears that beg the question, “Do wild bears do something in the woods with moist wipes?”

Consumers are bombarded with choices. We as marketers are responsible for this bombardment. But we are also responsible for throwing consumers a life buoy in the sea of choices. Brands give consumers a level of predictability. With the range of choices growing each day, so grows the number of opportunities to make a poor choice. Consumers drift towards brands because they know what to expect.

NOTE: Many have used the aforementioned situation to justify extending their brand into categories in which the brand does not belong. We are in no way advocating or suggesting that such a line extension is ever a good idea.

## **Reason Two: Trust**

Trust is a leg shackle holding a consumer from straying. Though not a pretty metaphor, it speaks to a truth of brand dependency. A consumer will hold on to something they know despite their instincts. In the face of overwhelming logic, consumers still drift towards the instinct of trust. Even though overall product reliability is extremely high and even though products have much more quality control than they had years ago, people still think that somewhere out there someone is out to get them and they better go with the brand they trust rather than risk it.

It's the force that grocery store private labels have been fighting for years. The store can make their own competing items cheaper, improve their package design and advertise that they just plain like you more than the branded items, but in the end that relationship between the branded good and the consumer will most likely win out.

## **Reason Three: Identification**

Deep in the relationship mix is identification. Consumers enjoy what using a brand of wheat flour or motor oil says about them. It's why people put decals on their cars of the brand of spark plugs they use. To be associated with some brand is a badge of honor and is the reason why a simple T-shirt with a designer logo can cost 40 times that of a T-shirt without it.

## **Some thoughts on getting to the brand relationship process**

When helping distill a brand, we like to think and talk about our brands like they are people. We eventually develop a code of how our brand might see the world. What would he or she think is cool, hip, desirable, lame, repulsive or irresistible? We think about how this person might go about making friends. And what brand couldn't use a few more friends?



## C H A P T E R   T H R E E

# The Hedgehog and the Scorpion

I am a big fan of Jim Collins and his book, “Good to Great.” To see a book revolutionize the way companies look at themselves is really something and Collins’s hedgehog concept is one of particular fondness for me.

I believe the hedgehog concept is quite possibly a business’s most important strategy. The concept is a highly effective manner for a company to set standards in all aspects of its self-image - from service to HR to operations. It also serves as an approach for communicating to potential customers. For reasons detailed later, the actual message must distinguish how we view ourselves and how we communicate our identity. Distilling the core principles of the hedgehog concept is crucial in determining a company’s true brand.

Very similar strategies have been espoused by Jack Trout in his book, “Positioning,” and by Al Ries in the book, “Focus.” The concept that a business should have a single, defensible selling proposition seems obvious because businesses rarely survive without at least some incarnation of the theory, even if the business operators are unaware.

Where the hedgehog concept falls slightly short, in my opinion, is in the fact that little is said about the need for differentiation within a crowded marketplace, applicability and the necessity of an effective, offensive approach.

The animal the theory is named on has but one defense. A fox may exhaust himself trying many different maneuvers. The hedgehog, however, will always curl into a ball and bear his spines.

Why doesn’t the hedgehog inflate to twice his normal size like a puffer fish? After all, inflating is a proven, singular technique for repelling predators. The answer is easy. The hedgehog does not live in the ocean. Though inflating to appear larger works for another threatened animal in another environment, here the market is different and so are the predators. The hedgehog is suited for some things and not for others. He is who he is. He has his attributes and, while he could piecemeal together the adopted tactics of others, his own best-suited strategies will prove more efficient and effective in the long run.

The marketplace is a reality. The need for a theory that is different, practical and that can actually be implemented is also very real. Certainly, every business could claim that their hedgehog concept is “to provide a quality product at a great value” or “exceed the customer’s expectations with service,” but who isn’t offering such pitches? It would be as if every animal in the forest curled into a ball for defense. Of course, eventually, some animal would figure out how to defeat said defense and the results would be disastrous.

The most important point here is: If a strategy is not both defensible and differentiating, it is not a strategy.

The hedgehog fails at one very important thing. While he uses his spines for defense, he still has to root in the dirt for food. Great defenses should also be great offenses. Great single positions make a defensible posture into an equally potent offense. If the hedgehog could use his spines to help feed himself and acquire resources, then he would be functioning more to his optimum.

## **Enter the scorpion concept**

He may not be as cute as the hedgehog (and that’s not saying much), but the scorpion may just be markedly better off than the hedgehog. The scorpion has what he needs - his stinger, claws and protective plating - and none of what he doesn’t. He doesn’t need a very calculating mind because he has a single approach. Sting to defend. Sting to attack. No matter the predator or prey, sting, sting, sting. The scorpion has a defense that is an equal offense.

Hedgehog or scorpion, great competitive concepts should have a few components before they should be called great strategies:

- Great strategies should be taken from the reality inside the offering, not the ideal.
- Great strategies should use their defense as an offense.
- Great strategies should seek to differentiate the offering in the consumer’s mind.

- Great strategies should be realistic with regards to implementation, evolution and quality control across the organization.
- Great strategies clearly understand that which the organization can control and that which it cannot.

## **Finding the scorpion**

The scorpion can hide in some elusive places. He hides behind infrastructure and facilities. He hides behind mission, vision and “steps to excellence” statements. He hides in the place where you may not want anyone to look.

A resort we consulted wanted to find the scorpion. The club was nice, but not ornately so. It was seen by many as the “lite” version of a much grander club right down the street. The competitor had it all. Excellent golf, a massive clubhouse and a five-star hotel on the premises. Additionally, it should be mentioned that the President sometimes stayed there. Our little club was smaller and humbler and got lost in the shadow of this great competitor.

When we put together a focus group we heard a story. Our subject pulled into a gas station right next to an identical color and model luxury car as her own. The lady in the other car said, “Look, we’re twins.” She then looked at the license plate on the front of our subject’s car denoting the club in which she lived and said, “Wait, we’re not twins.”

The first lady, our subject, said she wanted to plead with this other lady in the identical car and explain that, while the club was not as faux fancy, they more than made up for it by being a great neighborhood without the pretension of the other club.

We had our hook. No one wants to say they can’t afford the bigger, fancier club even if it’s true. But people will say, “I could have gone to the fancier club, except I’m not a snob and I prefer really good neighbors.” Our new communication not only took our position out of our own weakness, but also took the competitor’s strength and inverted it. To believe that a club that prides itself on being exclusive and fancy is also pompous and pretentiousness is not hard.

## **In summation**

The essence of the scorpion concept is finding an offense in the defense and vice-versa. Putting a scorpion to work means finding a real strategy and integrating it into the operation, voice and culture of an organization. Using criteria from the hedgehog concept as a litmus test for truly competitive strategy can be wise. It can also be helpful in gauging potential offensive and defensive strategies.

Whatever animal, vegetable or mineral your company uses to embody strategy, the battle implications in these woods we call the marketplace should be crucially considered. Like the natural world, how you attack and defend essentially defines your future.





## C H A P T E R   F O U R

# Everything Connects When You're in L.A.

I married a girl from L.A. No, not smog-ridden, silicone-laden, runaway white Bronco, L.A. I'm talking boondocks, 110 degrees in the shade, runaway rusted pickup truck L.A.

And that is, lower Alabama.

The thing about lower Alabama is that you don't have to be from lower Alabama to be "from" lower Alabama. My wife only lived in L.A. for a brief while, but that does not precluded her from the following characteristics I find unique to this special part of the country. Such as:

- No one has a last name. In lower Alabama you are know as Mister or Miss and then your first name. For instance, I would be Mr. Jeff.
- Nothing is private. Your love life, grudges, ambitions and current gastrointestinal condition might as well be painted on the side of a barn. Take it from me, when you marry into a family from L.A., never tell anyone you have diarrhea. Never.
- Gossip is king. You will be weighed, measured, lauded or shamed for your knowledge of local gossip. Ever read the newspaper in L.A.? Don't read it if you're looking for an economic forecast or political happening. Instead, get ready for a heaping portion, served family-style, of first-rate local gossip about how Mr. John and Ms. Katie were seen at Mr. Bill and Ms. Karen's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary together talking about Mr. Jake's diarrhea.

All that said, the starkest thing I know about L.A. is how everyone is related to everyone. Once, on a trip back to Georgia, my wife ran into a cousin at a gas station. And that's really no big deal. Consider the following situations. My wife has two cousins who are best friends and only recently realized they are related. My good friend's cousin's wife is a friend of my wife's cousin. I even have a client who was in my wife's aunt's wedding as a flower girl or something of the like. The long and the short of it is this: When it comes to L.A., everything's connected.

We as marketers could take a lesson from L.A. The interconnected nature of business and the customer experience is not very different from life in a small town. First, everything about you will be weighed by your friends (and by those less-than-friendly) when they have dealings with you. Second, communication will happen, and it's up to you to tell your story before someone else does it for you. And finally, on Sunday morning, things always go better when everybody sings from the same songbook.

We all know that efforts work best when they are coordinated. Football coaches and dance instructors drilled into our head that we must work together, understand our roles and appreciate how those roles operate in the team. But then we entered the marketing department and have made war against distributors, consultants, the sales force and each other ever since.

I have had the good fortune to consult great businesses and, in my experience, finding a marketer who could not benefit from better coordination is rare. The banking industry is of great interest to this firm. Only in banking does there seem to be such prevalence of the total separation of sales and marketing and I believe that this happens after several steps down. Namely:

- Much of banking sales is sold through network marketing rather than product development or positioning. Simply put, the marketing department could be saying to consumers, "We consult businesses to find hidden financial opportunity," but the salesperson (banker) is still going to use the pitch, "Hey, don't you go to my church?"
- Because marketing initiatives are not used by the bankers and because bankers are almost always the people who eventually become in charge of the bank, the marketing department is regarded as a luxury (or less) and is banished to the basement behind the old copy machines.

- The failure of marketing and sales to coordinate results in a gaping hole of opportunity for a competitive effort. It is naive to think a consumer will continue patronage when they received mixed messages about the true nature and value of a product or service.

I say all this with a deep affection for many in the banking industry and a stark warning for those who are continually fractured in their efforts. Unite and stand, or remained fractured and crumple.

It's not just banks. It's gas stations who gush about their customer service but have employees who lock the door and sit outside to smoke. It's retail stores who get tendonitis patting themselves on the back for their "know-how" only to show through interaction and communication that they know nothing. It's any company where the coordination between advertising, distribution, public relations, sales, direct marketing, outreach and any of the many channels in which consumers experience the brand has broken down.

But there is hope. Companies can diagnose and correct the lack of coordination by doing a few simple and relatively painless things.

- Conduct a marketing audit. Find out everything you do called marketing and ask why. Draw out the consumer unawareness-to-purchase spectrum and write out where every effort falls on the spectrum. Does it build awareness? Does it increase knowledge? Does it drive conviction? If it does not fit on the spectrum, you need to know why and the answer should not attract flies.
- While you're in the auditing mood, do pitch audit as well. Find the messages that are opening the doors for your sales efforts. Don't be myopic. Consider different approaches as indicators of a bigger brand position.
- Pick a hill and take it. Pick a position and rally all the troops and resources toward that position. Then again, you could spread out your troops and resources and try to take a few hills at the same time. If so, don't grow too attached to your sword.

- Get everyone's commitment and responsibilities upfront. The funny thing about strategies is that everyone has a suggestion that's someone else's job to implement. Get people to suggest, critique, understand and agree to carry out their role in the effort.
- Don't go back and hide in your office. Spend time with the team debriefing, telling jokes and coming up with blue-sky strategies. A friend of mine who teaches government often tells the story of warring countries who, before meeting, have protracted discussions about the place they will meet, the size of the table and how many pens and pads of paper each side gets. Why do they do this? They know the more they start down the path of agreement and group decision making, the easier and more productive future efforts will be. Get your team used to working together and future efforts will be more efficient and productive.

Cohesive efforts have a compounding effect. A great strategic pitch made by marketing, affirmed by sales and confirmed by customer service gives the consumer a reliable sense of brand identity and expectation that cannot be achieved by fractured efforts. Working together through a unified effort works for every company in every industry no matter where they are. Even if they're in L.A.





## C H A P T E R F I V E

# Great Brands and the Battle of the Conch Republic

Our team thought we had landed the dream assignment. Repositioning a beach club sounded like paradise when compared to laying out a brochure on banking regulations or developing a print ad where the pre-written copy is a whole lot of “single source solution” nonsense. The team was, mentally, already at the beach.

To keep with the theme, we ordered a Conch Republic flag and hung it proudly in the office. I had long wanted a flag of the Conch Republic and had admired the ones I had seen hung in offices throughout the years. But why? No offense to the Conchians (or Conchos, or whatever they’re called), but the flag is not the most appealing. In fact, I’ve seen many a high school marching band with a more appealing banner.

To understand my and so many other’s allure to the Conch flag is to know the story. In my limited understanding, the Conch Republic is a really fancy way to say Key West. In 1982, the U.S. Border Patrol started a series of road-blocks to catch illegal drugs and aliens coming up from the Florida Keys. The resulting traffic jams paralyzed business along the way, leading Mayor Dennis Wardlow of Key West to inform the federal government that the region would secede from the United States, become the Conch Republic and declare war on America. Later that same day, the Conch Republic surrendered and demanded one billion dollars in foreign aid from the U.S. government as a region that had surrendered in wartime.

Defying the notion that all fun was to be had in the ’80s, in 1995 Wardlow and friends took it upon themselves to mobilize and defend Conch from a U.S. Army training exercise simulating the invasion of a foreign island. Firing water cannons and throwing stale Cuban bread at the soldiers as protest of an exercise that took place without the locals being informed, the Conch Republic defeated the invading U.S. forces. Army leaders apologized and took part in a ceremony two days later in which they formally surrendered to the Conch Republic.

I love to hear stories of the little guy winning, even if it's in a buffoonish style. I imagine what has led me and a ton of others to hang our Conch flags proudly is the desire to tell others of our lightheartedness, our openness to a good joke and our constant cheer for those who stand up to the goliaths.

The Conch Republic is more than just a goofy story about the wacky pursuits of those who spent too much time in the sun. A lesson about branding hides within the stories of this citizen army uniformed in shell necklaces, flip-flops and JAMS.

## **Brands that take their strategy from human desire and understanding are markedly more potent than those that do not**

The Conch “brand” has endured for nearly 25 years with little more than storytelling and a few ragged flags hanging from stores in Key West, yet its messages of independence are timeless and universal. On the flip side, huge numbers of marketers blow their war chests trying to convince people of things that are contrary to common beliefs, attitudes and desires. A better strategy is to link attributes to existing notions rather than trying to combat existing thought.

## **People use brands to identify themselves to both themselves and others**

The Conch Republic initially represented a people, but went on to represent a rooting for the little guy. I've seen Conch flags in law offices and they're not there because the lawyers came from the Keys. People define themselves with brands. Whether they are affirming a belief about themselves or expressing for others to see, people's cars, homes, clothes, watches, handbags, perfumes, hairstyles and countless other things are more about self-identification than anything else.

## **Stardom is rarely made with a safe bet**

In our world of quarterly stock expectations, marketers are becoming increasingly frightened of anything but the status quo. Marketing strategies used to be about differentiation. Now those strategies are often about blending in, line extension and anything but taking a chance. No one would have ever heard or cared about the Conch Republic if they had held a bunch of meetings with the government and changed their slogan to “The Conch Republic - Making dreams reality for the whole family since 1982.”

As marketers, we have a lot to learn from the people of Conch. While we were struggling to sell memberships or financial services or items on the third plan-a-gram of aisle four, someone in Conch convinced people that declaring war on a superpower was a good idea. While we’re spending boatfuls of money trying to be heard above the clutter, the brand of Conch permeates from person to person. While we are conceiving and training brand persona, the people in Conch live their brand fully even to this day.

To use their words, they’ve seceded where others failed.



## C H A P T E R   S I X

# Getting Old School

My friend Mike G. was a skinhead. No, not one of those racist nutbags who wants to blow up the government - more like a skinhead in style only. My understanding is that being a skinhead was initially a style. Shaved heads, combat boots, braces, Fred Perry shirts, straight leg jeans and Vespas were more related to the English mod movement than to the skinheads often seen on “Jerry Springer,” whom we referred to as “Nazis” or “boneheads.” Mike G. was a drummer for a popular ska band, lived in suburban Atlanta and would be disgusted if anyone mistook him for a bonehead.

I was mystified by the whole English mod (modern) scene. Much of the music, style and even political disposition was three decades old. Yet this was 1992, well before the whole “old school” concept. In other words, well before people dancing the robot was seen in 20% of TV commercials. Mike G. knew something before many others did. He knew that some ideas don’t go out of date. He knew that many styles and ideas are enduring and are even more applicable the second time around than they were during their initial introduction. Mike G. knows old school is cool.

Why can’t more marketing people be like Mike?

When I was asked to be on a curriculum committee for the marketing department at the University of Georgia, I panicked. I don’t have a degree in marketing; I have a degree in psychology. I’ve taught and lectured a bit, but it’s always about what I want to talk about. Most of my discussions are about the current goings-on in marketing. I have not the fluency or credentials concerning all the lessons of marketing that fill those big textbooks.

So I got one of those big textbooks. Actually, I got a few of them. And some books on iPod. I felt so much like a student again, I was tempted to throw a keg party.

In my reading, I discovered three important things. One, most of what I read related to things our firm has done with our clients. Two, some fundamental and important information was once considered part of marketing and is crucial to the success of a campaign. And three, most companies are ignoring that information.

So I've pulled out a few oldies but goodies from marketing's Iron Age. I hope you find relevant little pearls of wisdom in each one. And if you don't, that's okay. I just hope you don't work in marketing.

## The four P's

I'm not talking about the singing group, but rather a fun little idiom to help you remember product, packaging, price and promotion. Back in the day (which I have been told was a Wednesday), all of said elements were viewed through a marketability lens. Today, the product is developed in isolation by R and D, the pricing is set by the accountant, the packaging is an afterthought and the promotion occurs only if there is enough money left over from the strategic vision/golf retreat. A great case can be made for why each of these elements should be considered for marketability. I will try to present at least an adequate one.

- **Product:** Products should be created with marketing abilities and ramifications in mind. After all, you will have to sell them at some point. Sales and marketing departments have more touch time with consumers than anyone in an organization. With the money and effort that marketing groups put into understanding customers, the same information should be considered in developing products and updates to address the product/marketing life cycle.
- **Packaging:** Packaging is a final advertisement before purchasing. Please let me tell you from my experience as a marketer that there are few things as difficult as having a great campaign for a dull, uninteresting and even offensive (yes, it has happened) packaging. If a marketer is going to truly embrace brand management, then the whole brand experience needs to be viewed in the sense of the brand strategy. That which does not adhere to the brand strategy should be thrown out and replaced with on-strategy materials.

- **Pricing:** A client of ours developed a series of collectable dolls to be sold for a particular charity. The campaign was to be strong, emotional, dignified and refined. They nearly puked when we increased the price threefold. Our explanation? People are not buying this doll just because they can buy it. They are buying it because they can and others cannot.
- **Promotion:** I lecture enough on the need to holistically and cohesively market goods and services to not rehash it here. My only point is the same as with packaging. That which does not fully fit into the brand strategy should be discarded. That includes irrelevant sponsorships, celebrity endorsements, faux fundraisers, corny sweepstakes and unfocused, irrelevant advertising.

## The unique selling proposition

When groups are unwise enough to let me address them concerning marketing, I often make them itch with my first question: “Why exactly does your company exist?” I quickly follow with, “Doesn’t your competitor do that?”

Competitive marketing has taken two distinct roads lately. One is traveling off towards austere concepts that are supposedly replacing the unique selling proposition, like the emotional ignition point, the winning mindset and other such drivel. The other road simply ignores all sensible selling propositions and replaces them with marketing strategies like “We care,” “We like (insert local sports team) more than (insert competitor)” and “We care more.”

Tell me this: when does a company not need a unique concept of themselves and how they address consumer’s needs?

## Marketing is a war

We have a videotape from a board game called “Commercial Crazyies.” I won’t bore you with the details of the game. The videotape shows actual, vintage TV commercials in which advertisers make fun of Canada, call their competitors liars and suggest that Delta Airlines and McDonald’s are a part of the Communist Party. They are ruthless.

So what happened? Is today's marketplace just less competitive? Do CEOs and stockholders care less about making a profit? Are marketing teams less incensed to kick the competitor's ass? Maybe today's companies are just content to buy market share and show growth and profit with nifty balance sheet tricks rather than getting out and earning it.

We encourage our clients to both love and hate the competition, but to hate them more than they love them. Sure, competitors keep us on our toes and give us a target, but they also have money, customers and market share that we want. If this is just too much for you, you might need to find a job with less ferocity. Perhaps as a shepherd somewhere. Somewhere without wolves.

