

Everything Must Go!

As I was driving up Wisconsin Avenue, fairly congested and busy road here in Bethesda, I saw those yellow signs plastered in the windows of two stores: Store Closing! Going Out of Business! Everything Must Go! It got me thinking about what message that sends us. On the one hand, the bargain hunter in us always goes into alert mode when we see those blaring signs. Perhaps we can get a great deal. And that is the main reason those signs go up, and are so prominent. But, if we are not shopping say, for Oriental rugs, then what do we think when we see those signs? I, for one, see them as the tangible signs of the economic recession. And I think that it adds to the burdens of the troubling economic news we see every day. It adds to the perception that business is buckling completely under the strain of the economic downturn. It also makes you feel it is everywhere. Another bad sign (sorry for the inevitable play on words) is all the For Lease signs in now empty store windows. Restaurants and retailers are closing their doors and all the landlords can do is post signs. But if you see too many For Lease signs on one block or area, what do you think?

What do you think about this? Should businesses blare that they are closing?

Update: On Reuters I found a story on what a town in England is doing about empty shop windows: displaying art. I tried to [link here](#) but could not.

It's all in the details

Print ads need to work hard for you. They must grab your attention and then they must tell you something interesting. Lastly, they should motivate action. Generally speaking, this is the AIDA model (attention, interest, desire, action). It is not always easy to do all this within the constraints of a small space. If you are a small business, chances are you can't afford a full page, or even a half page. So you have to pack it in to small ads. The smaller the ad the more you have to think about what you write.

I came across an ad for a ballet studio in a local women's magazine. The headline says: "4 Week Introductory Sessions \$30." That left me thinking—does this mean four weeks for \$30? How many classes per week? Does the introductory session last four weeks? Already not clear.

The body copy goes like this:

Teen & Adult Classes

Jazz,Ballet, Pilates, Zumba, Musical Theater

Just for you!This wonderful program will ignite your passion for dance and exercise. Our extraordinary teachers will guide you every step of the way with a specialized curriculum in our lovely studios. Join us in class! (Telephone number and email address follow).

OK. What is missing here? LOCATION! From the phone, I know it is located in Maryland, but that could be anywhere in a 30-mile radius. No website either—I can figure it out from the email. Basically, missing key details.

What about the copy? Well, its like someone looked up adjectives and strung them all together in a sentence: wonderful, extraordinary, lovely, specialized. Those

meaningless (and overused) words take up valuable real estate. Also, the copy refers to a (single) program, yet they tell me they offer at least five different types of classes.

My conclusion is that this ad does not work. If you are a small business, and you are going to spend money on advertising, think about what you want to accomplish. Of course, a professional can help you with this, but using some common sense is always helpful.

UPDATE: I checked out the studio's website, and it turns out they have multiple locations. However, the website was not updated to reflect the aforementioned classes. If you are going to start running advertising, you better have information to back it up. Don't make potential customers work so hard to find out!!!!



DIY and other economic realities

In the midst of economic crisis, we don't flaunt wealth or advertise luxury goods. Instead, we emphasize savings and value. A few weeks ago, I wrote about banks emphasize how solid they are, and how some retailers like Walmart are running campaigns about saving. In fact, Walmart is currently running a commercial that talks about eating in as a saving strategy (and you can get all your ingredients at Walmart). And in today's *Washington Post* there is an article that says Americans are doing more things for themselves, things they used to pay someone else to do. Things like mowing the lawn, walking the dog, dying hair, and others. The Post reports on

one retailer that is using the trend in its advertising: Target, with its “brand new day” campaign. Target’s advertising has consistently been cutting-edge. In the ads, which you may have seen, against a catchy tune, Target shows you how several products it carries can be used to save money. It is clever and it is really responsive to the culture.

In general, advertisers are most definitely acknowledging the new economic realities. More and more I see the word “save” or “savings” in ads, across the board. Big Lots is running an ad showing a couple who bought a dining set for a lot less than it would have cost elsewhere. So basically the theme is you can save money but please buy from us. I wonder what advertising was like during the Great Depression. It must have been similar, putting emphasis on value and savings. If anyone has any examples, please share in the comments.



