

What's good endures

I have been thumbing through old magazines, which is a quick way to see just how fast graphics and tastes change. If you were to pick up a magazine from 1990 you would really feel the difference. Some of it is more sophisticated tools, but some of it is just changing taste. In any case, I came across a print ad for a Fig Newton Snack Bar that is “just 100 calories.” (When will this fascination with 100 calories end? What is so magical about 100???) I don't think Nabisco makes these anymore, but the tag line “Snack Happy” is still in use. Why? Because it's good. Period. What more do you want from a tag line? It is short, succinct and connotes at least two emotional states: guilt-free and contentment (or guilt-free contentment). So Nabisco has kept the tag line and got rid of the “snack fairy.” Remember the snack fairy? It was some guy dressed in a tutu that gave you snacks you could enjoy, EVEN if you were on a diet. I just did a quick search and now Nabisco is running a “Snack Purple” campaign to celebrate women (huh?). In any case, this is not even close to being as enduring and clever as Snack Happy. Snack Purple? First of all, how does purple connote women? And second, who eats a color other than orange?

A marketer should aim to create those enduring tag lines. MasterCard of course has “For everything else there is MasterCard.” Nike has “Just Do It.” These endure because they transcend whatever the image/graphic/fad of the moment is and communicate quickly and effectively to their intended audience. If you can think of other great tag lines, please let me know.

Going green is all the rage

Earth Day makes everyone go green, right? Yesterday, once again, I saw a television commercial for Chevron that touted how a gas company can do good for the environment. It's a long commercial—probably one minute long, and it shows “green” images such as fields of wheat, etc. I wonder what the target is. Do you buy gasoline based on green practices? Do you believe oil companies can be green? After all, the commercial did not mention specific initiatives that Chevron is invested in, it only claims they are working on “human” interest. In fact, the whole commercial is so stylized and designed for an emotional response that it made me doubt its sincerity and accuracy.

Obviously, being green is an important attribute these days. Some companies have the actions to back up the claims. Whole Foods has banned plastic bags at check out, for instance. Some companies print on recycled paper and make a note of it. Some companies try to use recyclable paper and inks for the printed materials. But I can't recall a green campaign that has made me sit up and take notice. I know it is the hot topic du jour, but companies can use the current interest in the environment both to their advantage and to help the planet. If they can actually walk the walk, and tell people about it at the same time, they are truly ahead of the game. That is why the Chevron commercial did nothing for me. They are telling me how interested they are in the environment, but they are not actually telling me specifics.

Advertising in the Friendly Skies

It is not a new phenomenon that the airlines sell advertising. Their main selling points always involve the terms "captive audience," since at 25,000 feet no one is going anywhere. On my USAir flight on Friday, I noticed that the airline has certainly been working this captive audience angle. All ticket jackets had an ad for Geico and its ubiquitous gecko. And one flight segment, the tray tables were covered over with a ad on a sticker. The interesting thing is that although I did use the tray table, I cannot recall what the advertiser was. I do recall the product—it was virtual voicemail. I think that this is the challenge for advertising on board—you can't take action and you may not have pen and paper readily available to make a note to check when you get back on the ground. Or you may be wrapped up in your book or traveling companion's conversation to even notice.

On the other hand, Skymall must be somewhat successful. They have had their catalog onboard for many years. Skymall offers the most unusual selection of goods (whether you NEED any of these is another discussion). People who board a flight without any reading material or other forms of entertainment nearly always end up perusing the catalog. I wonder if any buy or if it's just a source of amusement.

In any case, the airlines are desperate for additional sources of income. As discussed a few days ago, USAir is set to start charging for "premium" seats in economy class, and all airlines will start charging fees for the second piece of checked baggage come May. It will not surprise me if soon we start seeing ads being played on the TV monitors at full volume for at least the first few minutes of the flight. It will also not surprise me if the flight attendants start pushing a product other than the airlines' own credit

card/frequent flyer program.

Cynical marketing

Yesterday, I received an email announcement from US Airways. It is about something they call "choice seats." As part of the growing trend to nickel and dime air travelers, USAir is getting into the fray by offering window and aisle seats in the front of the cabin for purchase. They are attempting to sell this as a benefit. By labeling it choice seats, and offering it for free to their Preferred Dividend Miles members, they are ensuring everyone else is stuck in middle seats. What I find so unsavory about this practice is that they are publicizing it. And making it seem like a good thing. The only people who will benefit from this practice is the USAir higher ups. Gate agents will be even more harrassed as people jockey for better seats, now not available UNLESS you pay. Honestly, this makes me sick. Playing to peoples disgust with flying these days, and seeing an opportunity to extract some more money from the public, USAir will sell you a right to a better seat. If you don't pony up some cash, you can rest assured you will be seated in the last row , in the middle, next to the bathroom. Lovely.