## **Those who ignore history are doomed**

Marketing always seems to be new school. Some fad is always being heralded as the doom of the 30-second TV spot. There's always some yahoo who claims he can influence everyone through word-of-mouth.

The simple truth is in understanding the idea of marketing. Taking something to market means watching and controlling every step, process and decision that will connect you to the consumer. It worked decades ago. It works now. Understanding, appreciating, expecting and enabling marketing to close the chasm between product and consumer is a winning strategy every time.





## C H A P T E R   S E V E N

# The Art of War

I have a military family. My dad, his dad, my mom's dad, my stepdad, most of my great-uncles and most of my uncles had military stints or careers. As we lived at Virginia Beach, most of my family served in the Navy, leaving only one Marine, my Great-Uncle Alvin. My Uncle Tom spent a career doing something with rockets and torpedoes and my Uncle Bud still does something important in the Navy, though my brothers and I aren't really sure what it is.

As a kid, I sometimes thought my mom really wanted my brothers and me to be naval officers. There is a huge respect for naval officers in my family. Portraits of men in uniform hang on the walls in Grandmom's house. Rank and impending promotion of rank is discussed at Christmas dinner. I responded to my family's expectation by growing my hair out and announcing that I would pursue a career either as a clinical psychologist or as the guitarist for Guns N' Roses. Neither pursuit fully panned out.

Despite my youthful rebellion, I've carried respect for the armed forces into my professional career. I have found it common to discover congruencies between battle and business. When TV mob boss Tony Soprano said he studied "The Art of War" to learn how to run the family, reprinted copies of the centuries-old text flew off the shelves. In their book "Marketing Warfare," Trout and Ries adapted portions of the age-old battle text "On War" to make the case for battle strategy in marketing.

I often get teased by colleagues for making comparisons between strategic marketing and battle, but I don't give them much mind. The lessons learned in war are learned while making order inside of chaos and when the cost of failing is far more than two points of market share. Knowledge gleaned from smart decisions in desperate times has enduring value for many fields.

There are plenty of allegories that can be drawn from battle to business and if this subject piques your interest, I cannot recommend strongly enough that you read "Marketing Warfare." For our purposes, however, I am focusing on one simple principle and that is the following:

Start with a singular strategy and carry it out along channels whose particular abilities match particular parts of that strategy.

Sounds easy, right? It's not. On the battlefield, commanders know what field artillery, heavy infantry and air support can do. On the third floor, the marketing department is sometimes struggling to define the line between the public relations objective and the advertising objective.

And the communications industry has not made it any easier. In order to capture larger portions of client's budgets, the industry has invented the "integrated" communications firm. Ideally, the integrated firm would carry out a strategy without the loss in translation that occurs with multiple firms. Realistically, integrated firms end up being a jack of many trades and a master of none. Many marketers are not only now separating duties of press relations, Internet presence, and advertising, but also subdividing within categories, such as splitting the creative duties from the media duties.

The major folly in integrated campaigns is the cramming of the round peg in the square hole. Having a single, competitive strategy is good, but being unable to partition that strategy effectively into various marketing efforts wastes time and money. The result of such is often TV commercials that sound like mission statement-laden press pitches and press pitches full of a contrived hype that the press simply ignores. Dividing up your weapons and using them right is not easy, but it pays.

This is not the forum to solve the world's integrated marketing woes, but we do have a few suggestions that can help.

## **Get yourself a scorpion**

As I spelled out in Chapter Three, using the same approach on offense and defense can maximize a strategy's effectiveness. We are fond of the quote, "Not having a strategy is like telling your troops to march off in multiple directions and when some get to the right spot, you'll let them know." A scorpion won't let you do that.

## **Don't ask artillery to do infantry's job**

Before you start blasting away at the competition, you better fully understand the scope and capabilities of every marketing tool and how those capabilities can fulfill the strategy before the campaign gets rolling. In this age of guerilla marketing, buzz marketing, and bloggerific marketing, we often find ourselves pursuing the cutting edge by buying the promises of the latest marketing fad. I am not a fan of marketing fads, but I do feel that if the channel can use its unique abilities to further a needed part of the strategy then it might be a good idea. NOTE: Because it's new, hip or cool is not an automatic reason for inclusion of a particular marketing channel into the needed part of the strategy.

Moreover, making every part of a marketing plan meet the same criteria is like making every soldier carry every piece of equipment into battle. People, departments and divisions have different goals, abilities and expectations. Sometimes this is forgotten in marketing and we expect everyone to carry out the big plan in the same way.

## **Don't ask air cavalry to do infantry's job, either**

In advertising we often forget that different media have different strengths. In the interest of having a cohesive campaign, we often have a single set of points and try to address them the same way through different media. This is a bad idea. As consumers progress from awareness to action, different media have different capacities in creating awareness, building knowledge, driving conviction, and inducing action. But don't ask the media which of these they do best. Otherwise, you'll get the simple answer, "Sure, we do that. Just sign right here."

## **Fight the good fight**

There are plenty of epic marketing wars raging in today's business landscape. Opposing sides fight relentlessly to win ground in share of the market. While everyone wants a Trojan horse or an atom bomb, many winners are ahead because their battle plans take into account the different capabilities and expectations of the troops. I have had the honor of commanding a few marketing battles myself. I have a few scars, a few medals and, while I don't wear dress whites, I'm pretty sure my mom is proud.



## C H A P T E R   E I G H T

# The Deep and Creepy Side of Research

We all have that moment. For me, it was in the movie “The Skulls” when the kid from the wrong side of the tracks gets accepted into the ultra-elite secret society and seals the deal upon receiving a gift. Well, a gift and a brand of the society insignia seared into his flesh. I guess we all pay our dues somehow.

The gift, however, has stuck with me for several years. A genius of product placement, it was too good to have been crafted in the backroom of some place with a name like Integrated Placement Solutions. The gift - a beautiful Breitling SuperOcean Chronograph watch.

It hit a nerve. I had to have that watch. And then it hit another nerve. Having wanted to be a psychologist since I was 14 and having blamed my years in school on my Psych degree, I started dissecting my near insatiable desire to have that watch. Why did the simple placement of the Breitling affect me so?

I empathized with the film’s lead character. Like me, he was pulled into a world very unlike what he was used to and always doubted his credentials for membership. The watch represented an initiation into a group that gave relief from the uncertainty in one’s financial future and promised entrance into the privileged circles of the elite. A tempting fantasy for a young college grad, that’s for sure.

The years have passed. I have a few watches. And I’m still dissecting and recombining the psychological elements of selling a brand. In the science of selling, two particular concepts come to mind: the linking of mental constructs and the retrieval and influence of unconscious memories.

Thoughts don't just exist in isolation. Thoughts are related like a web and, when viewed as such, they are often called constructs. Constructs can be of knowledge, esteem, inferiority and any of the other thoughts that flash through the mind. Constructs are also interrelated. Some constructs trigger many others while some trigger only a few. For example, perhaps the feeling of accomplishment is felt triggering self-confidence, bravado, a sense of history and so on. Picture a quilt in which each uniquely shaped piece represent a construct. Grab one particular part of the quilt and you lift many constructs. Grab another part and you lift just a few.

The key to using the illumination and activation of mental constructs is understanding which constructs are connected and the nature of said connection. Such information is gleaned from precision interviewing aimed at uncovering unconscious linkages. Understanding the constructs that enliven desired thoughts can be part of a greater equation in which we remind receivers of feelings, images, and states of mind that allow our message to resonate more fully.

Memories exist in distinct categories that are semantic, episodic and procedural. Within these categories are both unconscious and conscious modes. Without delving too much deeper into the realms of mental function, I will give a broad statement: Understanding the associations between unconscious memories can guide a properly executed communication and trigger such memories. The result can be the layering of emotion and purpose onto an otherwise less influential situation.

For example, our product was a homegrown packaged good. For many people, it had grand old memories. For others, it just had one memory: old. For us, this grand old brand became more than just an item on a shelf. Where some saw a simple package we saw an obvious opportunity staring back. Our product was not just a product. Our product was (brace yourself) about fearing the future.

Our target consumers were ambivalent toward the future. They were those people who say things like, "That's the way we always did it." They don't care much for progress.

Our brand was a commodity and we knew it. But we came to realize that we represented "the old times" and a sense of unchanging values to our core consumer. In the commercial test, respondents used words like, "honest." Now tell me the truth, when was the last time you encountered an "honest" packaged good?

Our creative dug deep. We pulled in scenes just authentic enough to bring our consumer's unconscious memories to life. They responded. Our pre-wave analysis said they wanted the product to mean something. Our post-wave told us that we made the commodity mean all the things the consumer was longing for: honesty, enduring tradition, a return to family values. And all that on aisle four.

The mind is the frontier and battlefield for tomorrow's marketing. The desire to understand the mind's true interaction with the unconscious and how it pertains to brand affinity is still a small and somewhat exclusive club. Our little firm is right there seeking the ways to put strategic use of this understanding to work for our clients' brands. And while sometimes I feel like the club membership is a little over our heads, I remember that our quest for more actionable knowledge is our dues.



## C H A P T E R   N I N E

# Marketing Research Rockstar

I was a seventh-grade rockstar. I had T-shirts showcasing my favorite fully permed bands. I had my awesome ripped and bleached jeans with the occasional bandana tied around the leg. I had long hair. Well, I had the type of long hair parents in Georgia let you have back in the '80s, and that, of course, was a mullet.

My rockstar fame was so pervasive that one of Dad's coworkers recommended me to a market research company for one of their projects. The project was to evaluate whether or not a new series of rockstar trading cards would be a hit. The cards featured the star or band in some rad pose on the front with fun facts and stats on the back.

Now that I am older and can watch VH1's "Behind the Music," I realize there are a lot of fun facts about Vince Neil and Sebastian Bach that were left off the back of the cards.

That was my first run-in with market research. Years later I am sometimes back at the same research company, now as one of the people observing from behind the glass.

Good data comes from smart collection. Conventional wisdom is that more is better, leading to an addiction to reams of green bar charting broad trends. Our experience is that the kind of research that creates potent strategies comes not from quantity but from quality. While less refinement has gone into qualitative research than quantitative, we have a few pointers that may help.

## Get personal

Skip the one-way mirror and M&M's. The more natural an environment to collect data, the better. We once conducted a study to see how people choose where to go out to eat by showing up at their house before they went out and tracking their conversations and decision-making. Though influenced by external social forces, consumers make personal decisions individually. In the focus group setting, the group dynamic can change data leading to inaccurate conclusions and, ultimately, ungrounded strategies.

We recommend marketers commit to not only learning about the consumer but to adapt to a consumer's way of thinking. When we were asked to learn about the interaction of consumers and a brand of chili, we bought boots and hats, listened to cowboy poetry and ate chili for what felt like two solid months.

In short, when it comes to thinking like the consumer, eat your chili.

## Ask the questions you really want the answers to

Much of consumer research is often full of affirmative, leading and grandiose questions like, "When enjoying the power and agile handling of your Mustang, would you say you feel bold?" Marketers seem reluctant to hear the bad stuff, such as, "What would encourage you not to buy the product?" or, "What do you dislike about the company?"

Yet these sentiments are at least as important as the more positive information.

One diagnostic that I particularly like is to ask a consumer what they believe a company that makes a product thinks of him or her personally. Consumers may espouse fairly positive feelings towards the product, only to say the company who makes the product is out of touch, cares little about them as people or just doesn't get it.

Our advice is to get the dirty laundry out, no matter how bad it smells, and then wash it. Pretending customers don't feel a certain way may impress the board, but it does not change consumer thought. Learning the truth today will help diffuse tomorrow's negative situations.

## **Everyone loves a story**

The ability to accurately and fully convey one's full feelings towards a product, service, company or cause is rare. Feelings leading to actions are influenced by conscious and unconscious thoughts, the latter of which are difficult to ascertain through simple questions.

As the mind is adept in using metaphors to translate, categorize and store information, the use of metaphors as a diagnostic can yield important data. We use a variety of metaphor elicitation techniques, such as having consumers view pictures and then make up stories to explain the actions in the photos (thematic apperception test) or describe products and companies in terms of the people in the photos and their personalities, manner of dress and physical appearance (metaphorical personalization).

## **Be a rebel**

The old adage is that once you learn all the rules then you can break them. Marketing research has guiding principles but exists as an organic and evolving study as opposed to a rigid set of laws. Great insights in marketing research and marketing practice have been gleaned by breaking and bending the rules. Whatever you do, don't get stuck in the old architecture that was designed to sell products in the 1950s, when the world revolved around the sales of soap, cigarettes and cars as big as aircraft carriers.

## **In sum: The original marketing research rockstar**

The facility where I gave rockstar trading cards a poor to fairly stupid rating all those years ago was the famous Marketing Workshop outside Atlanta. MWS not only has evolved with the many changes in products and research, but has also plotted new courses for the industry with very innovative approaches. We cannot recommend them highly enough. In short, they rock.



## C H A P T E R   T E N

# The Brand Archetype

Movies are a guilty indulgence that my wife and I share. We love movies. Mystery, drama, suspense, we don't care. Our video store has a five-for-five deal and, thanks to us, they're losing money on it. Good luck getting that coveted copy of "Sneakers" or "Battle Royale" or "Point Break" on a Saturday afternoon from Vision Video. We've gotten there far earlier than you, scouted the employee picks and are watching our second flick just as the neighbors simultaneously fire up their lawn mowers.

To be a lover of movies means to also be quick to engage in a heated debate over the virtues of actors, directors, cinematographers and such. I was in such a debate when I heard a searing, yet profound statement. My dear friend, a music producer, proclaimed that if one had see the hit film "Ray," there was really no need to see the other hit music film, "Walk the Line." The temperature in the room dropped ten degrees.

The producer meant no disrespect to "Walk the Line." He even has a friend in the movie (Dolan Wilson as A&R Guy #2). But Ben has a point: The movies really are similar. A tough childhood. A young man leaves on a journey. Fame becomes overwhelming. Addiction. Redemption. Reflection. For all its acclaim, "Ray" was no great invention either. The story is as old as humankind, just retold with new characters.

Watch enough movies and you'll see that the barrel holding all the plot lines has a bottom. Why? Because these stories are parts of human thought and are often used in various forms to help us make sense of our experiences. We call them archetypes.

Try this little experiment, courtesy of the good folks at Harvard. Read the sentence below and respond quickly.

Think of a vegetable.

If you're like most Americans, you said carrot. Sure, you can probably explain with elaborate detail why you thought carrot, but, in the end, you thought carrot. It was predicted that you would and you can pretty much plan on most people to do the same.

Understanding archetypes has consequences for brand development and marketing. When a marketer weaves sales content into a pre-existing archetype, the consumer feels familiar and loyal without fully understanding why. Archetypes make good starting points for brand building because they are reasonably static and often cross-cultural. Following are a few archetypes that we feel can have real impact with consumers. And of course, because we love movies, they are formatted like movie reviews.

“Die Hard”

**Genre:** Hero brand

**Starring:** Ford, Sears, Viking, Jack Daniel's, Charles Schwab, O Magazine, and Martha Stewart

**Synopsis:** The hero brands always have great stories. There is often some hardship at inception, a drive to stick with it and then a tipping point of success. Hero brands always seem to want to reinvent themselves every few years, which can seem counter to an often-important heritage factor.

**Snowden and Tatarski give it:** One thumb up. The hero is always fun, but is also very hard to be. Nearly all businesses can find a hero story within them if they look hard enough. Correctly applying the hero archetype in a manner that connects consumers with the brand is what separates the heroes from the zeros.

“Look Who's Talking”

**Genre:** Feel good

**Starring:** Most grocery stores, Macy's, pretty much every upscale piece of real estate or spa

**Synopsis:** The world is transformed to a place that revolves around shoes, things made with whole grains and pastel sweaters.

**Snowden and Tatarski give it:** One thumb up, one thumb down. The energy created around some feel-good brands is very potent, but the believability threat always looms. At what point can we keep showing people fantasyland and expect them to believe it is real?

“James Bond 007: Golden Eye”

**Genre:** Suspense/spy action

**Starring:** IKEA, Hummer, iTunes

**Synopsis:** A dark horse brand doesn't seem to need consumers, which only makes consumers want it more. A sense of challenge to the user (IKEA stuff comes in a million pieces, Hummers are pretty much impractical to non-battle-field situations) says you really have to like me to be with me.

**Snowden and Tatarski give it:** One thumb up, one thumb down. Mystery is cool but can get old in a hurry. Competitor brands that swoop in with similar features but more ease-of-use can become both viable imposters and easier-to-use alternatives.

“Forrest Gump”

**Genre:** Coming-of-age

**Starring:** Ben and Jerry's, REI, Microsoft, Starbucks, Google

**Synopsis:** Once-new sweetheart begins to mature publicly, leaving the brand somewhere between the newly passé and the retro.

**Snowden and Tatarski give it:** One thumb down. Coming-of-age sounds easy...it's not. Many brands have an identity crisis. Instead of resolving the crisis with a Corvette and an earring, however, brands often pull painful gymnastic maneuvers like line extension to look younger. As companies grow, brands grow with them.

## In sum

A million great stories are out there. Understanding how a brand fits into these concepts is a competitive advantage most companies don't know they have. Proper brands should have a gauge of where they are in the consumer thought process and a strategy of how to become part of consumer decisions. Relevance to the consumer must always play the leading role.



## C H A P T E R   E L E V E N

# Closing the Gap Between Product and Message

I was not the world's best student. In fact, I might have been in close contention for the worst. When I finished college, I believe the faculty was applauding my exit as much as my accomplishment. So it is not without a sense of irony that I now occasionally teach at the business school that collectively laughed at my application so many years ago.

My Marketing 4060 students are amazing. Their drive and zeal makes me ponder whether such traits are the hallmark of the emerging talented youth or merely something we all had before the cold reality of the working world set in. Nonetheless, I am impressed.

At current, the class is finishing their final project before graduation. The task is to construct an integrated marketing campaign for an actual business. While I sat and discussed the projects with each group, I came upon something amazing. The marketing blunders and snafus normally found within the hierarchal structures that don't allow for dissent were now clearly before me in these students' projects. The ever-widening chasm between the product and the message sat like a science experiment in front of me.

Forgive me for taking a student's earnest and honest attempt at creating a cohesive campaign and dissecting it to show what is making many campaigns fail, but the value of seeing how the process works really gives insight and warning to us who engage in the very same thing. The problems have various causes, but end in nearly the same way each time. They end in a disconnect between the product and the consumer. Here are a few examples.

## **Because management told us to**

This is the business equivalent to sugar in a gas tank. Such a situation accomplishes several amazing feats at one time. It negates any self-worth the marketing department has built up by reviewing research, tracking competitors, testing the product and basically doing all the other things they do to shape their marketing strategy. Marketing departments that become used to such blind, top-down marketing strategy eventually become a mere apparatus that carries out the boss's latest whim rather than acting as a consultant on who, what, why and where to sell.

## **Because it looks so cool when our competitor...**

Target has some of the best advertising on TV. It's fresh, hip and lively. It's what every marketing department wants people to think their advertising looks like. So it's funny that the best new Target ad is from Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart's new spot has all the funky irreverence of Target. It even wraps up the spot with some faux Zen empowerment like, "The more you save, the more you blah. Blah, blah." The only problem? It's still Wal-Mart! The fun and stylish life the commercial exudes runs completely counter to the overwhelming brand image of a massive box that sells stuff cheap. Positioning Wal-Mart as cool is like positioning Buick as young.

Wal-Mart marketers chased the trend of Target and IKEA without restraint. Maybe someone should have stopped and said, "Hey, I know we're trying to be cool...but we're Wal-Mart."

## **Because everyone likes it when...**

Fads are like waves at the beach. Cool to ride if you know how, but they can also smack you in the face, grind your head in the sand and carry you helplessly out to sea. A good percentage of my students (and some clients, for that matter) seem called by the sirens of blogs, buzzagents, viral campaigns, guerrilla tactics and a heaping pile of other "Johnny-come-lately" marketing tactics. Sometimes jumping on the fad wagon is easier than having a good idea. When I ask fad proponents if their fad is even congruent to their marketing strategy, their response usually confirms that such a notion never really came up.

## **Because the marketing book said so**

I know, I know. You have to learn the rules and then you can break them. The problem is there seems to be a new rule written each day (see section immediately above). My take is simple: Learn theory and make your own rules. We know that consumers have particular desires and needs. We know that our products may fulfill those desires or needs. We know, to a limited extent, our target consumer's personal characteristics, likes/dislikes, media consumption, etc. Our job is to explain to the consumer why what we have to offer meets those needs or desires. Everything else, all the "say the brand name five times and make the logo this big" junk, needs to go in the shredder.

