

Did that commercial just go boom?

Have you ever noticed how certain words or phrases seem to become ubiquitous? Sometimes it is because of a movie (“dude” became very very popular after Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure). Sometimes it is because of a TV show. Sometimes, I am just not sure.

I heard a commercial on the radio the other day for a cell phone company, where one of the guys was saying “Boom!” and the other other guy replies: “Stop saying that!” And the other guy goes on “Boom, and there it was.” I can’t remember the words verbatim, but it was all about boom.

And then I started to see/hear boom everywhere, including this commercial for Miracle-Gro Potting Soil:

Notice the last word in the commercial.

Boom!

I bet you start noticing boom all over the place. If you find a good one, share it here in the comments.

Why so many ads fail

Have you ever been watching TV and seen a commercial that falls flat or that outright offends you? I bet you have. I have: the Go Daddy commercials from last year’s Super Bowl, for example, were way offensive and sexist. So, how did they make it to such a massive audience? Why did they get made at

all?

I think the answer lies in some nuggets from this Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation survey of black women in America. If you read through the poll (especially the last few questions about sexism and racism compared to black men, white women and white men), you see that each group views the world differently. For instance, a number that is really indicative, is that 55% of white men think the world is fair to everyone, versus 34% of black women and 47% of white women. (In my opinion, the world is fairest to white men, so therefore they think the world is fair for everyone.)

Another telling statistic is that more black women (36%) think sexism is a big problem in society than white men (12%). Again, white men do not experience much sexism, so it does not affect them as a group, and they conclude it is not a big problem in society.

Different people experience the world differently. Marketers need to be aware of this since we are often swayed by our own experience of the world. This is why certain white male politicians have no problems indicting a whole class of people for being lazy or for not believing in the American dream.

So the next time you see an ad that seems to be tone-deaf you will know that it was created by someone who doesn't understand that his/her experience is not reflective of the world as a whole.

Your thoughts?

Have you signed up for the DBMC newsletter yet? It will take about 5 seconds to sign up right there on the upper right hand side of this page.

Marketing lessons from the gym

Today, as most days, I was working out at the gym and observing those around me (the gym can get very boring). There were some people working up quite a sweat, and there were those that were barely working. Some were older, some were younger. In short, there were all types. But three stood out to me:

The multi-tasker: Today, the multi-tasker was a woman using one of the ellipticals while responding to email and/or texts on her smart phone. She was so engaged with her phone that her legs were barely moving. Was she there to exercise or was she there to deal with work?

- **The lesson:** If you are distracted from your goal, you won't get there. In marketing, you could be trying to do too many things at once and not succeeding in any of them.

The repeater: The repeater is the person who does the exact same exercise, at the same level of intensity, on the same machine. Always. In this case, I have seen this woman "run" at a very slow pace on the exact same machine, at the same time every single day. And guess what—her body is not changing (she is not even breaking a sweat).

- **The lesson:** If you do the same thing over and over without change you won't be effective or see any change. For instance, some companies have always used a full page ad in the Sunday newspaper. And they have been doing that for years. It may produce some results but it will not expand your reach.

The guy wearing jeans at the gym: Have you seen these guys? They come in to the gym in their jeans (usually with belts too) and sometimes, with street shoes instead of sneakers. How are you going to run in jeans?

- **The lesson:** You have to dress appropriately for the occasion/venue. In marketing terms: you have to know what marketing vehicle is the right one for what you are trying to accomplish. If you are trying to target seniors, perhaps a spot on the evening news is the best way to go.

Have you seen these people at your gym?

Is threatening your customers ever a good idea?

Today, in my inbox, I had an email from an online bookseller with this subject line:

“Last day for FREE shipping in time for Christmas.”

I also had an email from an online drugstore, with this subject line:

“NOW OR NEVER: get \$5 dollars off your order and free shipping.”

Although both emails have virtually the same message, the former is URGENT, the latter is THREATENING.

Threatening is telling me that unless I do something there will be consequences (in the drugstore's case, no more free shipping or something). Urgent is telling me that I should act

now because time is running out.

It is more effective to **show your customers why they should act now** instead of telling them that if they fail to act, they will suffer consequences. Don't you agree?

Repetition and frequency

In advertising, most media buyers are trying to find the holy grail of how much repetition/frequency you need to get your target audience to hear/understand and act on your message. The other aspect is reach. Are you reaching the target audience through the channels you have chosen?

It occurs to me that some companies, namely the ones that have the MOST customer service issues (telecom companies, power companies and airlines) and some degree of monopoly, are the same ones that advertise the most aggressively. In any given hour, you will see many spots for Comcast/Xfinity or for Verizon FIOS. I wrote here last year about the intense amount of direct mail FIOS sent me. These companies are hammering away repeating their message with a scary frequency.

Why? Because they have to. Nothing else is going to speak as loudly as lots of loud advertisements. Certainly not the customer experience or their “stellar” customer service.

A few months ago I had a appliance repair person come to the house. He was great: fixed what needed to be fixed, and charged a fair price. He does NO advertising. His business, which is doing well, is strictly word of mouth.

Can you imagine Comcast or Verizon having no advertising? On

the other hand, you have few options when it comes to Internet, cable and phone providers. You will have to persuaded over and over and over.

I am suspicious about any company that feels the need to advertise ALL the time. It seems to me that high repetition and frequency, which are expensive to maintain, are the only way they will retain any top-of-mind share.

What do you think?



How to become irrelevant

How many blogs have you stopped reading? How many products have you stopped buying? How many ads do you ignore?

If you answered just one to any of these questions, the reason is because whatever the blog/ad/product/service has become irrelevant.