Energy (ad) wars

UPDATED INFORMATION

Ever since the steep rise in gasoline costs last summer, we’ve seen a steep rise in image/issue advertising from energy providers. What is interesting is that it continues, even months later. The big ones here are traditional oil companies like Chevron and Exxon/Mobil, the coal and natural gas industries and nuclear energy. Steadily, these three are competing for attention, one has to wonder from whom and to what end. And of course, before I forget, there is T.Boone Pickens, the millionaire, who is self-paying for ads pushing wind and natural gas energy as a way to “stop our dependence on foreign oil.” Pickens is part of Clean Energy, an outfit

promoting natural gas.

Chevron is running a campaign that is centered around the tag line "human energy." It is designed to make gasoline look environmentally friendly (in fact, that is exactly what all three types of energy want you to think—that they are the most eco-friendly). There are two types of commercial—one saying Chevron is a company concerned about the human race, and the future and another about conserving energy—for instance unplugging more. I am not certain who the target audience is for the campaign, nor am I certain the campaign works.

Meanwhile, the Nuclear Energy Institute (I think) is running a commercial with the tagline "nuclear-clean air energy." In searching for info about the ad, I came across AREVA (a nuclear company) that was running an ad campaign with the tagline "pure energy." You see the theme here?

And finally, there is the omnipresent commercial ~~for the clean coal oil and natural gas industry.~~ You've seen it—a woman in a black pant suit is walking around talking about how we can tap our own ~~(clean)~~ energy resources at home. This commercial has been running fairly steadily since before the election last year, ~~and still, I can't find a link to it. (If you can, will you send it to me or post in the comments?).~~ Of course, ~~clean coal has come under fire, because apparently, there is no such thing.~~ I saw the commercial again last night and saw that it is for the Oil and Natural Gas Industry. The concept really is not about eco-friendliness but rather using American resources (you know, drilling more at home). It is quite anachronistic in a way because it has no mention or acknowledgment of the impact of the energy industry on the environment.

In the end, ~~all~~ some of these energy sources are trying to prove to us that they are the most ecological/green alternative. The gas/oil industry is the one running the most scared. After the rise in fuel prices last summer, people made changes in their energy usage, and are now demanding fuel

alternatives. So, gas has to position itself as somehow clean and friendly.

Do you find any of these commercials compelling or convincing?

Not so super if you ask me

Last night, I suffered through a football game in which the team I was rooting for lost. I was in it for the ads in any case, and that also was a bit underwhelming. As I had predicted, there were lots of ads for movies (about 10 by my count), some of them not opening until late summer. The beer ads were as always for Budweiser, Bud Light, and Bud Lime, plus one for Heineken (again, that I saw). There were ads from CareerBuilder.com and Monster.com and Avon touting the time to change your career. Other advertisers included:

In the automotive category: Hyundai, Toyota, Audi, cars.com, carmax.com, Bridgestone tires, Castrol Oil

Beverages (non-alcoholic) : Pepsi, Coke , SoBe Lifewater, Super G (I think this was Gatorade)

Food: Taco Bell, McDonalds, Cheetos, Doritos

Products and Services: Etrade, GoDaddy.com, H&R Block, Teleflora, GE, Cash4Gold.com, Overstock.com, Kellogs Frosted Flakes, Pedigree adopt-a-dog campaign.

Overall, some of the best (and more memorable) ads came from the usual suspects, Pepsi and Coke. Pepsi seemed to have taken over the Obama logo and used Bob Dylan and Will.I.Am. Coke went the animation route (this is after all the company that brought us cola drinking polar bears). Budweiser had two memorable commercials-one in which business people are having

a budget meeting while drinking Bud Light (what?) and one of the recommends, albeit jokingly that they cut out the Bud to save money and gets booted out the window. The other featured the Clydesdale horses recounting their epic immigration to the United States. Bridgestone used Mr. Potato Head. SoBe used ballet-dancing football players.