## **In sum**

This chapter could be eleven volumes thick. What I think all of us can learn from seeing a dissection of early problems in marketing strategy formation is that the lack of transparency and clear communication prevents self-defeating problems from coming to light. If everyone's efforts and goals are on creating marketing that is focused on outcomes instead of process, the end result improves significantly. I am no genius nor am I a rocket scientist. In fact, I learned this from a couple of college students.



## C H A P T E R   T W E L V E

# The Simple Truth about Food and the Consumer Relationship

I love food. I don't just like food. Food and I don't just slow dance and hold hands. No sir, if food's dad found out my intensions he'd be looking for 12-gauge shells. That's how much I love food. My wife and I base most of our vacations around food. We try to make sure we eat the truest local cuisine of where we are and we try to collect cookbooks from everywhere we go. Being that we often travel the South, we have more than a few cookbooks with titles that end in "Baptist Church."

Amidst this protracted love affair with food, my wife has fallen in love with the magazine Real Simple. It started with the food, but then the other sections started calling. She cooks the recipes, takes the clothing advice and tries to follow the instructions for simplifying the everyday. My wife loves food but she really loves her Real Simple magazine for one really simple reason: It gets her.

I mean it really gets her. Amid the enormous selection of magazines published today, my wife really had little interest in any until she found Real Simple. Real Simple is written for people like my wife who are a growing percentage of the population. Highly educated, but grounded. Discerning, but frugal. Stylish, on a budget.

And there is a simple reason that Real Simple is good. The magazine seems to fully appreciate its role in the consumer's life. Rather than focus on a single aspect of a lot of people's lives (like fashion), Real Simple focuses on many aspects of life for a certain group of people. Instead of being a fashion or food magazine, Real Simple acts more like a monthly installment guide on how to be a hip, stylish and practical human being.

And a few savvy marketers are taking notice. And more than a few are not.

Too often marketers seek out a single interaction with consumers. This is lost opportunity. Consumers, particularly ones like my wife, seek out relationships on which they can build trust and expectations. The charge this levees onto marketers is the building of an entire experience around a product (or suite of products) within a brand persona that is attractive, responsive, encompassing and yet, really simple.

Marketing which truly appreciates and accurately executes with regards to the consumer/marketer relationship should expect better results. Additionally, one can expect better intelligence for product development and better communications with consumers.

Here's our take on a few things that can help.

## **Don't send a man to do a girl's job**

Too often, research fails to appreciate the full perspective of a consumer group that may be different from the researcher. This does not mean you should be banishing people from the research team due to race or gender, but it does mean only including people who demonstrate a keen ability for self-appraisal and the capacity to separate their own perspectives while appreciating another's. Truthfully, I have found people that are pretty much in the target group who still taint their research by not separating and evaluating their own influence on the data. When researchers are unable to make this crucial step, they often go down the dark road of over-reliance on quantitative data. This is a really bad idea.

## **Walk the walk. Talk the talk. But don't talk the walk.**

A while back, our firm was requested to produce a spot to remind consumers of the need for the simple, no-nonsense way of life and then position our product as part of it. In one scene we show an old guy on a tractor with his wife bringing him out a cup of coffee. It was a quick little scene that enlivened the imaginations of the consumer. The responses we received often spoke of that scene, saying how much it reminded the viewer of life on the farm and grandparents and so much more than was expected from the 2.3 seconds it sat on the screen. In that short time, we really connected with some people.

What did we not do? Show flawless models in cowboy hats riding around in jeeps hooting and hollering. Nor did we have a giant picnic spread under pappy's old live oak while people square-danced. Patronizing the consumer is always a losing strategy for everyone but the media account executive.

Showing a faithful appreciation and understanding for the consumer in communications is as important as showing a faithful appreciation and understanding in interpersonal relationships. Easily put, before you try to walk the walk, better know where you're trying to go first.

## Circle the wagons

Some very successful brands have found the opportunity to exude the brand through every interaction with the consumer. This means elevating the experience beyond, "Come buy our stuff." With web forums, books, newsletters, meet ups, outreach, training and a myriad of other tactics, great marketers are closing the gap between company offerings and customer experience.

One great example of taking the brand beyond its typical two-dimensional interaction is what we like to call the now/how approach. Now/how is simple: Now you can do this with the product (which you didn't do before) / Here's how.

I love a spot for Kraft Italian salad dressing where they show a cute, funky girl and how she makes her funky salad with blueberries and an assortment of neo-fusion fare. It's basically saying, "NOW you can use a dressing we've made for years to make a really good salad that you wouldn't expect. Here's HOW."

The now/how of a product should, however, fit into its brand strategy. Using Coca-Cola to make barbecue sauce fits perfectly into a rooted heritage of simpler times and the intergenerational enjoyment of a Coke. So does putting a bag of salted peanuts in the bottle (glass is better if you can find it). Using Coke to get corrosion off the car battery is probably off-strategy. I do feel, however, that it's a close second to the current prevailing idea of "The Coke side of life," which is apparently an alter-universe where unrealistically diverse posses roam urban centers while break dancing, skateboarding, crumping and text messaging. Is there a Dr Pepper side of life, too?

Our favorite chili, Wick Fowler, can be mixed sparingly with ground beef to make the best chiliberger you've ever had. Our favorite mayonnaise can be used to make the best chocolate cake you've ever tasted. Yeah, a mayonnaise cake. A few years ago, a coleslaw dressing promoted itself as the best alternative to mayonnaise and a whole ton of people gave it a try. Keep your now/how in-strategy and there is no limit to the strides that can be made.

I believe that when you truly immerse yourself in the product (figuratively, you sicko) you begin to transcend the mere use into the product experience. You cannot force it. You really should not fake it because somebody has money down on the accuracy of your experience. You should sit back and take in the whole sum of the product and find the blueberries in your salad and the peanuts in your Coke.

And now, because I ragged on them (and because members of my family own stock in the company), here is my famous Coke BBQ sauce:

- 1 medium bottle ketchup
- Four cups apple cider vinegar
- Two cans of Original Coke
- Four tablespoons of red pepper
- Two shots of bourbon
- One cup of sugar

Combine ingredients and slow boil for a few hours.





## C H A P T E R   T H I R T E E N

# The Car and House Theory

The occasional cigar is a vice of mine. I started years ago, when the agency was first getting its feet under it and revenue was...well...not in accordance with a taste for fine cigars. It doesn't take many cigars to get you addicted. No, I'm not talking about the nicotine. The far worse addiction is the cigar culture that leads you to compulsively buy and collect burnished wood humidors, cut crystal ash trays, self-sharpening cigar cutters, leather bound journals, overpriced magazine subscriptions, acres of books and, of course, enough cigars to speed up global warming by 10%. It can be overwhelming and expensive.

But every smoky cloud has a silver lining. In the midst of delving into the cigar culture, I noticed that everything even remotely concerning cigars is branded. From your Davidoff cutter to Marvin Shanken's CIGAR Insider, your rank in the cigar world is defined by your collection of brands. The culture is not merely a suggestion in an ad, but an entire experience with wood paneled walls and stuffed leather chairs.

Sadly, I am not the first person to be intrigued by the brand identification in the cigar world. Luxury marketers have long chased after the whole brand experience that seems to envelop cigar aficionados and like-minded enthusiasts. Luxury marketing councils and forums have sprung up to share practices and pool resources. A group of luxury marketers once banded together to hire famed psychiatrist turned marketing guru G. Clotaire Rapaille to decode the mental working of the luxury goods buyer. A savvy group, that's for sure.

Much is learned from studying the brand loyalty among those heeled enough to engage in such pursuits as sailing, gourmet cooking and piloting airplanes. The relevance of such a study, however, is not exclusive to marketing to the wealthy. The need of consumers to use brands to define themselves exists in all socioeconomic strata. As one traverses various consumer groups, the principles gleaned from luxury marketing have differences in application, yet the principles remain intact.

We have listed below a few important principles found in luxury marketing that have possible applications for all types of consumers.

## **Consumers buy who they want to be, not who they are**

Consumers use brands to define themselves in the way that they see themselves. We often view ourselves optimistically, seeing what we hope will be perceived. Therefore, the brands we use to define ourselves are based on a personal self-image rather than one rooted in reality. This notion was emphasized in a project our firm engaged in while marketing lakeside home sites in a luxury community. The previous marketing efforts had been ingrained in what managers and real estate agents thought was the persona of the targeted group. Even if those earlier efforts had been correct in their assessment of the consumer, the flaw was that no one bothered to market with any semblance of genuine understanding of the person that our consumer wanted to be.

## **Consumers buy relationships, not products**

Owners of luxury cars love to tell stories of their extraordinary customer service. Like the E-Class loaners they give you while you get your oil changed at the dealership. Or the Rolls Royce mechanics that sometimes travel by helicopter to come fix your Rolls at your mansion. Luxury cars having accessory clothing, magazines, short films and owners' clubs is no coincidence. Brands that people define themselves by have the ability to foster loyalty through a variety of channels. When you buy a Cavalier, you get a car. When you buy a BMW, you join a family.

## **Consumers seek the whole experience**

The number of cigar products that become involved in the experience reveals the potency of brands that people use to define themselves. Consumers want a whole experience and marketers would be wise to provide it. The crux of creating a whole experience is knowing which attributes and actions will be memorable and further the desired experience and which attributes or actions are wasted time and energy. For our luxury real estate marketer, it meant spending more time getting the right scotches and cognacs in the clubhouse and less time agonizing over table centerpieces. Not that centerpieces are not important, they just were not that important to our target group and, therefore, not warranting overuse of limited time and resources.

## **There were 200 million people in this country in 1970 and most of them wanted to either be, or be with, James Bond**

Why the popularity? James Bond was not who people were but whom they admired and perhaps, in a small way, identified with. We all picture ourselves far more suave and debonair than we really are, and that allows for a unique opportunity in communication. To construct a message or experience that targets what people want, or want to be, is far easier than creating one based on the countless facets of actual people's personas. Yet everyday, we find products, services and messages meant to be everything to everyone and based on interpretations of people's lives rather than their wants. Our advice? Focus, sacrifice and stick with it.

## **Consumers use brands in different categories to define themselves based on the availability of categories**

One member of our staff returned from a trip to Tokyo, setting off several conversations about brands and the use of brands to define the self. We at ST have often been curious about the interaction of societies and brands. Meredith's observations in Japan, along with the views of a few good thinkers, have led to the development of a working theory we call "the House and Car."

The house and car theory simply states that people will use the resources available to brand themselves. For many Americans, the resource for branding oneself is the house and/or the car. The type of home we choose to live in and the type of car we choose to drive is often a statement about who we are and what we aspire to be. Maybe we are sensible or progressive or engaged in the world around us. Let's face it: A whole lot of the people who went out to buy the first hybrid cars have enough money to not worry about gas prices.

As we move into populations where cars and houses are less of a personal brand option (i.e., urban centers with limited housing or mobility for cars, areas with high concentrated poverty), other items become more involved in the branding of oneself. We were astonished with Meredith's tales of \$1,100 shoes and \$200 cell phone charms until we realized that when your house is just like everyone else's and no one has a car, you do what it takes to brand yourself.

This theory is not proven, or even tested for that matter, but its suggested implications are stark. People will brand themselves no matter what their resources. Marketers are wise to position their products in a way that allows consumers to define themselves.





## C H A P T E R   F O U R T E E N

# Strategy Creep is Out to Get You

I love non-profits. Aside from allowing the communications industry to create some of the most compelling messages in the media today, the fact that some people will put in the time, get the education and then dedicate themselves to a life of bettering the lives of others is humbling and educational.

I've learned a good bit about non-profits this past year. My wife finished a graduate degree in Social Work and now works in social service giving us new connections with many in the field. I've taken a few posts on boards of non-profits and consulted more than a few on marketing and messaging. In all this, I've observed a stark and important parallel.

Non-profits sometimes suffer from mission creep. The way mission creep works is that a non-profit exists to fill a particular need, but then finds that funding can be obtained by stretching the resources and attempting to fill an additional need. Mission creep becomes dangerous when important resources are over-extended and the core mission of the group is diluted beyond recognition.

Funny. That sounds like a lot of marketing plans. A once great strategy is often weighed down with new agendas and stipulations until the original strategy is all but lost. In a sort of marketing department version of the schoolyard game Telephone, strategies filter down, shedding focus and potency along the way. We call such a phenomenon strategy creep.

Strategy creep is not when someone interjects during a presentation with a new idea. Strategy creep is not an abrupt and sudden change. Otherwise, it wouldn't "creep." It is not a drift, but a fundamental shift. Strategy creep starts after the presentation and often with the lines, "I loved the presentation; I've only got a few changes. Like, can you change the TV creative to include a laptop, Paris Hilton and reference to our new blogspot?"

Strategy creep is like mission creep in that it is invasive, self-defeating and often predicated on shortsighted goals. We've encountered strategy creep a few times, have learned to recognize it and have a few tips on how to avoid it.

## **Creep #1: The all-inclusive target market**

Great creative focuses on the target consumer. Brands that have wide appeal should target communication through media channels that have special creative opportunities. While there are few guarantees in marketing, one of them is that attempting to stretch a strategy intended for one group to address another group is a bad idea.

The desire to neatly package up our efforts is human. Human communication, however, is not prepackaged. We customize our communication to whom we are talking to and we don't feel compelled to sum up every conversation with the same tired tagline. Brands that seek a more direct experience with the target consumer understand that consumers appreciate being addressed with a personalized and sincere message.

## **Creep #2: Hey, those guys over there are making a killing**

It seems to always happen the same way. The concept is flawless. The research is clear and telling. The strategy is solid. The material is on the UPS truck to the TV stations. Sales, Distribution, Public Relations and the whole dealer network are all on board. Then a competitor is rumored to get some traction on one part of an effort. The whole thing goes to pieces.

In political advertising, I was always taught to define the opponent and the battlefield. Unfortunately in many a marketing effort, we not only define ourselves through the competitor's actions, but also allow them to chart our strategy as a response to theirs.

Strategies rarely fail because someone missed a fleeting trend in marketing. Strategies often fail because someone gets scared that if they don't stay safe and follow a competitor, they won't know where they're going. The result is often a hybrid of the original idea and some concepts lifted from a competitor, making a mix that goes together like Reese's Peanut Butter Cups and Pepto-Bismol.

### **Creep #3: Backsliding to the good old days**

Enduring campaigns stick to a company; that's the whole idea. And it's not a bad idea unless it's a bad campaign. Good or bad, people become comfortable with a campaign and seem to itch for years when it gets changed.

Perhaps the old campaign had glory and success in earlier years. Perhaps many of those responsible for the old campaign now have a few more inches added to their job title. Whatever the reason, old campaigns seem to stick and get stuck in about every effort they possibly can.

Times change. Consumer attitudes change. Strategies need to change as well.

### **Creep #4: It's the new thing**

On the flip side of backsliding is jumping into every fad simply because it is new. This is bad business not just because it allows outside forces to dictate marketing strategy regardless of internal needs or attributes, but also because it is symptomatic of a strategy poorly planned in the first place. Organizations that hop from marketing fad to marketing fad often have little solidarity in their marketing plan. If your organization's strategy is to sit and wait for a trend to fall in your lap before the competition gets a hold of it, it might be time to get a real plan.

Continually switching the game plan waste resources and precious time in the competitive world of selling. I have seen companies ignore solid marketing plans with proven results to chase after cell phones, blogs, infomercials, guerrilla stunts and a host of other marketing oddities. Innovation is good in the communications industry, but for every good innovation there are a hundred bad ones and somebody else already footed the bill to show us they don't work. Unless the new thing fits flawlessly into an earlier conceived and honed strategy, it might be wise to practice restraint.

## **The cure for strategy creep (or at least a vaccine)**

Get a strategy, agree on it and stick to it. Our clients distill their strategies down to single page documents and nothing else happens until everyone is on board. That can be uncomfortable. Inevitably, someone in the strategy meeting will have a critique that comes with no justification. Something like, “I can’t explain why, I’m just not feeling it.” Make that person go sit in the hall while the people who have something to add finish up.

Determining the marketing strategy is the most important task a company can ever do. In our time of companies being run by accountants and general counsels, it might seem funny that we even have to worry about selling instead of focusing on mergers, strategic partnerships and version 5.1 rollouts of the company email system.

A solid strategy is a litmus test for everything a company communicates. It helps make linkages or identify deficits in communication. This sounds easier than it is. Often, an opportunity avails itself like a particular media buy, a celebrity endorsement or the chance to be the official IT partner of “American Idol”. Stretching the strategy towards the opportunity rather than holding fast is tempting. Such a situation is a difficult call for brand managers. On one hand, you could become a marketing superstar. On the other, you just blew \$1.4 million to text message thousands of 14-year-olds about the value of your CRM software.

One way to stay focused is to have strategy summits to keep the strategy fresh and relevant. This is a great opportunity to review what works, what doesn’t and what else is out there. Get the gang together, go hole up somewhere and don’t come back until you have something brilliant. And by something brilliant I mean a solid strategy. Not a karaoke-singing deer head found in a truck stop.

As an endnote, please support your local non-profits. They teach us not only about marketing strategy, but also about the things that are truly special in life. And if you don't have a particular cause you like to support, please consider supporting one of these fine organizations listed below.

[www.communityconnection211.com](http://www.communityconnection211.com)

[www.safecampusesnow.org](http://www.safecampusesnow.org)

[www.foodbanknega.org](http://www.foodbanknega.org)

[www.project-safe.org](http://www.project-safe.org)

[www.athensareahomelessshelter.org](http://www.athensareahomelessshelter.org)



## C H A P T E R F I F T E E N

# Ahhh...the Tried and True

My wife sometimes gets annoyed with me because I laugh at my own jokes. It's funny, because I remember being mortified when my dad would do it. He would tell a joke to the other parents while I was at football practice. I would hear him belly laugh and the distraction allowed big Bubba Moon to knock me on my ass. I guess I stopped being self-conscious about dad laughing at his jokes right about the time that I started laughing at my own.

So here I go. Ha, ha! I think this is funny. I have laughed at it several times while revising it. I laugh at it when I see a commercial and know I just got bingo. I laugh out loud and sometimes it annoys my wife.

Below is a list of tired old TV concepts that gets rehashed over and over again until people have become quite indifferent towards television ads, forcing advertisers to now chase you down on the Internet. I blame those who lazily use these trite formats for the entire concept of clutter. Think about it. We don't consider multiple TV stations, hit songs or fine art clutter. No, because we like these things.

And sometimes we like ads. Sometimes, people put the time into understanding us as consumers, formulating a message, and considering entertainment value. This list and bingo board is about what happens when none of the aforementioned steps are considered.

If you like to laugh at stupid, disconnected, arrogant, aloof and just plain bad advertising, I hope you'll join me and laugh aloud while you're playing bingo.

## Obvious Concept Bingo: Television Edition

Why worry whether or not a concept is innovative when you can follow these plots and guarantee that it won't be. At least then you'll be sure.

### 1) Brag, brag, brag, question (BBBQ)

**Description:** Ego-fueled words spoken by a gritty, movie trailer voiceover. Always sure to get the people at your company who don't wear sleeves on the weekends a little misty.

**Prevalence:** I don't think one is allowed to own an American car company without having at least six varieties of this spot on the air at each given moment. Also works great for any product where over 50% of the communication to customers is through koozies and mesh ball caps.

**Example:** "More head room than any car in its class, supercharged turbo-charged superengine, even the spare has all wheel drive... Are you ready for a breakthrough?"

### 2) Brag, brag, brag, cliché (BBBC)

**Description:** Much like the above BBBQ, but with a philosophical bent via a cliché. Great for reaching the higher intellect customers in the lowest possible educational bracket (some kindergarten?).

**Prevalence:** Mostly used for automobiles, lawn equipment, gutter covers, and any substance for your house that was once a liquid but now a solid, like stucco or asphalt.

**Example:** "Hardens faster than any other paving surface, superior resistance to rain... Take the road less traveled."

### 3) **Brag, brag, brag, insult competitor (BBBI)**

**Description:** Again with the bragging, but now upping the ante with an insult or challenge.

**Prevalence:** And now for their third medal of the evening...automobiles.

**Example:** “Bettering handling than any Indy car. More horsepower. Let’s see Firebird try that.” Or, alternately, “Firebird doesn’t come close.” The sticker version of such a tactic is those little cartoon Calvins peeing on a competing car emblem, which is always ironic because with the sticker, being on the supposedly superior truck, the cartoon is also peeing on the truck, and quite near the driver for that matter.