Some irrelevancy is by attrition—meaning that you will stop buying a product because you no longer need it (like baby diapers when your child is potty trained). Other irrelevancy is because you just don't care anymore or the information does not ring true.

How do you become irrelevant?

If you are a blogger:

- You write about things that people don't care about or are not interested in.
- You write about the same things over and over.

- You write about you, you and more about you.
- You never update your blog.

If you are an advertisement:

- You advertise the same offer, over and over
- You advertise an offer with tons of small print
- You advertise things that are just not true (we beat any price, for instance).
- What you advertise does not match reality.

If you are a product:

- You don't work as promised.
- You don't fill a need.
- You are not well priced.

If you are a website:

- You have outdated information.
- You look like you were designed in 1999.
- Your visitors can't find the information they need to make a purchase/visit your location/etc.

Basically, you become irrelevant when you forget what your audience needs or wants.

What makes you tune out marketing? Let me know what makes blogs/ads/websites/brochures irrelevant.

Logistics?

Have you seen the new UPS commercials? It's about logistics. There are several different iterations, but they all talk about how important logistics are, and of course, UPS is all about logistics. Really? I thought UPS was about shipping.

But I guess I am supposed to now think of shipping as just the visible part of the complex web that is logistics.

[youtube id=mRAHa_Po0Kg&fs=1&hl=en_US]

What's good:

Song is memorable. Logistics is a new USP for UPS. It has definitely caught my attention.

What's bad:

Logistics? Really? Is that why I would ship with UPS over Fedex?

Your thoughts?

Want to improve your marketing? Start with your customer service.

The best, most award-winning ad in the world won't sway an unhappy customer's mind. Keep that in mind as you tinker with your marketing and you don't check in with your customer service.

If you live in Washington, DC or Maryland, you probably have PEPCO as your electric company. And if you were around this past summer or during the massive blizzards of February, you probably lost your power. You tried calling PEPCO only to get bad information or no information at all. Then you found out that PEPCO is rated very poorly among all electric utility companies in the United States. You probably weren't

surprised.

Fast forward to the Fall of 2010. PEPCO is busy running a TV commercial featuring the company president assuring the viewers that PEPCO is responding to customer concerns. But, is it true?

Yesterday, I had to call PEPCO. I was on hold for 21 minutes. And there was no emergency. Can you imagine what hold times will be when there are outages?

This is a case where PEPCO is investing money in its marketing without investing money in customer service. This is a major mistake. Customers don't care if you are running a great ad campaign, have well written brochures and a redesigned website, if they cannot get through to an agent to resolve their problems.

Customers will judge a company on its service, not on its marketing. Marketing may get customers through the door, but it will not retain them or make them think positively about your company or organization (this applies to nonprofits as well).

Before you spend any money on a marketing campaign, make sure that you have budgeted for customer service.

Ads are powerful; differentiation is important

This morning's Washington Post is full of interesting media/marketing news. First is the announcement that the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) has enacted tough new rules

on cigarette/tobacco advertising as part of the agency's new authority to regulate the industry.

According the Post, tobacco companies will be banned from sponsoring sports and entertainment events and from offering free samples, among other restrictions. The FDA also tried to limit advertising to text only (banning color and graphics) but a judge has ruled in favor of the tobacco companies, which the FDA is appealing.

Tobacco advertising and the federal response to it has always been fascinating. Tobacco is a legal product, sold and taxed in stores like any other product, but when used as directed, causes wide-ranging health problems (cancer, heart disease) not only to smokers but those exposed to smoke. The Feds have tried to curb the appeal of smoking by restricting advertising and putting warnings on cigarette packs. This has always raised the question of first amendment rights—after all, the companies that manufacture cigarettes are trying to sell a legal product. But the government is concerned that increased sales of tobacco mean increased health risks.

The point here is that advertising and marketing efforts, when done right, are powerful. They can steer consumer behavior. Personally, I abhor smoking and I applaud the FDA for stepping up regulation of tobacco marketing. To me, marketing tobacco is marketing death, yet the issue of free speech remains. The real issue may well be why we allow companies continue to produce and market a product that kills.

Another piece of news that is fascinating is that Christiane Amanpour, the famed CNN war reporter, will move over to ABC, to host This Week. If ever there was a least likely candidate for this position it was Amanpour, who is more comfortable confronting dictators and dodging bullets in war-torn areas. I think David Brinkley would turn over in his grave! Will the round table with George Will, Cokie Roberts and the rest continue? I doubt it. And I doubt that with Amanpour at the

helm, This Week will be able to compete with Meet the Press on domestic political coverage. **But that seems to be the point—hiring Amanpour is meant to change This Week into a program with a more international focus. And differentiate it will, but will that also result in increased viewership? That is the question.**



Super sexist

I watched part of the Super Bowl last night, but really wasn't interested in the game. I wanted to report on the commercials—those famous, expensive spots that seem to make advertising history each year. But, I just didn't have the patience to sit there and watch them. And you know what? The ones I did see offended me. Apparently, advertising agencies have been taught to believe that:

- 1) Only men watch football
- 2) Aforementioned men prefer to drink Bud Light while trying to fulfill every male stereotype out there
- 3) Sexism sells

The absolute worst from the sexist standpoint was the Dodge Charger commercial, where a man is emasculated by having to do everything his wife nags him to do, and makes up for it by taking a ride in this ridiculous car. Close behind is the always offensive GoDaddy, a company that believes men will buy websites if scantily clad women appear in the ads.

My vote is that as marketers we stop paying heed to this one time event. We give these commercials too much power by endlessly commenting and analyzing them. The bottom line is that it is a one-time deal that proves certain companies have outmoded advertising ideas—thinking that by advertising during the big game they will get so many eyeballs they won't have to do much else.

Your thoughts?