Social Marketing at the

Presidential Level

The 2008 election is being played out across new media. From the YouTube debates to the Facebook pages every candidate seems to have. I heard recently that Chelsea Clinton is asking everyone to “friend” her on Facebook, presumably so she can then have an email list of potential supporters for her mother. Today, I saw something very interesting. John McCain (or rather one of his campaigners) posted a question on LinkedIn. LinkedIn has a great tool called Answers. Through it, people can ask for advice and experts can share their knowledge. McCain used the Answers feature to ask what issues are top priority for Americans. I think this is brilliant on his campaign’s part. First, the campaign will receive some honest answers from Americans around the United States, some who probably would not have this type of access to a campaign. McCain will also create interest and some good will, because he is asking what is important. It makes his campaign look new media savvy as well.

In short, 2008 will show us just how effective social marketing can be. Obviously, campaigns think it is important. It helps raise visibility. The test will be in November and to see how many voters turn out, and why they turned out.

Sunday mornings

I used to be quite a fan of Meet the Press and other Sunday morning talk shows. At the time, Orrin Hatch was a favored guest, and boy, he was ALWAYS on. So I stopped watching. I also really liked David Brinkley, and of course, he passed on. Now, I only watch the programs occasionally. What hasn’t

changed is the advertisers and type of advertising. Sunday morning public affairs shows have image advertising, rarely retail. Back in the day, a huge advertiser on Sunday was the Archer Daniel Midlands company. Or BASF (we don't make the plastic we make the plastic better). This past Sunday, I noticed image advertising for Boeing. Clearly, viewers are not shopping for their very own 737. These commercials are mostly designed to promote the company as a do-gooder or a well run company and really, are designed to appeal to the company's own stakeholders (employees, shareholders and other internal audiences). It is a very unique segment of advertising. The idea also is that policy wonks and other influential people tune in to these Sunday morning shows and these image commercials are meant to create name recognition for these companies. Of course, at some point, policy wonks will be involved in an airline requisition and may have to choose between Boeing and McDonnell Douglas. I wonder if these image campaigns truly influence these types of choices. After all, there is a large difference between choosing Jif Peanut Butter instead of Skippy and deciding to buy a Boeing 727 over a MD-80.

More tagging

Today, I picked up new glasses at For Eyes. The name is brilliant. And the tag is great: The store for people who can't see spending a lot for glasses. I love this! Clever but not at the expense of making sense. And, I really like their ads...generally funny. Plus, I got good service and what I hope are a nice pair of glasses at a reasonable price.

Tagging it

Tag lines are not slogans, although they could be. Slogans can serve as tag lines, as in Nike's "Just do it." Tag lines help the advertiser define the service or product beyond its name or the headline on the ad. As you can imagine, they can be hugely important. Today, an ad for a mattress store caught my eye. It is called Sleepy's. Not sure I care for the name, but the tag line "The Mattress Professionals" just didn't do it for me. In fact, Mattress Professionals would be a better name for a store. Sleepy's is a fairly "unprofessional" name. But they want you to think they know what they are talking about. I think professionals is the not best choice...it doesn't match. I guess "Sleep experts" must be taken...that would have been better. Or "we know mattresses." In any case, to me this illustrates a disparity between a brand name and its brand identity. You want to keep those separate.

Please keep in mind that I have never been to a Sleepy's store and this is just a commentary on a particular element of a particular ad.

Any thoughts?

Need vs. Want

In the end, consumer behavior is stimulated either by needing something or wanting something. Guess where marketing communications plays the bigger part? As I mentioned some posts earlier, Comcast has some very funny commercials. It

doesn't make me WANT to be a Comcast customer but I am a Comcast customer. Why? Because, at the time, they were the only cable tv alternative available to me. I NEEDED to sign up with them. Yet no amount of advertising is going to make me get their voice package. Why? Because I already have a telephone service I am satisfied with, so I have no NEED or WANT.

This need vs. want dichotomy explains why you never see advertisements for certain items. How often do you see an ad for plain rice? Never. Uncle Ben's Wild Rice? More often. You probably need plain rice, but you have to **want** wild rice. The whole advertising business is built around the idea of creating desire. That is the AIDA theory—Attention, Interest, Desire, Action. An ad is supposed to catch your attention and then create a want for something, which will lead you to spend money on something. It's not all nefarious—charities do this to. Who hasn't seen pictures of starving children in Africa and not wanted to help?

Successful marcomm will stimulate a want. We get what we need anyway. You'll want to try new brands, new items, new services, all because the advertiser has convinced you that they have some unique or special attribute.

Viagra on ABC News

Viagra sponsored the limited-commercial edition of tonight's ABC News. On the one hand, this makes sense. Evening news generally skews toward an older demographic. On the other hand, ABC News has a new in-depth series, on what it's like to be 21 in different places. So how does this make sense for Viagra?

Viagra, an ED drug certainly faces competition (I could pun here, but...) from Levitra and Cialis. All three drugs spend lots of ad dollars on high production value tv commercials. I am not sure which drug has the biggest market share, but here's another example of marketing driving the drug companies.