### 4) **Power track set to family antics of aging hippies**

**Description:** Driving, chores or any otherwise mundane activity set to horrible classic rock.

**Prevalence:** Oil changes, fast food, cars, auto parts.

**Example:** Guy mows grass with enthusiasm while Eddie Money power track booms in the background.

### 5) **Hot wife teaches slouch husband domestic sophistication**

**Description:** In TV land all husband are overweight, bald and can only think clearly when it is concerning sports. Wives, on the other hand, are all nineteen years old with two teenage children and perfectly white teeth. In these commercials, the husband is always trying some rudimentary task that he just can’t get right because it doesn’t involve sports. His wife then must step in and do it for him, to which he shrugs his shoulders. I imagine the assumption is that women are supposed to identify with their husband being unattractive and dumb while they are hot and in charge. How uplifting.

**Prevalence:** Cleaning supplies, packaged goods, anywhere that has a one-day sale.

**Example:** Husband dresses kids in shorts while it is snowing outside. What a goofball!! Good thing his wife was there to keep him from mistaking Drano for the kids' Kool-Aid.

## 6) Girls just want to have fun to techno

**Description:** Products that are so magnificently wonderful, they make people break into spontaneous dancing. And not just any dance - the sorority girl dance (I know because I married a sorority girl and she can, in fact, do this dance). The dance starts where you just sort of rock back and forth and progresses until the arms move overhead and the hips wiggle side to side. Never seen it before? Go to a Dave Matthews concert.

**Prevalence:** Eyeglasses, haircuts, places with “doorbuster sales.”

**Example:** You can't see it, but I am doing the dance for you right now.

## 7) Straight shooter with stupid shooter

**Description:** Person giving a hardnosed sales pitch with some unrelated and moronic action; i.e., camera zooms out to reveal actor is not wearing pants, person in background doing the robot\*, anything involving Vikings.

**Prevalence:** Anything with technology involved. This is due to the tech wonder years where start ups wasted people's retirement money running ads of people shooting hamsters from cannons and streaking naked across soccer fields to sell software solutions.

**Example:** A man telling his yard gnome about how fast his Internet service is. The gnome replies back. Not in that his lips move, but with just a really zany voice. I mean, really zany.

\* It should be noted that the popular break dancing move “the robot” hereafter replaces the “staying alive Travolta finger dance” as the ironic dance move to be used at weddings, bar mitzvahs, neighborhood pool association luaus and in TV commercials.

## 8) Food that dances or talks

**Description:** Sure it's trite, but you have to love food that talks to you. What if food said what was really on its mind? How creepy would that be? "Hey, don't eat me. I have a family back in the fridge who loves me." That's just gross. Food should be seen (and eaten) and not heard.

**Prevalence:** When fast food and packaged goods marketers run out of ideas, they start to hallucinate and think that the food is talking to them. The marketers then mistake the hallucination for an epiphany and decide to base their advertising on it. That's the best explanation I have. It sounds stupid, but so does making something you are going to consume speak to you before you eat it. In fact, that's really stupid.

**Example:** You can't see it, but my hamburger and I are having a conversation right now.

## 9) Today's ailment makes your life better

**Description:** Judging from all the waterfall-laden vacations that people with herpes are taking, herpes seems the way to go. Also, people with asthma and high blood pressure sure seem to live interesting lives. Funny that they show you all the interesting scenes from these people's daily lives right when they are explaining that the drug might cause sudden and explosive diarrhea.

**Prevalence:** Prescription drugs make up 95% of this category. The rest are for mutual funds that only seem available to people who become sculptors or yoga instructors in their retirement.

**Example:**

- Scene 1: open on tropical beach
- Scene 2: loving couple runs in the waves at sunset
- Scene 3: wild horses run across the beach
- Scene 4: mermaid riding a unicorn descends from sky
- Scene 5: voiceover: "Having genital herpes doesn't slow me down."

## 10) Corporate congregation: What we believe

**Description:** A commercial that magically overdoes the drama (without really having a message) with the intention to sell you the latest CRM software. These commercials are amazing in that they make you want to rise up and take action, but in the end you don't really know what you're rising up for. They start with powerful music and often have a sped-up shot of a highway or commuter train. Important note: These commercials always have a small Asian child staring up at an imposing building. And then the sermon. "We believe in solutions that transcend convention." What exactly does that mean? In fact, what does any of the corporatespeak jargon in these commercials mean? It really seems like a load of fresh manure buffed to a high shine. After watching such a pseudo-spiritual *tour d' farce*, one knows not whether to buy a new contact managing software or quit one's job and join the Polyphonic Spree.

**Prevalence:** Nearly every commercial that runs during "Meet the Press" or "Hardball." Popular products are computers, software, oil drilling platforms, military aircraft and business opportunities in Virginia.

# Obvious Concepts Bingo

<p>The Brag, Brag, Brag, Question</p> <p>ADVERTISTER:</p> <p>DESCRIPTION:</p>	<p>Brag, Brag, Brag, Cliché</p> <p>ADVERTISTER:</p> <p>DESCRIPTION:</p>	<p>Brag, Brag, Brag Insult Competitor</p> <p>ADVERTISTER:</p> <p>DESCRIPTION:</p>
<p>Power Track Set to Family Antics of Aging Hippies</p> <p>ADVERTISTER:</p> <p>DESCRIPTION:</p>	<p>Hot Wife Teaches Slouch Husband Domestic Sophistication</p> <p>ADVERTISTER:</p> <p>DESCRIPTION:</p>	<p>Girls Just Want to Have Fun to Techno</p> <p>ADVERTISTER:</p> <p>DESCRIPTION:</p>
<p>Straight Shooter with Stupid Shooter</p> <p>ADVERTISTER:</p> <p>DESCRIPTION:</p>	<p>Food that Dances or Talks</p> <p>ADVERTISTER:</p> <p>DESCRIPTION:</p>	<p>Herpes Makes Your Life Better</p> <p>ADVERTISTER:</p> <p>DESCRIPTION:</p>

## SUPER DOUBLE BONUS

 <p>The Corporate Congregation</p> <p>ADVERTISTER:</p> <p>DESCRIPTION:</p>
---

To get bingo, you must connect 3 boxes horizontally, vertically or diagonally. The Super Double Bonus question is a freebie, and you can use it in any box you please to help you make bingo. Please write the advertiser's name and a brief description of the commercial in each box.

Fax your completed board to 706.546.8104. We will post results on our website. If you get bingo first, we will send you some random junk from our office. If you get blackout (all 10 squares) we will send you the randomest, coolest junk we can find in our office.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

# The Tagline Conundrum

“Moving your communication solution into tomorrow, today”

Toyota is a huge company. They have shown a repeat ability to produce well-conceived products and market them to the point that the American apple pie has been replaced by a sandstone-colored Camry.

What a smart company to produce such thoughtfully designed and well-built products. So what happened? In the midst of all those good ideas, did a really dumb idea seem like innovation? Did the rush to fill an empty space in car ads lead to the following hypothetical scenario?

“Bill, quick! We need a tagline!”

“What does the car do?”

“It goes forward.”

“How about *moving forward*.”

“But it also goes backwards.”

“Too late, you should have said that up front.”

There is no explanation for what forces people to think a truly terrible tagline is better than no tagline at all.

Some managers prefer to err on the side of saying nothing, but still insist on using a tagline to do so. Like, “The best at next.” What does that mean and how does it not apply to perhaps every company to ever exist? A neighborhood had the tagline, “Created from yesterday’s memories.” Are not yesterday’s memories actually today’s memories? Should it say instead, “Created from yesterday and today’s memories,” or simply, “Created from memories?” Would one even have a concept of yesterday without a memory? It’s all very, very stooopid.

## The tagline test: See how you measure up

- Are you really saying anything customers care about?

A big box appliance discounter is noted for moving to Sprawling and hawking an \$11,000 plasma screen which maxes out an entire family's credit line. They follow their ads with the tagline, "Family owner since blah blah blah." A consumer buying a TV that cost more than their house does not care if the owner is a terrorist if they can get financing. Get relevant in a hurry.

- Is your tagline consumer focused or just bragging?

This notion goes for brand names as well. An overflow already exists of "Premier Real Estates," "Superior Tire Service," and "Pinnacle Products." For taglines, use this quick and dirty rule: If you are boasting about yourself, your tagline sucks. For added measure, if your tagline starts with a "we" or "where," as in, "We believe in quality," or, "Where service is value," trash it and start saying things that really matter to consumers.

- If your competitors all jumped off a bridge...

Remember, just because everyone else is doing it does not certify effectiveness. Keeping that in mind, avoid stupid clichés, cheesy double entendres and don't put anything in quotes even remotely near your logo.

## Be like the great ones

Great taglines sum up a brand position. In a few words, the truly great encapsulate a whole feeling about the brand in a way that seems to speak to customers. Some of our favorites are listed.

- The Ultimate Driving Machine

Despite an unfortunate venture into the sportutilivan market, the position of the BMW has always been one that beckons to those who truly love to drive their cars. Additionally, if you own a BMW, no matter how old, you know that saying “ultimate” is not bragging.

- When it absolutely, positively, has to be there overnight

FedEx wanted one position, which was overnight shipping. Long before the days when accountants convinced shipping to become integrated logistic solution providers, the need for overnight shipping still existed and FedEx enlisted a tagline that got right to the point.

- Is it live or is it Memorex?

What could say more about the fidelity of a tape than comparing it to being live?

- Let's Motor

A recent commercial for Cadillac showed European luxury cars in a ballroom driving precisely in a choreographed order, when suddenly a Cadillac bursts through the door and starts doing doughnuts in the middle of the room. OK... Mini's position of “Let's motor” is in direct opposition to that. In two words, they siphoned all of the macho, arrogant, “bull-in-a-china-shop” mentality out of enjoying your performance car. That they chose a soft word like “motor” gives authorization to those turned off by the gearhead image to still love this brand.

## A few more tips

- Don't handicap yourself by assuming you must have a tagline. This is the very mistake that forces companies to settle on nonsense.
- Look for the ability to transcend the traditional arenas of a tagline. Can sales use it? Can public affairs use it? If the answer is no, see the point immediately above.
- Be prepared to try something different. Greatness is often found in boldness. On the flip side, don't get beyond Pluto\* and do something truly wacky.

\*It should be noted, Pluto is no longer a recognized planet. – ed.





## C H A P T E R   S E V E N T E E N

# The Great Advertising Smell Test

It is finally here. We're not trying to brag. Heavens knows we've even been on the offender list at one point a long time ago. But if more advertisements followed the smell test, profits and primetime TV would be a whole lot better.

In this short chapter, we will lay out a simple answer to a question that has spawned a thousand books: Why and how do some creative materials fail to connect? Sure, one can blame it on product design or distribution, but often these protests only surface like recovered memories after a \$500,000 commercial is shot.

So here are the rights and wrongs, starting with the wrongs:

### **Deception**

This should be an easy one, yet there it is on TV. "This sale beats our already unbeatable prices!" What does the consumer hear? Either you were lying before or you are lying now. Consumers can smell deception on a subconscious level. When you make some stupid claim like, "We have to sell because it is tax time and the new models are on the way and the manager is on vacation," the consumers smell a rat. The human mind is amazingly capable of detecting a falsehood.

An individual for whom one of us once worked would often refer to the consumer as "Bubba." Well, newsflash former boss/autocrat, your wife, your dad and anyone you ever respected is "Bubba." Aim for the bottom and you'll get there for sure.

Deception wears many hats. A few are listed below.

- Outlandish and nonsensical sale claims

After fifty-seven sales in a row, no one believes you actually discount anything.

- Exaggeration of benefit

Buying a house in a particular neighborhood will not get your life back on track despite the advertiser's claim, "The lifestyle everyone wants."

- Minimizing the true cost

A classic phrase (cleaned up a little): Good stuff isn't cheap and cheap stuff isn't good. When you state a monthly cost without the number of months, consumers sense a snake. Think of all those shady used car dealers who only write the monthly on the windshield. What's your opinion of them?

- Faking the format

Advertorial, infomercials and faux important mail containing "dated documents that need your immediate attention" are nothing but straight-up lies. Consumers, if not immediately, will eventually treat them as such. The biggest problem with such actions is that they poison the waters of consumer opinion towards mediated selling as a whole. Way to go, guys.

## **Irrelevance**

We once saw a TV spot that looked like it was right out of the film "Varsity Blues." The scenes were beautiful: A nighttime football game in the rain, the ball is hiked-stuffed in the gut of the slot back who then goes over the line for a TD. The crowd roars.

And then there's a chicken sandwich with fries.

That's right. No dissolve. No graphics. Just a jump cut to a scene of a chicken sandwich with fries. When we were watching the spot we were like, "What happened? Did somebody sit on the remote? Put it back on football!"

I asked the writer what the chicken sandwich had to do with football and he said the restaurant chain was a big supporter of youth sports. Right. I always seek out the involvement of fast food purveyors before I buy. In a word, Stooooopid.

Other examples of irrelevance are less obvious but still the advertising equivalent of a whistle on a plow. People whoring out their charitable involvement or love of soccer to sell more houses. Trying to tie an automobile dealership or a pest control to a sports team. Think of it this way: Would you let the coach do your dental work? Then why do you expect everyone to take his recommendation for landscaping or financial planning?

The greatest hits of irrelevance:

- The celebrity tie-in

OK, so Jordan does sell sneakers. And Burl Ives did sell Luzianne Iced Tea. But unless the product directly relates to the personality, people see the celebrity and forget the product. Hey, what does Harry Connick Jr. or Catherine Zeta Jones know about a cell phone that I can't find out myself? If you think celebrities have boundless credibility for any product, go watch "Team America: World Police."

- Hey, that's my cliché

There is a lady in Atlanta who sells mattresses. In her TV commercials she does this little pirouette that looks to me like a shot from the "Walk Like an Egyptian" music video. Then, with such pride she says, "After all (cue signature pose), mattresses are our business."

Who told her that was a good idea? Oh, I'm sure poolside somewhere a friend told her, "That's what you're known for." We've seen a ton of these. Stupid phrases and signatures that overwhelm the product in favor of following some piece of advertising lore probably seen etched in a bathroom stall. The mattress lady even has a billboard of herself in an evening gown doing her awkward dance move. I know what you're saying, "It's catchy!"

So is chlamydia.

The violators are not just the amateurs. Look at Verizon Wireless. I think they must have to earmark off 15 seconds of a 30-second commercial to get in all their junk.

"Verizon Wireless, we never stop working for you." "Can you here me now?" "It's the network." (Guy giving the peace sign.)

One question: What is all that crap for? Instead of replacing a tagline (none of which, by the way, says anything tangible), they just pile another one on. I guess it's their signature (Me giving the thumbs down sign).

- But it's art

I know. There are a million graphic artists out there rolling over in their cubicles. I'm not talking about art that is relevant to creating mood or that is consistent with the marketing strategy.

I'm talking about no marketing strategy: a picture that has nothing to do with the product and the insidious belief that (blank) means something other than "I didn't have anything useful to write."

Art vs. crap walks a fine line. Here's the best way to test it. Does the artwork or production seek to strongly connect the product through mood or state of mind to the consumer? If yes, score. If no, crap.

## Dated content

Some people seem to get their notions about what makes good communication from reading Collier's and Saturday Evening Post. Sure, there were some great advertising stories from yesteryear, but no one buys cigarettes because the tobacco's toasted anymore and nor should we be emulating dated selling tactics.

Yet there they are - companies singing their name over and over again with no added words. That's just a hair's breadth away from dancing cigarette boxes, except dancing cigarette boxes would be eons more entertaining. It's like somebody purposefully sought out all the things that sucked about old advertising and slapped a new coat of paint on them.

The world has changed. Before products were different; media was different; people were not nearly as jaded about sales claims as they are now. Advertising has gone from informing people to too often annoying people. Us advertisers are strangling, beating and boiling in oil the golden goose of credibility. Think about that the next time you feel inclined to sing your name as a radio ad.

A few from the vault of advertising's glory days:

- Repeating the brand name is scientifically proven to piss people off. If people can't remember the product, maybe there is something wrong with the product.
- Hey, that sounds just like an ad! Never use any of the following clichés unless you are being sarcastic:
  - » "Run. Don't walk."
  - » "Quality, Service and Value" (in any combination)
  - » "Family owned and operated" "Quality since 19XX"
  - » Anything ever put in quotations unless it's being attributed to someone.
  - » A stupid play on words, i.e. "Everything I touch turns to sold."

## **Inability to reconcile marketing strategy and creative**

With many products and services not being marketed with a clear and stated marketing strategy, this is not a hard mistake to make. A wonderfully talented young copywriter once made his way to our shop. We perused his book and came across a really funny ad for a barbeque shack. We loved the ad for its entertainment value, but, despite its wit, the only ascertainable marketing strategy was “Barbeque makes you fat.”

Why does so much advertising make us laugh, weep and think, yet fail to sell? Because someone has failed to bridge the chasm between the consumer and product. If an ad fails to connect, there has been a failure to understand either the product or the consumer. It is that simple.

### **Our take:**

We rely on a four-way test for creative content to help align what we are saying with a consumer’s disposition.

- Can it be personified and made emotionally significant?

We expect our creative to enliven consumers by eliciting significant thoughts and memories. Before marketing plans are created, we plot thought models and their respective relation to each other. The result is the ability to identify points in the creative that will allow a deeper experience.

- Is the execution commensurate with the emotion of the product?

While we intend to deliver new information to consumers, we do not want to create an experience so far outside of their schema that consumers cannot categorize and memorize the information. When used properly, emotion in execution can prime a sales message and add new meaning.

- Is there a defined call to action?

Even if the call is for consumers to take a particular perspective, our strategies are continually refined to a razor's sharpness and held against the marketing strategy to insure that every commercial and ad is on said strategy.

- Is it novel and memorable?

One route to being memorable is being fresh. Looking at media and communication and their intrinsic philosophies and parameters allows a fuller view of what's possible. For example: Our art director recommended we break radio's fourth wall by having the announcer interrupted by the action in the spot. The result was so new and interesting and the only defense anyone had for why we had not done it before was old conventional thought from advertising's Stone Age.

## **In sum**

There is a faster way to give advertising the smell test, yet it is a route too many fail to follow. Great advertising starts by studying, thinking like and yes, liking the consumer. Great products, services and ads are all consumer focused, so it only makes sense that the consumer is the best source for inspiration in communication. If you take just a little while every so often and honestly ask yourself what the consumer might be thinking, it will pay off immensely.



## C H A P T E R   E I G H T E E N

# Reality - It's the New...well...Reality

One of my favorite family pastimes during the holidays is for us all to watch and comment on infomercials. This guy in South Alabama repeats relentlessly, "I am the bank!" every 15 seconds or so. I can't help but wonder if when people come up to his car lot, he breathes in deep, assumes a braced posture and belts out, "I AM THE BANK."

It brings up an interesting point: Why do we refuse to be real when it comes to advertising?

Ad content has become a one-way ticket to fantasyland lately. In this magical advertising land, all wives are smoking hot and 22 years old (even if they have teenagers) while their husbands are fat, bald and obsessed with sports and power tools. In another infomercial we watched this holiday, a beautiful couple enjoyed a cup of coffee on their porch while rain was channeled through their NASA-approved gutters. Funny, when it rains at my house it's a bit different. Instead of having a fine cup of coffee, I'm in the backyard chasing the dogs into the house while screaming expletives. I guess I should have bought those gutters.

Years ago, advertising people rhapsodized about the value of fantasyland in ads. Perhaps it was because life was so real back then. The reality of making one's way in the world was just so much that a little trip to La La Land helped ease the discomfort and perhaps helped plant the seeds of need for a newer, improved wheat flour or toothpaste.

Today, reality is a sought-after commodity. After all the virtual this and simulated that, people want to connect with their humanity. I like to think of the change in terms of movies. In the film "Steel Magnolias" everything is beautiful and perfect and, even when things aren't perfect, they work out for the best. What optimism. What fiction.

In the movie "American Beauty" the pain and awkwardness of the human experience is dissected before our very eyes. It is not pleasant, but it is very real. People cry during "Steel Magnolias." People feel during "American Beauty."

Literature, film, music and life in general have taken a turn towards the real. And I'm not talking about reality TV, which everyone knows is about as far from reality as things get. I'm talking about TV shows where people grapple with real issues. I'm talking about films like "Sideways" that take us into lives none too different from the lives of our friends, neighbors and perhaps even our own.

The newfound love for reality has consequences for advertising. No longer are we to assume that the "ideal" we often portray in advertising is magnetic to consumers. Irrelevant and unrealistic scenarios cause individuals to tune out and make up the bulk of the clutter.

A big challenge for advertisers will be the necessity to truly get to know their consumers rather than making assumptions. From product design to public affairs to TV spots, consumers can tell when you have not put in the time to get to know them. They respond in kind.

## **Target markets: Where reality sets in**

To see that many advertisers are aiming for a target market that doesn't really exist is easy. In my view, McDonald's is the best example. In McDonald's Land, everyone is androgynous, of non-specified race and is 19 years old. This group's favorite pastimes are walking in the middle of the street to hip music, looking cool and wearing pink boas. That's great. Where do we find these people? The commercials always seem to be taking place in some sort of clean, hybrid New York/Paris. Sure. A clean New York.

Advertisers are too often aiming for unrealistic and non-existent groups. Song Airlines was a great example profiled in a recent documentary. They indicated their target as an individual named Claire. Claire was middle-aged, had two kids, a two income family, a SUV and a sports car, liked to read ultra-sophisticated publications but also indulged in a little pop trash to keep her honest. Song Airlines was so convinced that Claire existed that they spent a ton of money and time chasing her down. They even took out large ads letting us know that Song flight attendants would soon be wearing Kate Spade brand uniforms because apparently Claire is impressed by such efforts.

Where is Claire? Apparently not flying Song. Apparently, very few people flew Song so now no one flies Song. At least they had fashionable uniforms.

The mandate for advertisers is to connect with consumers in real terms. Furthermore, reality cannot be limited to production value. Marketers must commit to truly understanding consumers at a brand strategy's inception. Only then can the true power of an initiative have its true potency focused.



## C H A P T E R   N I N E T E E N

# Creative that Wins

The ADDY® Awards are to advertising professionals as French self-tanning cream is to George Hamilton, except that the ADDY Awards help people with their profession and George's tan...well...enough said.

ADDY season is both a magical and odd time. The creative teams are giddy like children, but try to hide it so no one will accuse them of losing their edginess. The account people are finding new shelf spaces to make sure prospects have to walk past their gleaming trophies on the way to the bathroom. The industry has a static buzz about it.

For us, the ADDYs were a few nights ago. We came out ahead, but I won't brag. I'll use the phrase that is often invoked when one decimates the competition: "The judges saw it our way." So we got some trophies, a little applause and someone bought me an expensive beer.

Don't get me wrong, I was pumped, but I couldn't help but think about one ad that the judges snubbed. The ad did well enough, but didn't get any special distinction. No medal or trophies. We had hoped for much more and we had good reason.

The material was from a campaign you've probably heard us refer to in the past – a somewhat known brand of coffee in Tennessee that had a great heritage and message but also had a challenge getting the word out. We were brought in after the brand suffered quarter after quarter of flat or declining share. We immersed ourselves in the business, came up with a philosophy, got management's blessing and put out a simple TV spot that cost a fraction of the industry's typically gargantuan budgets.

The copy testing report came back saying they had never seen anything like it. The spot changed preferences by a huge margin, more than they had ever seen. When the spot began to air, we were flooded with phone calls from the client, TV stations and even consumers asking for copies of the spot and the music. Most recently, the client has informed us of nothing less than stark increases in sales of a manner and magnitude that had not been seen in the past. Ever.

Back to the ADDYs. The judges knew nothing of the requested music or rising sales. They knew nothing of the meticulous study of the people and the marketscape that went into the concept. They never saw the consensus maps or decision-making trees or copy testing data. Instead, they saw a simple spot that celebrated people who in turn celebrate themselves by choosing a brand of coffee.

So that got me thinking...what really *is* great advertising?

Creators have always had to walk a fine line between creating work we've been told is great by the industry and creating work that works. I say that as if the decision is solely up to the creative department. Those even remotely associated with advertising know that when work is being discussed, nobody, no matter how minor their involvement, is ever out of new ideas and opinions.

Advertising need not be complicated or contrived to function at an optimum. I believe that great work starts with great planning. I believe that, thanks to the slow demise of the goliath and the lukewarm creative shops, the future of the advertising industry will be about nothing but the work.

## **So, what makes great advertising?**

- Great advertising connects product attribute and personality to a clearly identified and appropriately targeted consumer need.
- Great advertising is culturally relevant and resonates with the consumer as sincere.
- Great advertising is an impetus for intellectual engagement with the content.
- Great advertising is never more than 10% production and never less than 90% concept. (Anyone who tells you differently is trying to cover up flawed concepts with smoke and mirrors...and they're making you pay for the mirrors.)

- Great advertising is never easy. Rarely is it created by non-professionals. It takes vision and then the ability to protect that vision. (Remember, “got milk?” was nearly revised to “You Gotta Have Milk.”)

We didn't win a gold trophy for that work this year. We didn't have to. We won a lot of fans for our client's brand. We won a few converts to our philosophy of thoughtfulness and deliberate action. We won the right to say we did something a ton of people said was impossible.



## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y

# The Sounds of Sunnyview

Sunnyview was a magical place. It was a place where talents were discovered, long time dreams were realized and the first flickers of blazing music careers were often seen. Sunnyview was a recording studio in a house off of Sunnyview Drive in the epicenter of the '80s indie rock scene: Athens, Georgia. Sunnyview was, and is, engineer Ben Holst, who has been a trusted colleague of ours when it comes to getting the strategy into the music. You heard me right, getting the strategy in the music.

You see, when a brand campaign is developed, a point comes where the artsy people with goatees and high fashion jeans enter and talk about creating the “look and feel.” The problem is they often just mean the look and not the feel. The result is elements of a campaign that do not adhere to the strategy. Since we’re talking about Sunnyview and music, I’ll give you a music example.

I wonder why Kentucky Fried Chicken uses “Sweet Home Alabama” as a soundtrack? Despite the obvious name problem, my experience has been that “Sweet Home Alabama” is played in limited scenarios, such as a theme song for playing mailbox baseball from a dated American muscle car or as an ironic encore played by the band at Alpha Tau Omega’s parents’ weekend. I don’t think it is legal to play “Sweet Home Alabama” during dinnertime in most states, but I could be mistaken. What is worse is that the version KFC uses is not the fist-pumping anthem of our sweaty youth, but some hip-hop club mix with beaucoup record scratching most likely remixed by a guy with a name like DJ Flavor. If there was any brand loyalty to be transferred from Skynrd to fast food fried chicken, it was lost when the background singers were sampled and configured to sound like something from C+C Music Factory.

Music is pretty important when it come to commercial production, so my question is this: If so many efforts overlook the integration of strategy into music, within what other less obvious touch points is the strategy being overlooked? The answer hides in plain sight in many companies and the sheer situation of close proximity has allowed us to overlook great opportunities to exude the brand. Here are a few places to look.

## **New products**

Often new products are added by convenience rather than as part of a core strategy. One good example is how many casual restaurants do not pioneer new products; rather they rely on their supplier (who also sells to the competition) to offer new products. Developing products pursuant to your company's individual strategy is a whole ton better than serving the same jalapeño poppers as the guy across the street.

## **The sales counter**

Companies often seemed desperate to have an amazing Web presence, only to allow the situation at the counter to deteriorate. Dress codes for sales staff don't always have to be a minimum standard. A dress code can be used to further the brand position. At our company, we not only subsidize the purchase of professional dress so that our people look great and in style, we also distribute a healthy portion of goofy and funny T-shirts for non-client days to keep our culture of creativity out front. Dress is not the only chance to communicate the brand. I am continually enchanted with little extras, like really good coffee for customers and little seating nooks so that a spouse doesn't have to stand outside a dressing room.

## **Sponsorships**

I have had the uncomfortable position of having to determine which worthy cause will not be benefiting from a client's marketing budget. I try to give everyone a fair shake and also allow the opportunity for the petitioner to make the case for how the sponsorship will further my client's brand. What I continue to find amazing is that people are surprised when I am interested in how the cause and the brand will link. I imagine many of the people they call on are content with obscure non-strategies like "name recognition" or "goodwill." We once worked with a performance tire manufacturer who sponsored a figure skater. When I asked the reason, the brand manager said it was because both were of Taiwanese descent, to which I responded, "So what? You make tires. She's a figure skater."

We try to seek out entities that help further our intended communication. For my client to be on a banner or a caddy's visor is not enough unless a compelling link between the event and the brand truly exists. All that being said, the field is nearly open for finding great opportunities to which you can hitch your brand if your strategy is clear.

## **Heavy collateral**

BMW's numerous Hollywood shorts were so compelling that scores of consumers subjected themselves to several multi-minute commercials marketed under the auspices of short films, with the Beamer playing the lead. Jack Daniel's will soon publish a new cookbook of some of its biggest fans' best-loved recipes using the cherished whisky.

Advances and availability of heavy collateral have created new opportunities for brands to integrate into media that was once off-limits.

## **Stay on the Sunnyview side of life**

The best song from Sunnyview is the message. You can integrate brand into pretty much anywhere consumers and the brand interact. So long as the strategy is potent, direct and rooted in realistic offerings, you can reinforce a message and compound the impact.

When consumers are given a clear concept of the brand and that concept is reinforced by all messages and action, it increases the chance you'll turn an interested prospect into a raving fan. Consumers can then accurately build expectations and identification concerning the brand as loyalty grows.



## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y - O N E

# The Painful Death of Good Ideas

This is a true story. The names have been changed to protect the (somewhat) innocent.

The portfolio bag was packed and repacked to perfection. The shoes were shined, ties straightened. Tic tacs may have also been involved. I laid out the strategy along with the duty assignments of each media. Budgets were presented along with expected results.

The strike came so swiftly, I didn't realize it had happened until... well... it happened.

"Rufus, do you watch much TV?" the president asked in a manner that suggested all he wanted was a single word and a head nod.

"Nope," the VP replied.

"Alright then, let's get rid of TV."

That was it. All that planning, not to mention the entire balance of the campaign, was now gone because Rufus doesn't watch TV.

When I got back to the agency I was sullen. They killed a good, important idea for no reason. The idea was just trying to be their friend. It was like, "Hey, I want to introduce you to a few customers so you can get even richer than you are." This didn't faze the client. They killed the idea without really thinking it through.

We let the storyboard lie in state in the lobby for a while so that others could mourn this hapless crime.

## Stop the violence

This is an industry of ideas. Not all ideas can be good ideas. At some point, ideas have to get killed off or, at the very least, put into hibernation in a closet in my office. My protest is not against the weeding out of bad ideas, but in the senseless killing of good ideas for bad reasons.

## The problem behind the problem behind the problem

- Good ideas get struck down due to lack of vision.

Some people can't conceptualize and that isn't really their fault. It's not easy to see a bunch of scribbling and understand that the stick figures and pencil shading represent months of research.

Experienced consultants search for a potent idea well before the slick layouts are rolled out. The whole reason we draw the little stick figures is to not spend money polishing ideas that are flawed from inception.

To not fully comprehend a strategy, especially if one hasn't witnessed firsthand all that has gone into it, is not a crime. It is a crime (or it should be) to stop progress on a strategy if everyone else gets it and you don't. That doesn't mean ignoring a possibly valuable gut feeling, it just means not faking a gut feeling when you don't understand the concept.

- Good ideas get struck down due to lack of strategy.

Every person in the creative business has heard this: "Hey, I don't need you to get all creative with this, just sell it. You need to just get up in the consumer's face and tell them we've got a great product."

"Just sell it" is not a strategy. Products have places in a category, marketplace and the consumer's mind. Charging wildly into a marketplace with no strategy other than QPV (quality, price and value) is a poor decision and should be punished by costing wads of money with no change in consumer attitudes. Wait ... that is what happens.

- Good ideas get weighed down with extraneous pursuits.

I heard a story once about a person involved in a campaign who had a particular love of ice sculptures. He kept finding new ways to work ice sculpting into the concepts, dealing with completely unrelated products, of course. After three years, someone caved. He got a spot on the air with an ice sculpture playing the lead. It bombed and was a huge waste of money. And ice.

Not every personal pursuit is so obvious. It can be as subtle as pouring cash into a publicity campaign to tell the company story or laud the founder. One could make a case that the founder is the captain of the brand or that the company's story is a differentiating factor. The truth is such ego-massaging tactics are rarely focused on the best outcome for the brand and are really just puffery.

## A few tips

- One needs to pee on an electric fence only once. Kill enough good ideas and you'll only get safe ideas. A good thinker will only test the outside limits of marketing initiative so long as they know the company has their back.
- Don't kill the golden goose of good ideas, but don't strangle it into a coma either. Load up your efforts with extraneous parameters and constraints and the result is good ideas that turn into bland ideas.

Many business thinkers are raving about the idea economy and the advantage of great ideas in the connected world. But ideas are like plants. They need the right environment before they can bloom. Marketers would be wise to create an environment that fosters, identifies and expects great ideas. Saving a great idea now can save a business in the future.



## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y - T W O

# Profundity from a Journalist

My great-great-uncle was an odd man. Yates Snowden was, at one point in life, a professor who famously strolled the University of South Carolina campus dressed in a cape. He became known for facing the back of the school chapel when he prayed. (A proud Charlestonian from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Uncle Yates was said to have always prayed facing southward.) At his death, Yates' collection of newspaper clippings concerning the people and events in South Carolina was so extensive that the university bought the collection and named the history library and one of the dormitories for him. My wife and I have his dresser, reading glasses, and what we believe to be his bourbon stash in a small glass flask.

Yates was a lawyer, professor and historian, but before all that, he was a journalist. Uncle Yates had the deepest respect for the craft of journalism and his writings for *The State* have been reprinted and circulated for many years since his death. My admiration for journalists must be genetic.

Besides a brief stint as a photojournalist, the world of news has always seemed beyond my reach, so I never turn down the chance to work with members of the media. I try to learn the lingo and model the slightly jaded disposition of the working press, often with disappointing results. What I have found, however, is a vein of real potency in communication that our journalist friends have tapped into.

While we in the advertising world have tried a million different ways to find a true quantitative measurement of our craft's level of comprehensibility, journalists have a test that they have used to refine their craft since the printing press was invented: Does it sell papers?

News editors and writers have had centuries to learn what whets the readers' appetites for information and what delivery results in desired action (i.e. considering the paper a good resource, buying a subscription, following the story of several days, et cetera). Understanding a few of these practices can provide real results for marketers. It doesn't matter the product, media, or target consumer: Learn to deliver information like a journalist and consumers will see that what you are saying is worth listening to.

Here are a few tips plucked from a newshound:

## **Get realism**

People don't buy Time magazine's "Year in Pictures" to see a bunch of posed, airbrushed, and stylized junk. When a picture appears fake, it is essentially a lie. Consumers know that everyone in the world is not 5 feet 8 inches tall and 110 pounds, socializing in a perfectly culturally mixed clique where everyone wears the latest cell phone accessories. Consumers can spot a snake and, when the message we as marketers send is one of deceit, consumers sense it.

## **Start with the bookwork**

Can you imagine if, each day, news editors pulled headlines from a hat and then reporters had to invent the news to accompany them? That's how a ton of campaigns are managed. A somewhat unclear directive like, "Let's use the Internet in the ad," or, "Do something involving our PGA sponsorship" is made, and marketers are left to try and connect ill-fitting concepts into the marketing plan.

Journalists start with a lead, do the research, and finish with a full and logical concept. No cheesy, mission-statement-sounding taglines. No unnecessary evocation of patriotism or professional sports. Just a good story, well told.

## **Brevity rather than puffery**

Say only what matters and ~~cut everything else out.~~

## **Simplicity rather than complexity**

To develop a deep and transcending meaning between one concept and another is an art. To conjure feelings of profundity and introspection beyond a concept's mere presentation is a true art. It is not, however, marketing. Advertisements are often turned into amateur film slams or installments in the popular marketing department game, "Hey, see how witty I can be?" There is a time for games. It's called tradeshows. The rest of the time should focus on what connects consumers to something we want them to think or do.

The business world can learn a ton from the journalism world (like how to get a person with a college degree from a good school to work for \$14K a year, but that's for another book). As marketers, we would do well to study the lessons the newspaper business has taught. The news industry has given us a way to see how communication functions optimally outside of the lab. It's given us a medium to insert messages to sell our products, services and concepts. And it's given us some pretty colorful characters, not the least of which was a quirky professor named Yates Snowden.



## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y - T H R E E

# The Hardest of Hardsell

Some time ago, a truly brave individual asked me to address the Advertising Club at the University of Georgia. That evening, and the classes that followed, did not consist of much more than me spouting an acrimonious harangue about faux strategy, faux creativity and how if they got the idea to major in advertising from how cool it looks on TV, they better go ahead and switch majors before all the IT Management classes fill up.

So they gave me an award.

The James S. Fish Aide to Advertising Education Award is one I will always cherish. And all joking aside, I made some good pals among those students this year and will always carry a fondness for them.

As much as I might have wished to be the star of the awards banquet, the real stars came after me. Richard Riley is a man I have long admired. Richard's agency started in an Atlanta suburb, marketing such storied items as the "pig tumbler," and rose to lead the advertising efforts for Ritz-Carlton Hotels, CNN Newsource and a slew of other big name marketers. Better yet, Richard's second career is serving as an inspiration, mentor and dealmaker for young advertising students at the University. He's not a difficult man to admire.

Richard's speech that night was excellent. He told a story of the Ad Club's competition and how the client had already laid out how the whole campaign should function. He told about how one of the UGA teams mustered the gumption to propose a strategy that flew in the face of all the client's assumptions. He spoke of the bravery, leadership and desire to defend the client's business from everyone, including the client. He told the crowd of a group of young twenty-somethings who took certain actions that assured failure in the competition, but success in their hearts. The fact that the client loved their work is just gravy to this story. These kids have what it takes.

The speech Richard gave that night brought up a huge blight in our industry. Will we do what all of our training and experience steers us towards or will we simply do what will sell with the least fight? Will we be brave to stand up for new opportunities and approaches or will we rely on tired strategy to assure the contract? Will we listen to our guts or our wallets?

So grab your swords and let's charge the castle. Right. Sure, these calls for ingenuity and noble pursuits are nice, but just read the trade magazines and see how many agency-client relationships are severed due to "creative differences." Ad agencies typically want to stay in business, so in the end the client makes the call on content. But what is truly a crime is when the agency doesn't even try.

There are a few tried and true campaigns that seem to sell like hotcakes. And when I say sell, I mean they sell *to the client*. These campaigns should never be confused with anything that sells to consumers.

Presenting...the tried and true bunny slopes of advertising:

## **The Celebrity CEO**

Honestly. Who in a business is going to say, "No, I don't think our CEO can adequately represent our brand and draw action from our prospective consumers"? The laughable results, however, often reveal a huge chasm between the manicured CEO and the blue-collar consumer. Like, perhaps Bob Goodfriend. Bob is the CEO at Goody's Family Clothing. And while he's hawking matching sweats to my mom, does it look to me like he's wearing any of the clothes he sells? Heck no! He's in a black, tailored suit with cufflinks and a pocket square. I'm sure the lady buying the palm tree-bedazzled jeans on aisle three really identifies with Bob.

And oh, Billy! I can almost imagine the meeting where an agency pitched Bill Ford to be the automaker's spokesman. It probably went something like, "Bill, your family is worth more than the gross domestic product of most small countries, so hard-working Americans will surely identify with you talking about their values and innovation." Imagine being the lone person in the room who disagreed with the pitch. Would you speak up?

## **If we could just tell our story**

Newsflash: Every business has a story. Amazing as it may sound, every business was founded by someone for some purpose and most likely struggled at some point, yet made it through to today. So a sure winner is to walk into the client office and say, “We need to tell your story.”

Another newsflash: Nobody cares! Thanks to TV news magazine shows, people are bombarded these days with emotional stories about cats reunited with their owners and the man who rode his bicycle backwards across America. The chance that the story of the little IT company that could will resonate with consumers is none to none.

But again, who’s the one who says, “Why should people really care about our heritage?” I’ll tell you who says that - the unemployed guy.

## **Our pledge of allegiance (or lame corporatespeak that somehow becomes advertising)**

Some people just love mission statements. The sheer reward of knowing that one has boiled the whole company down to a rule of a few words is just intoxicating to these people. And what’s better than hanging huge banners of the mission statement so that it obstructs people’s office views? The only thing better than that is obstructing people’s view of the TV program they are watching with such mystifying decrees as, “We believe in innovation for tomorrow and today.” Wow. Glad I didn’t go to the bathroom and miss that.

Mission and vision statements are important for getting teams of employees to share goals and to provide pathways to reach said goals. The consumer, however, most likely does not really care, so it is best to stop annoying them.

## **From those wacky guys who brought you shooting hamsters at targets (but you remembered it, see?)**

In the mid-90s there was an emerging school of thought about advertising. A belief existed that if you could just get people to remember something, then the advertising is a raving success. What happened to building affinity for the product or service? What about showing consumers where and how the product meets needs and desires? What happened to taste? In a word, the Internet happened.

More money than brains equals an advertising industry playground. The worst part is that such an atmosphere was where some brand managers cut their teeth in the marketing business. If an ad was not some off-the-wall, pop culture-obsessed trash, then it was deemed “like how business used to be before the ‘net, dude.” All you needed to sell a concept was to mix one part technospeak with two parts irreverent, juvenile humor, typeset it in Futura, bake for 15 minutes and, *Voila*, you have a campaign. And even though a ton of those web marketing geniuses are now selling condos in Atlanta, you better believe the desire to break with convention just for the sake of breaking with convention is still out there.

### **In sum: It’s a two-way street**

The advertising industry makes a choice daily. Will we do our best for the brand’s best outcome or will we give in to whatever we can sell? How do we expect our industry to evolve and develop new opportunities if we only stay with the safe, tried and true?

A decade or two ago, clients prided themselves on discovering great creative talent. Coca-Cola, Nike and Apple have all made great advertising success through seeking out and discovering shops outside of the traditional mindset. Great marketers did such because it gave them a competitive edge and produced some great, cutting-edge work.

Marketers sought out thinkers and creators. They found opportunity where others found none. They found success where competitors failed to look. And a few very fortunate marketers stumbled upon a little agency in Gainesville, Georgia and a great man, Richard Riley.





## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y - F O U R

# Goooooo Commercial Carpet Cleaning Company! Sick ‘em!

I have another confession. I have almost always hated sports marketing. I can’t tell exactly where the tipping point came. Surly machismo mixed with poor marketing science has, over time, led me to pass on many sports “partnerships” that have come into my office. I can still hear the terrible radio spots even weeks after the game.

“What do JWL Diversified Septic Systems and the Georgia Bulldogs have in common? Teamwork, hard work and a winning attitude. This is Johnny Lightfoot and if your septic tank is blah, blah, blah. Blah, blah, blah, Herschel, blah, blah. So join the winning team at JWL Diversified Septic Systems. We’ll score the winning play for you.”

Oh my goodness. It’s that kind of radio advertising that sells commercial-free satellite radio. I am not kidding. Tune in to the Bulldog Radio Network every week during football season and you will hear spot after spot just like that. And don’t leave out print. Every joker with a somewhat-working printing press puts out a Dawgazine, adding yet another spare leg to the table of stupidity.

These have all led me to demand audited distribution and exposure numbers, huge spot packages and even the purchase of my client’s product as condition of the sponsorship. But come on, sports marketing can’t be all that bad. And it’s not. The problem is that most people who are doing it are doing it poorly.

Marketers have proven time and again that thoughtful sponsorship opportunities can be an important part of a campaign. The cross pollination of good will, values and the sheer numbers can be very enticing to the brand that wants a jump start or, at the very least, a kick start.

My best recommendation for clients considering sports marketing is to keep from getting star-struck. I have worked with at least a few brand managers who are giddy like little kids when it comes to sports stars. The view of the vast stadium and the flash of the Jumbotron hypnotize them and Poof! half the year's marketing budget is gone because we are now the Official Sponsor of the Nachos at the Concession Stand.

Snowden Tatarski sits smack in the middle of a quintessential college town, so we've seen our share of sports marketing and all the other things called sports marketing that actually market nothing. For your sake, we've printed a few tips.

## **Does it just make plain sense?**

In Chapter Twenty, I mentioned a tire company that sponsored a figure skater. That's exactly what I'm talking about. Too often sponsorships are driven by internal nonsense such as getting the CEO to play with Tiger before the Pro-Am. And if that's the way your company wants to play, go for it. Just don't book it under marketing in the SEC filing. And I'm not talking about the Southeastern Conference. (Is there an accounting designation for CEO butt-kissing?)

If the marketing department wants to live up to its name, then its focus should be on the marketability of every effort, including sponsorships. Seeing where a connection between a product and an opportunity exists is not difficult. Beware: Don't fall into the easy trap of justifying a sponsorship with some intangible like "awareness" when the true motive is to see your name in lights at all costs.

## **Can you own it?**

The sports marketing people I know are some of the best "sales dogs" I've met. They come around once in a while with a last-minute opportunity that a big company just pulled out of, and now one of my clients can be the big tamale for a fraction of the price.

But my client doesn't really get to be the big tamale. In fact, what my sports marketing buds have done is broken a large sponsorship that is simply too big for my client to chew into smaller little bites and sold these bites door-to-door. The result is my client and their four closest competitors are all asking for your business on a giant banner at the game or flashed in a rain of logos on the big screen.

When we negotiate a partnership with such entities, we say from the outset that we expect exclusivity. If we determine that our marketing strategy could be improved by a tie to the team and allocate funds for such an effort, you'd better believe that our plan does not include being surrounded by the competition.

## **How much gravy?**

"Sportos" are famous for their fluff. They have the mascot shoot your logo-laden T-shirts out of what looks like a police teargas launcher. They'll put your logo on towels, koozies, cheerleaders, toilet seat covers and pretty much anywhere else that a logo can be placed. And of course, you gotta pay for all that "exposure."

A key part of our negotiations with these types of opportunities is determining what is meat and what is fat. Using logos, the team name in your ad, media packages: all meat. Logo on seat cover or sponsoring the restrooms: all fat.

We view fat as added value and refuse to pay for it. If it's included, fine. If there is a great package of media spots, logo rights and special appearances with some hats and bumper stickers, fine. So long as the stuff we really want makes financial sense, we'll take whatever junk is thrown in.

## **Do the sports marketing people get it?**

We have a client that runs a restaurant with a Mexican-sounding name; however, the restaurant itself is anything but Mexican. Once in a while, an eager sales rep will call with an opportunity that they think will be the best for our marketing plan. It's normally something like sponsoring an AAA ball team or local races, and the sales rep just knows it's going to be successful when our client is the official Mexican restaurant of their little event. Ha, ha.

If they want to work with our clients, they better learn to love us fast. I eat at this client's restaurant several times a week. On more than one occasion, I have eaten two meals at their restaurant in one day. The ST staff is the same. We love this client's restaurant and those who will do business with us and this client better love it just as much. My advice: Make that sales rep prove their love and undying devotion. And if you can't get that, at least make them prove they have an elementary understanding of exactly what it is you do or sell.

## **Can it be tied to a particular promotion or launch?**

We work with a few seasoned marketing vets who really know their way around a stadium or track when it comes to marketing. These pros don't just get the name in the stands or on the car. They use the events to train and excite the direct sales force. They invite key clients to the box seats and get stagnant deals moving again. They create contests to squeeze every dollar of value from a sponsorship.

While I would never advocate buying a sponsorship or tie-in for any reason other than marketing, I do believe that one can plug various facets of the marketing apparatus into such an effort. Make sure the deal makes marketing sense first, and then it is open season to get every bit of value out of it.

## **Call it what it is**

There is a tendency to lump everything that involves the handing out of money and a logo into marketing. Every so often, the "causes" come calling and we disperse funds and say that we are "getting the name out there." I'm going to say something that will make some people itchy and, if so, I apologize in advance.

There is a time for marketing and there is a time for charity, and the two should not be confused. They have different goals. They certainly have different expectations. They should have separate budgets.

Charity is what we do to help others out of the bounty of our own blessings. I believe it is not only good for the corporate soul, but the message it sends observers is that a company truly cares about the world in which it operates. Marketing, on the other hand, is about investment and return. Marketing efforts should have definite expectations and be on a defined strategy. We should never hold charity to the expectations of marketing, so we should never muddy the waters between the two.

### **Three cheers for the marketing department**

Swallowing some pride and not giving in to the glitz and glam of sports/event marketing can be a tough job. It's tough to sit in the room with some people you once rooted for and tell them you want eighty radio spots instead of logo-emblazoned bobble heads. But if you expect potency for your marketing dollar, expectations should be defined along strategies developed long before that first presentation via the Jumbotron. Sports marketing works if you ask and fight for what works.

Play it smart and your sponsorship will be successful. You'll flank the competition. You'll intercept the consumer. And even if your team loses, your marketing efforts will not.



## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y - F I V E

# The Marketer's New Clothes

I have a guilty indulgence. All right, I have a few...dozen. Some are surly, like cigar smoking. Some are refined, like choral chamber music. Some I'd rather keep quiet about, but where's the fun if I can't make a confession now and then? I am a clothes nut. I know it's not something one would want to say while watching football or the strongman contest, but I have to let it be known. I really indulge in my clothes. Think I'm kidding? Try this on for size:

I have a summer and a winter hat. No, they don't say "Git-R-Dun #31" on camo. I mean one felt and one straw gentleman's dress hat. I own white shoes, which I wear with a seersucker or linen suit (I have one of each). I have a white jacket for my tux as well as a black one, which I can choose to wear with a bow, straight or ascot tie. Because I believe I show more confidence when I wear a new suit, I have often bought a new one before a big pitch. In fact, many a big pitch has made the closet bulge. I believe this habit is a result of nature, not nurture. My great-grandfather owned a gentleman's shoe store and was said to be quite the svelte dresser.

I say all this because of a recent situation. I am very brand loyal and will not buy something from a brand to which I don't feel connected. Like a true clothes junkie, I went to my favorite clothier, only to not get what I wanted. I was off the chain, so to speak. Years of brand loyalty began to unravel like the thread on a poorly attached button. A company that I had depended on and identified with just didn't seem to fit anymore. I'll have more on this later.

It got me thinking. Often, we as marketers contain the concept of marketing to our marketing department. That's not what marketing means. Marketing means all the activities to get a sellable product to the consumer. Wise distribution, focused promotion and an ace sales staff are often spread out through an organization. To put it simply, everyone's not singing from the same songbook.

## Creating the whole brand experience

A customer's experience with a brand does not begin and end with a mailer, TV spot or even a visit to the store. Good or bad, a customer builds a relationship filled with expectations, transference of identity, pride and commitment. CRM software has really hit a stride these past years, yet some of the most prolific users of CRM software still have their customer service farmed out to India. Now, I have nothing against India, but you really have to be living in a cave somewhere to not realize that consumers view outsourcing customer service as a cost cutting tool that negatively affects them. Same goes for endless phone systems that seem bent on shielding company personnel from customers. Movies, comedy and many other channels of pop culture have made such customer-injurious endeavors a bed of ridicule. So why don't companies get the picture?

Hold on to your chair because I'm going to say something you rarely hear from an advertising person. This is to the companies who engage in the aforementioned activities and it is on behalf of mankind: Stop running ads telling us how much you like us and how much you love charity work if you can't answer the phone when we call you, because we don't want to hear it.

## The other things customers really don't want to hear

- You're stupid.

Through advertising, customer service or direct sales, customers are being told they are stupid. They are stupid for not understanding the company policy. They are stupid because they don't understand that the customer value rebate, American sale and golf cash rebate cannot be combined on existing markdowns when using the online store. They are stupid because they didn't put Mercury on their list.

As companies, we assume a lot. We expect customers to have the same company knowledge and enthusiasm as we do. Well, they don't. You must recruit, train and foster that knowledge and enthusiasm in customers and the wrong way to do so is to tell them up front that they are just too stupid to do business with your company.

- You're business is not worth my extra effort.

I worked in a camera store in the early part of my college career. Occasionally, an old salty photographer would drag in and ask for some ancient, obscure piece of equipment. I knew we didn't have it. I knew nobody had it since it hadn't been manufactured since World War I.

Our company mantra and brand was, "Our expertise is free." What kind of expertise would I be offering if we could not serve those who brought us the most business? So I would get on the phone with other stores and the old sales dogs who knew where every piece of equipment could be found. Ironically, my manager said I was wasting time and should have just told the customer that we could not fulfill the request. She shut her mouth when I broke the record for the single largest sale in the company's history and she got a cut of the commission. It was all because I could not turn down a customer's honest and sincere request for our help.

- We are so important we don't have time for you.

As companies get larger, the ability to control the whole customer experience gets more difficult. Swelling staff numbers mean there are more people and situations for customer contact. I know companies cannot control everything. But I advocate for companies being proactive on that which they can control.

Forcing consumers to do Internet gymnastics to contact customer service says you just don't have time for the customer. Removing tellers, charging fees for contact, steering everyone to the automated system says you would rather not have anything to do with the customer other than take their money. The marketplace is, and will continue to become, more competitive. Customers' options will increase. Tell me this: With phone companies and satellite entering the TV businesses, do you think the cable companies still think it was a good idea to make you wait between the hours of 9 a.m. and 3 p.m.?

- We like you, sort of.

Some companies have tried to force feed customer service to employees. The single most pointed example I can give you is when you call a hotel and a monotone, lethargic voice says, “Thank you for calling, it is my pleasure to serve you. How may I exceed your expectations today?” I always get the feeling that despite that solemn pledge over the phone, the front desk worker might be reluctant to go find out what time the pool closes if I wanted to know. Brands survive on sincerity. You cannot fake liking customers and secretly resent them.

## **A few tips on creating the whole brand experience**

- Train the brand along all areas that have customer contact.

Anyone who interacts with the customer should fully understand the brand and company’s reason for existing. This may take unconventional training methods that are uncomfortable for stodgy, old HR departments. We have a client who knew it was important to train the brand to its frontline staff, so they produced a comedic spoof of what not to do. The video was a riot, showed staff that the company had a sense of humor they could support and explained the importance of continuing the brand relationship through their very crucial service. And it worked.

- Build the brand on realistic offerings capable by those who have customer contact.

Brand strategies are too often forged in boardrooms, irrespective of the company’s true ability. We often consult companies who want to say they build extraordinary experiences and such drivel. Companies need to get out of the clouds and base the brand on what is possible, continuously replicable and desired by the market.

- Integrate brand into design, facilities and the like.

Back in that camera store, the lab was left open so customers could see the process. The technicians wore lab coats and their credentials were displayed on the wall. The message was, “These are no slouches developing your pictures.”

In all company activities, companies should ask themselves how the brand and identity can be integrated into each aspect of consumer contact. Are the uniforms on strategy? Is the building? Location? On-hold music?

- Create the customer sales force.

For many organizations, the customer sales force has become the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. What is disappointing is when marketers do not realize that customers are the rainbow and the company tries to find the gold without them. Creating a vibrant and effective customer sales force is right near the top of the marketing achievement pyramid. And like any pyramid, you will not get there trying to skip the building blocks. If you are trying to create customer evangelists, make sure you are doing the following first:

1. Communicating a defined and competitive message that is focused in a documented consumer marketing strategy.
2. Exuding the defined strategy in all aspects of the company/consumer relationship.
3. Actively evaluating and acting upon consumer research that was correctly (done by an expert) collected.
4. Developing products and service anticipatory of consumer needs in conjunction with the brand strategy.
5. Continually refining and implementing the brand strategy with successful results.

A customer does not separate their experience with a brand. The communication of the advertising and the experience in the store are weighed in sum. Companies are wise to appreciate the entire way they communicate with consumers.

As for my clothier, an old veteran of the company called me. He is responsible for many stores in several states, but he took the time to call me on his cell phone. He didn't try to appease me or buy off what I thought was his company's mishap. Instead, he listened. He was genuinely concerned. He taught me a few things I didn't know before. And before the call was through, he reminded me why I chose the brand and why my trust had been well placed all along. Despite my brief feelings, I guess those clothes fit after all.





## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y - S I X

# Selling to the Sellers

I have worked with some nasty saboteurs. I had a communications manager who, after being overlooked for a brand manager position, resorted to undercutting and collapsing every project of the person who got the desired job. I have seen sales staff invent their own brand position and charge off to the customer with it in defiance of the marketing department's efforts. I have seen marketers do everything in their power to deflate their bosses' strategies for some really stupid reasons.

The term "sabotage" is coined from the French word "sabots," which means "shoes." During the Industrial Revolution, disgruntled workers threw their shoes into the powered looms to destroy the equipment. What a nice bunch.

Today's marketing saboteurs don't use shoes. Instead they throw irrelevant data, unproven approaches and a billion paralyzing questions into the looms with hopes that their efforts to prevent action could be seen as useful.

But marketing is not the army. We cannot shoot saboteurs (unless it's the finger), so we must learn to identify, infiltrate and persuade saboteurs to see the light. The truth is that an empowered and vivacious sales and marketing staff is more likely to become a coup than a brood of robots who can't think for themselves. Those who have the most potential to go against the grain may be the most valuable in making an effort succeed.

Marketers are wise to think about the sell to the staff as much as the sell to the consumer. Initiatives that appreciate insight, function, expectations and capabilities from those who are charged with carrying out the new plan are far more likely to succeed than drowning them in fear from above.

We compiled a list of a few things that have proven helpful in selling to the sellers. And if these don't work, you are welcome to shoot the bird.

## **You attract more flies with honey, but who wants to attract flies?**

The right team can accomplish anything, but getting the right team can be one heck of an accomplishment. An individual who, whether by ability, intelligence or bullheadedness, just simply refuses to be part of a sound and practical strategy is simply waiting to throw a shoe in your looms. One of the hardest situations in marketing management is determining who has valid and needed critique and who is the sour old slouch complaining that the sky is blue and how you should just do what they've always done.

A-plus marketers want to be part of something great. I try to remind our clients when they are on the cusp of something bold that such situations are what get profiled and studied in marketing books. (Hopefully the study is of what to do and not the converse.) Nobody catapults to stardom for doing what they always did.

Great marketing minds are attracted to the challenge and opportunity of doing something big. Make the incentives for great effort commensurate with such an effort. Having a great strategy and the discipline to not mess it up is enough to attract top talent to your cause. But then again, if you want flies, you can find them as well.

## **Get in touch with yourself. I mean your company's self. You know what I mean.**

Strategies taken from within the company's capabilities and knowledge base are far easier to sell to the ranks than strategies that appear imported. Strategy based on market and marketing theory is fine, but the very important missing element is the accurate appraisal of what the company can pull off.

I have a marketing manager who I love and from whom I have learned a great deal over the years. Once, in the brashness of youth, I presented what I felt was an amazing plan that cohesively managed a suite of new products along an extremely potent campaign and selling concept. The campaign had public relations components, advertising, and even had pitch points for the sales staff. "It shows customers our deep desire to forge meaningful relationships with them," I pitched.

"Really" she said. "And when did we start wanting to do that?"

She was right. The market, competition and sheer consumer psychology were all in my favor, but at the end of the day the company would be unable and unwilling to fulfill the sales promise. It's not that this marketing manager didn't care; it's that nobody else did. In the end we ran a campaign of drivel and self-worshiping nonsense.

Working internally can yield important direction, but one must be very careful not to perpetuate the status quo. There is a special attraction to maintaining a current mode of messaging even if it is useless and, worse yet, destructive. For some companies, the shoes have been falling in the looms for years and, while they have not caused work to stop, a piece of operation gets broken with each fall. One day, there will be nothing left.

## **He or she who is without blame can cast the first shoe**

A type of amnesia is particularly common in the marketing field. The symptoms are the forgetting of one's vocal support and pledges of commitment and resources to a particular effort, while being able to clearly remember the hushed little objection made under the breath while no one was around.

The only cure for such a malady is leadership from the person who has the most to lose. Bickering and blame-storming do happen, but at some point playtime is over and the business at hand must get done. Once the team knows that someone has more to lose on an effort than they do and that that person is going to do all that is necessary to succeed, it is amazing how such a realization can quell petty disputes and infighting.

Our agency is like many: Titles are used only occasionally, everyone wears flip-flops and even the interns get good parking. At the end of the day, however, there are people who are in charge and that fact has to be communicated on occasion.

I speak often with media sales executives who pitch and occasionally berate me over what is best for my clients. I then feel compelled to remind them that the captain is the only one aboard a ship who is expected to go down with it. That being so, the captain gets to say where the ship is going. At the end of a campaign or effort, I will be the one expected to account for the message, tactics and result while the media rep will be miles away in the lifeboat with the ship's rum stash.

As I have said before, marketing is a war of sorts. Orders are expected to be carried out and he or she that has any role in working against that effort should be dispatched. If you are willing to put your neck (and reputation) on the line, the very least you can demand is loyalty to carry out your orders.

## **The best way to keep shoes out of the looms is to ban shoes**

I have found most shoes in the loom to be personal agendas, counterintuitive thinking, laziness, lack of commitment, grudges, turf guarding and an array of other unneeded nastiness. Purging a corporate culture of such behavior before undertaking a mission-critical marketing maneuver is wise. Only then can you be relatively certain that the team has the loyalty and skin in the game needed for success.

## **No one will throw a shoe in front of you**

I believe the best way to encourage each person's best in a marketing effort is to stay engaged. I say this not meaning to nitpick, but to regularly inspect progress and reward commitment with your interest and praise.

I like the image of a flag officer inspecting the troops under his or her command. The soldiers line up at attention in perfect formation as the commanding officer walks through asking questions and showing an occasional glimmer of warmth.

Perhaps your troops could use the occasional inspection in which they polish their shoes and display their medals. With luck, they will be reenergized and committed because you have taken interest and pledged that if things do not go well, you will go down with the ship. So with the next big effort you undertake, line them up, charge them up and look them in the eye. Demand loyalty, expect hard work and, before you charge off into battle, look down and make sure everyone still has their shoes on.



## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y - S E V E N

# Eating My Words

OK. I admit it. I'm not always right. I don't have all the answers. I have made and will continue to make mistakes.

Years ago, I worked as a photographer, and more than once I realized we would have to redo a shot because there was no film in the camera. I once held up the production of a TV commercial when I left the batteries to the camera back at the office. Once, when addressing a group of honor students at my alma mater, I told them that they should be "commandeered" for their hard work. I meant to say, "commended." "Commandeered" is to be hijacked. I am not without my faults or blunders.

Blasting out against integrated marketing, however, is not one of my mistakes. I realize that some companies are successfully using integrated campaigns and I applaud them. I realize that many agencies have morphed and molded to include a host of integrated marketing services and I do not disagree with their tactics. I do not protest companies pushing towards integrated marketing, but companies that push to create integrated campaigns without understanding the abilities and limitations of that which they are attempting to integrate. Some managers only seem interested in integrating the hip, new tactics in marketing. They're all pumped up to coordinate with the new viral campaign or ring tone. Truthfully, marketing managers could have fully coordinated with sales departments years ago. But did they?

I have worked on a few truly good integrated campaigns. This is when, by my definition, sales, advertising, promotion and distribution work from the same agreed-upon strategy. A campaign that fails to fully address the needs of all of the divisions that help get a product to consumers is not integrated. Rather, it often ends up a giant stew of two parts hype, three parts untested fad, one part unneeded technology used for its own sake and three-fourths of the year's marketing budget.

There are a few hallmarks we look for to help integrated campaigns succeed. A partial list follows:

## Everybody on board (Yes, the same ship.)

A product can't move forward without everyone giving it a shove. When I was in sales, I made a special point of building a relationship with the distribution people. So when I had a customer who wanted a particularly exotic product, distribution did what it took to get it to me. Once, on a rather large sale, the manufacturer got wind of the deal and tried to approach the client directly. Our VP of Purchasing called the manufacturing representative and used a string of obscenities that would make a sailor blush. We kept the sale.

And that's the moral of the story: Work closely and early with departments in the development of strategy so that you can eventually use obscenities together.

## Understand where everything stands in the cycle of marketing

Remember that cute, little flow chart from Marketing 1100 that shows the marketing process? You know...



Know where every effort stands on the chart. Seriously. Draw it out and then draw lines to the parts that each integrated effort accomplishes. If you find that one part of the chain far outweighs another, balance it out. If you are missing key parts, fill them in with something. If you have an effort that does not have a role in the marketing spectrum, well, I think you know what to do.

## Throw it all in a pot and let it simmer

The soup du jour of marketing in the dot-com era was to jump on anything and everything because it was new, and then justify the effort later to the investors as “something fresh that old-school finance guys like you can't understand.” Sadly, some of that thinking has survived into the current era and managers, nervous at the prospect of being branded as “behind the times,” have allowed poorly laid plans to roll out the door unchecked.

Great integrated plans meld together harmoniously. Great practitioners are not afraid to accept the insight and counsel of peers from different divisions. In a truly great effort, everyone plays from the same playbook and finds success from the efforts not to be a surprise at all.

## **In sum**

There is a difference between trying to use the same strategy blindly in all channels and thinking about the whole consumer experience. That word needs to be said again... experience. Tomorrow's marketing will not be about "exposing" consumers to the message. Instead, we as marketers will be charged with building an experience that our consumers gravitate towards. With changes in the media landscape, consumers' enhanced control, and new options in media, we will need to do a little more beckoning and a lot less subjecting. Only working and thinking together will build the experience tomorrow's market will demand.

But then again, I could be wrong about the whole thing. Perhaps marketing campaigns are more effective without the oppressive and limiting forces of a plan where efforts work together. Perhaps consumers progress directly from unawareness to action with the right website or celebrity tie-in. Who am I to implore for unified efforts in marketing? It's not like I've never made a mistake.



## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y - E I G H T

# A Few More Than the Two Words Most Marketing Gurus Deserve

I am a book on tape fanatic. Well, it's more like book on iPod, but saying books on tape gives the experience that wholesome "look at me, I use the public library" kind of feeling. And I love it.

I listen to all types of stuff. I listened to this brownbag luncheon from W's media strategist and it was pretty cool. I listened to Donny Deutsch talk about how he was only kidding when he took off his shirt and flexed for reporters. I like to listen to books about marketing and recently listened to one that, had it physically been on tape, I would have thrown out the window.

Yes, the book was terrible, but it was really just another in a long stringy fad of marketing gurus spitting out their drivel. I dislike fad marketing - not because it is wholly incorrect (much of it is not), but because it is often driven by hype, almost always over-promises and is certain to under-deliver.

My boiling point was not when this yahoo rattled off the same tired list of technology companies who used his "innovative" idea. I didn't start to yell obscenities when, like every other idiot marketing scene one-hit wonder, he started talking about how many messages people are exposed to daily and how many choices of cereal are out there. No, I saved my full fury for when he called the concept of branding a black hole.

He made a common and stupid mistake. He equated the term brand with the logo and packaging. Silly guru, heal thyself.

For the record, this firm, along with many others, considers branding the personalizing of a company, thereby allowing attitudes, style and voice to work with attributes to create a persona that draws in customers. The rest of this chapter is dedicated to why fad-surfing marketing "gurus" need to go back to the putrid septic waste field of the failed dot-coms that spawned them.

## **Even my Grandpa is afraid of robots**

During the holidays, my family likes to sit around and listen to Grandpa tell us why the world sucks and how it cannot cope with all the change and fast pace. I'm willing to bet his grandpa used to do the same. It's what I like to call the alumni factor. No matter what school you went to, there were always some alumni ready to tell you that, back in the day, the courses or the partying or the daily life was harder. You can really up the entertainment if you can find even older alumni to tell the first guy that back before back-in-the-day, they ate wild squirrel, drank gasoline and attended class outside while burning sulfur rained down from the sky.

My point is every so-called movement is fueled by fear, and what scares many people is everything changing to the point of being out of control. I find it funny that movies portraying the future show the media as being sinister, but indicate that a car so capable that it drives itself, flies and gives you a simultaneous colonoscopy as being something desirable. In the same breath of criticizing too many television, radio and print choices, these gurus praise the amount of cluttered choices available on the Internet. Truth be known, media, communication and the relationship between brands and customers is about to get a whole lot better. Patience, I'll explain in a bit.

## **The truth about buzz**

Buzz worthy products get buzz. It's that simple. Observe how buzz-nuts keep their success pertaining only to technology items, hype-filled products and unique offerings that would create their own unassisted buzz.

I am not saying buzz is unimportant. What I am saying is that buzz cannot be manufactured from thin air. You don't see buzz marketers buzzing around the headquarters of insurance agencies, banks and established packaged goods. That's because they are fully aware that they can't create buzz for businesses that don't create it themselves with the product. If it's not a shiny new sneaker or cell phone, the buzz-nuts are lost.

Gurus will try to fill a marketer's head with notions of how people don't pay attention to TV anymore or how consumers don't believe ads. Take a look at two examples and analyze how you feel about it.

**Scenario 1:**

You view a humorous, insightful or informative television commercial that tells you about a product you've not heard of before.

**Scenario 2:**

You discover that an acquaintance has been paid by a company and given free product samples to convince you to purchase a certain product.

Honestly, how does that make you feel?

Word-of-mouth advertising is the magnetic bracelet of marketing. Everyone knows word-of-mouth has an influence on consumers' feelings towards a product or service, but the foolishness is the few that tell everyone they can harness the power of word-of-mouth to sell pretty much anything.

Consumers use brands and products as a way to express themselves and their viewpoints to the outside world. The fundamental misunderstanding about buzz marketing is that so-called buzz marketers assume that consumers evangelize the same marketing points about a product that the CEO does. The true whiz products of buzz marketing all had a preexisting brand and buzz marketing merely supplemented an already powerful marketing system.

**The truth about media**

No, it's not going away or being wholly replaced by a cell phone. Media is only getting better and you should be excited. While the so-called marketing prophets use the broadening of television offerings as a justification for a company to ax the TV budget and instead hire 14 NYU acting students to wear wetsuits with a company logo on it and walk around Times Square shouting the word "Believe," the truth is that more channels means less waste.

Think about it. Before, you used one of a few stations to reach a targeted demo/psychographic. With the variety in current cable programming, you can reach bass fisherman, food fanatics, history buffs and pretty much any group or combination of groups you desire. The options for the marketer are more, not less.

It's true that radio has taken a hit in recent years, but, as a medium, it asked for it. Programmers got lazy, filling the waves with stupid, mindless content and the same old Coldplay songs. The sad part about radio is all the untapped potential. When news talk hit the waves, it took off like wildfire. Why don't programmers continually search for new programming that may have a similar affect as news talk? Because they don't care. When their laziness drove major marketers off the radio waves, stations became content to just peddle their trash to local car dealers, adult novelty shops who sell "tobacco accessories" and concert promoters. Radio will change, but it may have to hit rock bottom first.

Understanding that radio will be a localized medium, offering local content and information, will be the key to radio's transformation. The other part of the pie is for radio to rediscover its educational roots. I have several thousand songs on my iPod. If I want to hear a Fleetwood Mac seven-song superset, I can do it myself. Radio needs to get back in the role of introducing us to music, news and views that educate, entertain and enlighten. That change will come.

Like radio, much of print has refused to evolve and will eventually have to change or vanish. Despite shrinkage in some of the print sector, thoughtful publishers have capitalized on the growing trends and interests of society. And that's nothing new. Successful publications have always been the result of someone thoughtfully designing a publication to attract a particular audience. The breakdown was when someone assumed that society doesn't change and we'll be reading the same old Life magazine on our spaceships.

## **The truth about brands**

Brands are like molecules. They have always been around whether or not we knew how they worked. Products, services, causes and people have always had personas that enhanced or discouraged marketability. Understanding and managing brands will continue long after the buzz of "brand management" has worn off.

People use the brand characteristics of a product to make a statement to the world about themselves. It's amazing. The people who claim the branding era is over all seem to drive Volkswagens, use MacBooks and wear Ben Sherman clothing. But *of course* they are not influenced by the persona carefully crafted by these products' marketers to attract them. They were instead influenced by the 10 girls in silver suits riding Segways in Central Park and the friends at a cocktail party who told them about that great new hemorrhoid cream.

## **Nay-sayers, Doomsayers and Soothsayers**

Fear of irrelevance in the customer's eyes is a powerful motivator and makes marketers do some pretty outlandish stuff. There will always be a snake-oil salesman promising to cure all your marketing woes. Consider the following: a new technology has been killing the 30-sec TV spot for the past 30 years. Not so long ago, this was the very same promise of telemarketing, which was hyped as the only marketing channel a company would ever need.

One of the things I treasure about being from a place as unassuming as Georgia is that I appreciate that there are other states in the union. When most marketing gurus step out of Manhattan, they seem to turn back into pumpkins. They don't realize a whole consuming world exists outside New York City's urban center. And no, contrary to popular guru belief, everyone doesn't aspire to live in the city. There is a fallacy in assuming that a technique or tactic gleaned in Gotham works on everything, everywhere.

The key to the future for marketing is better creativity and more cohesive selling concepts. Good products with strong, coordinated and rooted marketing messages will win every time. That concept is time-tested, it works and nobody paid me to tell it to you about it.



## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y - N I N E

# The End of Media, Huh? Are You SIRIUS?

Some of Bob Garfield's recent articles have predicted the apocalypse of mass media. And the often-praised Advertising Age writer is seldom too far off the mark.

But what will be the reality after mass media's newest technologies take a commanding hold? What are the hopes for marketers in the mass media nuclear winter? I'd say things look pretty good and they'll only get better.

Take DVRs (Digital Video Recorders) like TIVO® for example. The DVR allows you to record shows you would have otherwise missed. If you just can't wait to watch the TIVO version of the show and want to watch it live, you can't fast-forward through the commercials. That's important to the viewer because it means content producers will have to produce better quality shows in more convenient time slots. Otherwise we'll just digitally record them, which will increase the chance we may fast-forward through the commercials.

And that's assuming that people fast-forwarding through the commercials is a bad thing. Some studies are showing that fast-forwarding through a commercial doesn't necessarily reduce recall. During a commercial break without TIVO, people run to the bathroom or grab a snack or do anything but keep their eyes on the TV. When you are fast-forwarding through commercials, you must attentively watch the screen in order to not fast-forward too far. Imagine hordes of viewers who wouldn't have even watched the commercial had they not recorded it, and are now staring at the screen with an attentiveness that rivals the program. While they are watching the commercials whip by, those mental gears are turning to discern whether it is a commercial or content.

What I can't figure out is why everyone is so amazed by the fact that consumers fast-forward through some commercials and then go download others on the Internet to watch for amusement. There is a very clear answer. Some commercials are simply worth watching. So what do we learn from this? Advertisers need to make better commercials.

So let's add it up. More viewers seeking out the content. Enhanced attentiveness to the messages and the possibility of less ego-screaming car commercials? Sounds like gravy to me.

On a similar note, satellite radio trouncing regular radio is a scenario not to be taken at its word. Satellite stations are already out hawking airtime for ads and eventually it'll be no better than the average ROCK, STAR or MAGIC. With a catch: You wanna hear what's going on in your town. Ha, ha! You won't be hearing it from outer space! Satellite radio will force local stations to get local in their content instead of the duplicated junk that's allowed a ton of them to become bloated and lazy. Think of it. Local shows, local tunes, local news—I'd say that's gravy with giblets.

Oh, and how about our sad, dwindling friend the newspaper? Like the radio, they have grown used to using duplicated content to cut costs, so now the front-page story is the same on every local paper and about a million websites. Readers have fought back. Circulation is down all over the country. But newspapers have a secret weapon. Newspapers house most of the best journalists to ever exist and I say we need to put them all to work. Like radio, the availability of duplicated content through technology will drive them to look locally for news. Writers are going to sharpen those pencils and give us stories we really want about an area the Web neglects: Local news, better news. People should be getting excited.

As media content quality and focus improves, it leaves one very important part to get a makeover. Rather than finding ways to subject people to ads over their cell phones, marketers should explore how to make ad content better, and if not sought after, at least less repulsive. There's a reason that so few are looking into this option. The people who sign off on the ads that annoy us so badly really feel that boastful and arrogant about their products. People who put out ads that say nothing really have nothing to say. And people who can only rely on a captive audience have no inducement to make their content better. Until now.

Better creativity is the last bastion of pure competition. Outsmarting the other guy has always been a key ingredient in success. Rather than singing the names of car dealerships and yelling about how to rip off the government, advertisers need to make better connections with their prospects. The future will be bright for those who can close the gap between consumer desire and fulfillment with better creative messaging.

And those of you who fast-forwarded to the bottom of this rather than reading the whole thing know that media is only going to get better for marketing. Even though you sped through it, I'm glad you still got the point.



## C H A P T E R   T H I R T Y :

# Red Beans and Line Extension

Red foods don't kill you. Well, at least not all of them. In the past, however, people skipped out on the tomatoes and cherries that we enjoy today because they believed the red color to be indicative of poison. I find it odd that early people would believe a red tomato to be bad for them, but not a lobster. I mean, let's face it, if you didn't know that lobster tastes good would you really be willing to try it? It looks like an overgrown cockroach with claws. Delicious!

We marketers have our own "red food," so to speak. It's called line extension. Companies are eager to cash in a little consumer affinity earned in one category to sell in another sector. Sadly, consumers don't always make the jump from category to category, and over the years a few sorry blokes had to get poisoned so that the rest of us could see the difference between good sales and sales that puke at the table. Though not pretty, it was necessary. The looming question then is this: Are we as marketers so weary from our last tummy ache that we forgo a tasty opportunity to parlay brand equity onto another product?

There have been some very public poisonings, such as IBM copiers, Coors water and Levi's shoes. The companies who indulge in such line extensions often have a lofty strategy, such as, "We aim to be the ultimate office products company." No offense to those who perpetuated such campaigns, but that's not aiming for the bleachers. That's aiming for the outer ring of Saturn. And no matter how big the goal, if you are not checking the congruence of your plan with consumers' existing and entrenched thoughts, your aim isn't achievable.

If you had asked me a week ago how to execute a line extension, I would have simply said, "Don't." It's just not worth the risk of irrelevance in the consumer's mind. But then again, I constantly advocate for structuring marketing with overarching brand objectives and persona. It seems that if a brand could be broadened within a customer's comfort range, other products could exist under the umbrella and benefit from the existing customer goodwill.

I recently spoke with someone who had experience in making a successful line extension under the parameters of lifting the brand from product to whole marketing effort and then adding separate products that made sense under the newly lifted and solid brand position. The concept allowed for brands to be correctly extended, as well as provided parameters for executing the extension. The guy who introduced this idea to me is Dave.

## **The Brassiere Theorem (or, Dave's Law of Lift and Separate)**

Dave makes a good point: if a brand is elevated to encompass a broader yet still adequately focused position, additional products can be effectively marketed under that position.

The lift idea is similar to the parachute game many of us played at summer camp. Everyone works to lift a parachute high into the air, and then jumps under it and sits on the edge so that it forms a large tent. With the brand as the parachute, lifting allows people to get under and inside it. If everyone doesn't really work to lift the chute, however, it won't work.

The separating part reminds me of watching cells divide in BIO1104. The products that will reside under a newly lifted brand should be derived from the core brand strategy. One cannot pull a product by ease or acquisition and then pretend it functions under the brand umbrella. Again, consumers ultimately determine what fits in the brand and what does not. Consult consumers before attempting such marketing gymnastics.

Think you're ready to lift and separate? Ask yourself these questions first:

- Is the product I will use as a steppingstone to taking the position really a steppingstone?

Going from performance brakes to performance auto parts as a whole? Sure, that makes sense and, so long as you put the work into the transition, it will most likely work. Going from computers to air conditioners? Probably not going to happen.

The connection between the initial product and that to which the brand aspires needs to be more than logical to you, it needs to be logical to the consumer as well. Better check with them.

- Is the position I want to take in the market really a position at all?

Plenty of fantasy positions are out there and companies seem drawn to them like flies to garbage. Seeking to be the ultimate restaurant is more than just ambitious; it assumes that your consumer perceives all restaurants as simply good or not good. More likely, consumers categorize information related to their experience along specific guidelines, such as quick service, fast-casual and upscale.

A better position to seek is to be the ultimate western steakhouse experience or the best Irish pub around. Those goals are defined and, more importantly, achievable.

- Can I put in the legwork to lift the brand position?

A belief persists that a company can take a position simply by saying it does. Faking the position can work, but only until less refined members of the press begin regurgitating pitch points from corporate communications.

Consumers, however, don't get their grocery list from their stock analysts and financial writers. To truly take a position means to rightfully earn it. That means talking the talk in all forms of communication (ads, sales, PR, outreach) as well as offering products that are in sync with the overall position.

Want what I think is a bad example? Take Ford's audacious "Bold Moves" campaign. Tell me this: What exactly is bold about a Ford Fusion, which essentially looks to me like a golf cart wrapped in aluminum foil? I've got a bold move for Ford - make a car that sells without the help of 20% of the value in cash back and 60 months financing.

- Will the separation be comfortable and flattering?

It just made sense for Apple to come out with the iPod. Apple has long been a quirky computer company with loyal fans. For consumers, an Apple is not a computer but a revolution of design and technology, as well as a personal statement. The jump from the iBook to the iPod was not so much a jump as it was a slide. The Apple brand lifted long ago to mean more than computers and the iPod fits neatly beneath the brand umbrella.

A hysterical clip on youtube.com shows what would happen if Microsoft redesigned the packaging for iPod. The clip shows the box being cluttered with junk and misinformed assumptions about consumers. The humor is deeply telling about what some consumers think of Microsoft. Apple fans the flames with its hyper-minimalist television ads showing the PC as a lumbering lug head.

- I'll be comfortable with this for the long haul.

There are places for companies who switch strategies every quarter, namely the office furniture for-sale section of the business chronicle. Most companies don't really have the option to continually re-guess a strategy.

I bought a GPS navigation unit for a recent trip. Lost in south Alabama, I called my brother to ask if his GPS ever got him off track.

"Use it or don't," he said, "but don't use it some of the time and then try to second-guess. Do that and you'll get lost for sure."

Brand strategies are similar. Sometimes they meander down an unfamiliar road or take a route we are not used to, so we have to turn around and we end up lost. There are no guarantees in marketing. We take what we know about consumers and the product, and we pair them in a way we hope will be harmonious. While we don't have guarantees, we do have experience, and it has taught us that thoughtfulness, discipline and courage pay off while a continual change of direction is a waste of time and resources.

## **Those are some spicy red beans. I mean zesty. No, spicy.**

The peril of line extension has always been failure to commit. The Brassiere Theorem (or, Dave's Law of Lift and Separate) will not work without commitment and tenacity. So before your planning is done, before the product is all packaged up, before the ads are with the FedEx guy and sales has straightened their ties and scarves for the pitch, take a second and print out Dave's theory along the five questions that go with it.

Take a hard look at it before venturing out on a line extension. You might even let everyone on your team initial the paper before you start. Just pass it around and ask who's in and let them sign it. Then add your signature, crack you knuckles and take everyone to a dinner of spicy red beans and rice. If you're going to be bold, might as well start bold.



## C H A P T E R   T H I R T Y - O N E

# Marketing Even When You Don't Have To

Early in my career I worked for a magazine. It was a small, inconsequential magazine with small, inconsequential stories and we would sell the cover to an advertiser if they'd buy it. My boss was a reformed hillbilly who wore boat shoes, pandered to the elite (whom he called the "movers and shakers") and was basically viewed by his staff as lower in intelligence than a magic eight-ball and as agreeable as a case of shingles.

Our genius boss's latest idea wasn't of his normal flushable variety. Our task was to create trite layouts from stock photography of impressive-looking lawyers standing in front of impressive-looking books and pair it with an impressive headline like, "By your side, on your side." The layouts were then carted to every lawyer in the county and the visuals just sold themselves. Not even lawyers could refuse "our name in lights" tactics.

While on a photo shoot for one of these ads, a lawyer confided in me that this was the first ad he had ever done. "Why?" I asked.

"Well, it's kind of the idea that good lawyers don't need to advertise," he replied.

"That's really stupid," I said.

"Yeah, I know," he said.

And it is stupid. I'm glad cereal manufacturers aren't so stupid. "Oooooooo, look at us. Our whole grain goodness is so good we don't even have to tell people how good it is." What a pompous load of manure. The deep irony is that when lawyers do advertise, it is usually of such ilk that even flies would refuse to land on it, i.e., "Goodbye wreck, hello check!!!!!"

Anyone engaged in business where the goodwill of the people is involved needs to advertise. Advertising builds awareness of brand attributes. Concepts such as likable, fair, innovative, responsible get stored in the consumer conscience and can be withdrawn at the right time when needed. Ever watched “Meet the Press”? Do you buy deepwater oil drilling platforms? Why is Kerr-McGee advertising to you? Our government has a lot to do with what Kerr-McGee is up to. Your good feelings about Kerr-McGee translate into policies and actions that help the company succeed in a tough sector. And if Kerr-McGee gets called on the carpet, you’ll remember the attributes of “responsible,” “innovative” and “part of American progress” - not a bad thought to have in the jury of public opinion when you’re Kerr-McGee.

## **Nobody likes a bully**

My years in the commercial photography business taught me a ton about salesmanship, bullies and retaliation. For years, the photographic film business was dominated by a bully who worked by its own terms, forced actions from its distributors and all but totally ignored many who would otherwise be ardent fans. We pleaded with the bully to get better at distribution. The bully laughed at us and cited its market dominance. We pleaded with them for partnerships on large accounts. It responded by opening their own distribution points and competing against us with a smug little sales force.

Hello, digital photography.

When digital photography fell on the scene, years of arrogance and otherwise bullish behavior erupted in a popular consumer backlash against this bully. While this bully had been advertising regularly, much of its advertising was about how great the bully was and how we all should stand in awe of it. The business-to-business ads were just a reflection of its domineering attitude and, in the end, the bully got stabbed by all of its senators.

I believe to this day that many people buy an HP or Samsung digital camera just to take another pop at the bully while it’s down. Had the bully used its time at the top to build support among consumers and retailers, its fate might have been different.

## 1984

Apple is Apple because it is not IBM. An Apple sticker on the back of a car not only says, "I use a Mac," but it also says, "IBM sucks." In that iconic Apple television commercial, which computer company do you think is being portrayed as the lumbering cult of sameness?

Competitors do not become successful by touting themselves as your clones unless customers love your product but hate you personally. IBM has a long history of being such a dominant leader that people just love to hate them.

But there are greener pastures for IBM. A new focus on consulting and practicality has made big blue seem a little less...well...big blue. For the first time in a long time, IBM's communications seem to hint that they get it. It's going to be an uphill ride on a road where everyone's got a scope square on IBM. Their ads defiantly help by showing IBM as a smart and resourceful company eager to help business. That's a far move from the company who once built a computer to show how dumb people are.

### **Hey, what happened? Why don't we hate Bill Gates anymore?**

Bill saw the writing on the wall. He was and is determined not to go down in history as the imperial wizard of closed source code. Bill Gates and Microsoft embarked on an image makeover to soften the gritty image and connect to consumers with a human touch. And it worked! Bill Gates has gone from getting pied in the face to the cover of Time, next to Bono.

But why? Is Microsoft hurting for market share? Is there some software company looming to take away Microsoft's prestige? Maybe there is and Bill is not willing to take the chance. Today's brand equity is tomorrow's not having a pie thrown in your face. When consumers like you, they are not cheering for your competitors quite as hard or wishing for your demise.

## **I use SoCo to keep warm when it's cold**

The people spoke in Georgia. We marched, fought for and won our right to skyrocketing gas prices, spotty customer service and all the other things that unregulated natural gas service piles in a steaming heap on our doorstep. Like many Georgians, I've used a few gas companies since deregulation. One couldn't get the billing straight. One just never turned on the gas. Finally, our power company got in the game.

I should back up a bit.

The Southern Company doesn't need to advertise. It has a substantial and nearly guaranteed customer base, yet millions of dollars are spent telling me about their commitment to this and that and their service to me - the customer. Most of the time I gave it little mind.

But then I had the choice of SoCo for natural gas. I flipped my current gas provider the international symbol for #1 and switched my account. SoCo made a deposit in brand equity and many, like me, jumped at the chance for them to cash it in when a line extension was made. Please understand that the brand equity was not purely built by advertising but by the cohesive efforts of product, quality control, communications and customer service. My experience was due in part to the fact that all efforts focused on the customer's experience. That, in my belief, is marketing at its purest.

When brands can benefit from the goodwill of consumers, they should be seeking to develop a relationship. The payoffs of brand equity can be timely and substantial. When the offerings from two competing companies seem matched, a thoughtful marketing strategy can help anyone and any company.





## C H A P T E R   T H I R T Y - T W O

# The Two Roads in the Woods

I had the pleasure of sitting on a panel discussion while bright-eyed, young advertising students hurled questions about the business and why we on the panel weren't like the beautiful, Lamborghini-driving, advertising people on TV.

I lied and told them my Lamborghini was on loan to some guys making a movie. Good save.

Proudly on my usual soapbox, I complained about the current curricula's weakness in strategic marketing and its brief brush with anything considered creative. Then came the obligatory debate - the advertising industry equivalent of nature vs. nurture - portfolio school vs. the school of hard knocks. I told the students I thought portfolio school was great and had my parents found a buried chest of pirate's gold while gardening in the backyard, I may have gone myself. I gave them the best advice I could and told them if they *do* go to portfolio school make sure that if the program does not include writing for TV and radio then they learn it on their own somehow.

Suddenly, I felt a stinging behind my left ear. It was warm and smelled of Certs and Aqua Velva. It was the portfolio school guy seated next to me. He wasn't advocating for his school necessarily, but his comments exposed something I've thought about deeply for years. The sting was him interrupting me to say learning to write for TV is useless because the Internet rules and what students should really learn is how to make cool and hip Internet "viral" campaigns like that chicken that you could command to do all sorts of funny things and that, by making that Internet chicken do jumping jacks, you are influencing others to buy more hamburgers from BK.

There's something about an old guy talking about the cool, hip Internet world. It's like my dad rhapsodizing about his jeans jacket. "Hey, kids! Look, I'm hip like you, *I have a jeans jacket.*"

The chasm became real as day to me then. Are we as advertisers more focused on creating content that draws people in or that which gets people when they are captive? Look at the terminology “gross exposures” and “impressions.” We have a division in the advertising world, part of which is driven to put advertising where you can’t get away from it rather than make advertising you don’t mind seeing in the first place. I’m not calling the guy who sat next to me a Grand Imperial Wizard of Clutter, but I *am* saying that he was indicative of those who would prefer to find new venues where people cannot get away from our messages, rather than making the material better and more desirable. I call them, “The Dark Side.”

So how do we get out of this dark side? Well, the ironic part of this whole debate is that the answers have existed for years in a tiny yet popular book called “How to Win Friends and Influence People.”

So here’s how to win customers and influence decisions. Dale Carnegie had it from the start. If you want to win people over, use three simple fundamentals: 1) don’t criticize them, 2) give honest appreciation and 3) arouse an eager want.

## **Fundamental # 1: You attract more bees with honey than with gasoline**

When did the idea begin that we can guilt a client into a purchase by suggesting that without our product they are just not good enough? Sure, the cynic can say that much of advertising does that very thing, but that’s not what I am referring to. What I’m talking about is the gratuitous portrayal of those who don’t use the product as bumbling idiots. Additionally, bickering between brands is obnoxious. Quiet plainly, consumers have grown weary of the continual “33% more than so and so” jargon.

## **Fundamental # 2: Is the consumer an idiot? Well, is your spouse?**

I can't stress enough that when one pretends the consumer is some ethereal concept rather than people not much different than ourselves, the awful blunder of irrelevance follows closely behind. We are often tempted by strings of numbers on green bars and flickering scantrack reports to think of consumers as otherworldly and inhuman.

Giving an honest appreciation for the consumer, his or her true feelings and outlook, and then positioning your product really pays in spades. We at ST once embarked on a campaign that required us to study the people of Appalachia. We learned their history, their distinct culture, the political and social climate of the region and from there it came down to a single, simple soundtrack.

After extensive briefing with the musicians, they created a track so potent that TV stations running the ad got a flood of requests for the music. One lady said it lowered her blood pressure (that claim remains unverified). Truly appreciating your consumers is a simple but winning strategy.

## **Fundamental # 3: Now you can know what the snake oil salesmen did**

Snake oil salesman knew more than what people wanted to hear; they knew what people wanted. Otherwise, how else would you sell snake oil? Today, however, we seem less focused on arousing a person's want and instead prefer to bombard consumers with what they *should* want.

The truth is, the contemporary practice of trying to force a message and ultimately a product or service on a consumer is really the attempt to arouse a want, but with no patience on the part of the seller. Arousing a want means connecting with a consumer using their language and explaining the practical or emotional reasons why the product makes sense. Arousing a want may be subtle, but do not confuse subtlety with off-strategy.

## **In sum**

If it has been a while since you've read "How to Win Friends and Influence People," I highly recommend you give it another look. This time, however, think of consumers as friends and their decision as that which you want to influence. The more advertising seeks to truly connect with consumers, the more friends it wins those of us who advertise in the long run.





## C H A P T E R   T H I R T Y - T H R E E

# The 800-pound Gorilla

There is no CEO that looks better in a gorilla suit than A. W. Dahlberg. To illustrate the 800-pound gorilla, A. W. appeared in the annual report in full gorilla dress. Another time he wore a space suit. And once when he was at the helm of the Southern Company, he drove his Harley onto the stage to start a stockholders' meeting. I have to admit, I have a soft spot for charismatic CEOs like Dahlberg. Through nearly a decade of putting himself through business school at night, A. W. rose from a meter installer and eventually to CEO. He truly is an inspiration. We all have those heroes somewhere. My beloved mentor Bob Maurer is famous for getting up on the table to speak. And boy, can he speak. He can shake the rafters, rally the troops and change a company direction at its very heart.

I have met and worked with some amazing leaders whom I care for very much and that is going to make this next statement a little tough to say. Amazing leaders are sometimes the downfall of a company. Amazing leaders might also be the reason for the company's success in the first place, but ultimately they often take the success with them into retirement.

So what happens when the boss leaves? Does the accounting department suddenly forget how to account? Does shipping stop shipping? Are people so saddened that they just can't work anymore?

Brands that tumble when the boss departs are often the result of the boss being the brand. I am not saying that you'll even see the boss in marketing (though a few do inch into the spokesperson role), but in such companies the boss is the captain, steward, protector, litmus test, and developer of the brand. Think about it. Who often makes the call on what products will be developed and which will remain with the propellerheads in research? Who decides which companies and brands to acquire for the company portfolio? Who ultimately decides the position and premise for the company and associated brands?

So what happens when that person is no longer around?

I'll tell you what happens. Utter chaos. Without the CEO barometer, new products and positions start to smell an awful lot like the off-strategy pet projects that the boss used to keep at bay. Acquisitions become mainly a numbers game to buy growth rather than strategic pieces of a puzzle. Marketing becomes a blur of mixed-up messages and hodgepodge-y positions.

Is there balm in Gilead?

Yes, a company can take proactive measures to distill and retain a brand ethos that can help ensure continuity when the chief leaves. Yes, architecture for brand management can be clearly articulated to every sector of a company. And yes, many people have tried such a maneuver and failed miserably.

Here is how not to fail miserably (and publicly, for that matter).

## **What would you say it is...we do here?**

The greats I have worked with have the uncanny ability to boil down the essence of the company and brand. Like, "We make cereal and sell it to people for more than it costs us to make it, and we sell it under the premise of being a rite of passage for childhood." See, nice and simple. But then everyone else wants to stick their thumb in the stew and before long, nobody fully understands what the company does and how it does it.

No matter how large a company gets, its staff should always remember what, so to speak, feeds the bulldog. Taking an eye off what pays the electric bill is always a bad idea. The best bet is to make sure everyone has the same clear understanding of what the company does and why it exists.

## **What makes you special?**

All companies have an approach, reputation or persona that makes them unique. Too often the essence of the brand is guided by the CEO and joins him or her in Florida for the never ending round when retirement comes about. A better idea is to clearly record and articulate the brand ethos in a set of standards and practices that can be referenced for all things marketing and many things operational, keeping the company putting along nicely.

## **What do we hold most dear?**

My favorite bosses often had a list of inviolacies about our company, products and people. The skillful blending of these inviolacies created a culture magnetic to consumers. We like it when consumers buy our products. We love it when they join our brand and believe in who we are.

## **The hundred-yard stare**

Some just have vision. They can see movements in markets years away. They see opportunities in time to start multi-year development and always seem to having the timing perfect. You can't let them take all of that with them into retirement.

I often complain about the layering of marketing management, but the truth is it takes years of mentoring for vision to rub off on a junior vice president. Great CEOs just seem to sense the market and steer the ship into winds of opportunity. Sure, some of this is inborn, but it can be learned if the master makes time and the student is eager.

Don't let your marketing secrets buy a Winnebago and see the 50 states. Don't let a whole brand ethos retire to the south of France to start making its own wine. Before that vision is playing 36 holes a day, you better stop it. Stop it and sit down with it. Ask it questions and then listen to the answers. Get your colleagues together. Commit to understanding the successful brand as the captain did when he or she was here.

I wonder if the brass at Southern Company asks themselves, "What would A. W. do?" If you know A. W.'s years of service and his story of a man who loved every bit of a company from the bottom up, you already know the answer.

He'd do what's right.



## C H A P T E R   T H I R T Y - F O U R

# The Brave New Agency, the Whole Brand Experience and Tomorrow's Marketing Frontier

This chapter starts with a failure. The failure was not huge nor was anyone hurt physically. Our firm had made its case for a more strategic approach to developing a campaign for a client. We thought the overall message would be a perfect fit. We didn't win. Not for lack of talent. The client's rep made that very clear. Nor for lack of ability, grasp of the product or fortitude to do the job right. Nothing like that. In the end, we didn't have enough secretaries.

The client's feeling was that our staff size was not enough for them. But we have art directors, writers and creative service managers, as many as most large agencies. We even have a TV guy in-house, which is a pipe dream for many larger shops. We had pledged to commit two full-time people to the management of the client's business. All that left was secretaries. We didn't have enough secretaries.

I was sullen. To lose on ideas or ability is one thing. It's another thing to lose despite full capability, talent and heart. Now I know how Ogilvy, Gossage, Bernbach and Bogusky felt.

That probably needs explaining.

Each one of those guys stood on the cusp of change in the advertising industry when the gold standard was also the old standard and new innovative thought was repeatedly punished with failed wins before a new concept was popularized. To truly understand how this works, you need a cursory understand of the history of advertising. It will be very brief. Here it goes.

The first agencies were little more than sales offices for newspapers and magazines since the publications had no ad sale mechanisms of their own. To compete with each other, agencies began offering writing and artwork to help with the selling ability of the ad. Before long, people like David Ogilvy began to think more deeply about buying processes and consumer thought. Bill Bernbach later arrived with the first real creative touch to advertising. Remember the “Think Small” VW ads? That’s Bernbach. In a little San Francisco fire station, Gossage began the first legs of brand development with Fina’s Pink Air campaign. And now Bogusky with Burger King, Mini and the most exciting VW work in years. Each of these fellas jumped a chasm from old thought to new. Each of these guys saw their share of challenges. Each of these guys, so to speak, lost an account because they didn’t have enough secretaries.

Today’s chasm has two parts: first, the departure from the assembly line efforts of over-hyped multi-national conglomerates and, second, the weeding out of the fauxtiques. The big shops are yesterday’s wonder children, yet now they are so watered down that they often deliver so-so work with little strategy. The result has been a lull in the advertising industry as a whole. The fauxtiques are the leftovers from the dot-com era, in which many an ad person left the big shops to start their own boutique agency. Plenty were really good. But the money of the dot-com age fueled the growth like an algae bloom. Before long, shops with very little talent but plenty of cool furniture in their midtown loft office were making money hand over fist for absolutely deplorable work.

Want an example? One of our crew once worked at a company that, with the help of their “agency,” took out large ads in the Wall Street Journal with a painting of fish that they had commissioned by an apparently notable artist. They then took out ads talking about the ads with the revered painting of the fish. They sold software. Software that had nothing to do with fish or painting. The ad was so notoriously bad that Advertising Age magazine went out of its way to call attention to how awful it was.

What's missing from today's lukewarm assembly lines and laughable faux-tiques is the strategic drive and insight of the consultancy. A consultancy looks at the whole marketing-to-consumer relationship and lets strategy drive the whole experience, as opposed to overused clichés and paintings of fish. Today's struggle will be for agencies to ratchet themselves up the corporate food chain and be considered as important to a company as its lawyers, bankers and technology consultants. That is not where many companies are right now with their agencies. Some clients would rather steer the advertising themselves, have the agency carry out their poor plans and then blame the agency for the results.

A recent article in Business Week talked about the ethos of ad wondershop Crispin Porter + Bogusky. In the article, the agency talked about how they jumped the boardroom table and are now deeply involved in product development and corporate strategy in addition to marketing strategy. VW tapped the talent at CP+B and let down their turf-protecting guard. The result is sales gains not seen in a very, very long time at VW.

## **The current ever-present struggle in the client/agency relationship**

- Ego vs. courage

Some clients need an agency with a glass office and scones custom baked with the agency logo on them in the lobby. Some companies have this drive and plenty of agencies are there to take advantage of low corporate esteem.

We have had a few brushes with big shops with the same result. Because the client was not Procter & Gamble or Coca-Cola, the big lumbering agency could not afford to put any real talent on the account, so it was delegated to a team of juniors. The resulting work was impotent. The management of the business was both zealous and incompetent and the fees were insane.

A few enterprising companies have had the courage to skip the ego trip and go where real talent and heart could be put towards their business. And they have been handily rewarded for their courage.

- Safety vs. bravery

In the end, agencies are businesses and will try to keep a client in order to keep the shop up and running. This is where clients can really inspire good work. In fostering an agency-client relationship of openness to new ideas without threatening to cut bait every two weeks, a client will allow an agency to delve, develop and catapult a brand to stardom. Miraculous results are not guaranteed, but what is guaranteed is that overbearing behavior by the client results in less than palatable creative.

- Quantity vs. quality

Quantity vs. quality is a reciprocal relationship. An agency can have a few great clients that have commitments to long-term strategies and fair compensation, or an agency can have a roster of jerks whose retainer checks barely pay for the mountains of paste up board they consume.

At the same time, there are clients who need the emotional security of knowing a whole army is on their work (a situation which is never true but always expensive nonetheless). In reality, to come up with earthshaking creative does not take any more than two or three talented people. You can have all the secretaries you want, but in either quality of the creative work or plain cash, you'll pay for them.

## **The Trend**

Tomorrow's agency will be a consultancy. Most network media buys over three million will be bought by media houses. Therefore, agencies will be forced to compete on creative abilities alone. The idea economy is coming and it will be a war. The whole brand experience will reign and for a while.

On one side will be clients with the skilled guidance of their agency and an arsenal of strategic thinking. On the other side will be clients with an army of nothing more than appeasers and secretaries. The market is the battlefield. I think you can guess how it will play out. I think Ogilvy, Bernbach, Gossage and Bogusky could guess right as well.