My least favorite ads by far were for GoDaddy.com. Not only were they juvenile but they were also sexist. I am not sure what their target audience is for their services, but unless they are only trying to appeal to teenage boys and immature men, they missed the mark. I also did not like the CareerBuilder.com commercial. There was something so patronizing about it. Just like last year, I didn't get the Doritos ads. And Cheetos ads were funny, but disturbing: women who eat snack foods can tap in to their inner witch.

I think when the tallies come out, this year was not the year for Super Bowl ad spending. Many of the ads (and some of the funniest, actually⁰ were for NBC and their shows. I especially liked the one dealing with the LMAO. That was funny.

If you missed the game, but want to see the ads, you can go to Hulu.com.

Super Thoughts

First off, go Cardinals! Super Bowl 43 is on.

From what I have seen so far, here are a few predictions (about the ads)

Movies will be big—they have already shown a trailer for a movie opening in August. Movies do well in recessions.

Saving/Smart/Value/Solid—all touchwords for tonight

Enjoyment will be a theme

Another theme: Get ahead if you can, in spite of the economy (Careers.com, Monster.com and Avon will carry this message)

We are a scrappy people (continuation of above).

We'll see lots of commercials for beer. (No duh)

Too sexy for TV

No, this isn't about about Paris Hilton's Carl Jr.'s commercial or about Janet Jackson having a "wardrobe malfunction." Instead, it is about PETA's new commercial promoting vegetarianism, because, get this, it leads to better sex. NBC has effectively denied the commercial the right to appear during the high-stakes Super Bowl. I found out about it on CNN's Headline News, which gave the commercial lots of free publicity, and maybe, that was the whole point.

I am not sure where to start on this one. First of all, NBC's shows are full of sexual innuendo and actual sex talk, so I am not sure where NBC thinks it is drawing the line. But then, there is the commercial itself, which shows women flouncing around in skimpy underwear holding (and caressing) vegetables. I get it. The Super Bowl is seen by a bunch of men who love to see attractive women in various states of undress. GoDaddy certainly ran a fairly racy commercial showing some nearly-naked woman. But then, I don't get how showing women as sexual objects furthers PETAs cause. I am not sure that beer-drinking, nacho-devouring men watching the Super Bowl are suddenly going to give up the tailgate burgers and steaks

because being veggie is sexy.

I am not sure which irritates me most: NBC's false sense of "morality," especially in light of its programming, or PETA's decision to use sex, and sexist visions of women to sell their message.

See the commercial and commentary [here](#).

Thoughts?

Too much information

You know how you recoil when someone starts telling you much more than you want to know about his or her personal life? We call it TMI, and there's a good reason for it. We don't need to know EVERYTHING. We understand that some things just are better kept private. Well, apparently the folks at Pfizer in charge of marketing Celebrex do not believe in TMI. Currently, Pfizer is running a really long (at least 1 minute) commercial for Celebrex, airing on the ABC World News with Charles Gibson. It goes into way too much detail about the RISKS of Celebrex, and other NSAIDS. You may recall that NSAIDS have been linked to heart problems. This is not the first time that Celebrex goes this route. Last year, they ran a two and a half minute commercial, in the same, graphic style (no actors, just voice over).

The problem for me is that the message is lost. In fact, I am not sure what the message is meant to be. Is it to recap the various risks of NSAIDS? Is it to say Celebrex is just as risky as other NSAIDS? The commercial mention benefits, but I didn't see those communicated clearly. That is why I think this commercial is faulty...it doesn't make me want to consider

Celebrex (not that I need it, but that is another issue). As a marketing professional, it makes me question Celebrex's savvy.

Judge for yourself. Here's a link to the commercial on the Celebrex website: <http://tinyurl.com/26cqok>

Shelter magazines

I have never been a huge fan of shelter magazines, mostly because they make me feel very inadequate in both the decorating and housing areas. However, they are usually at least inspirational...some day, maybe, I will have the taste and the money to decorate my house with shabby chic or whatever. However, I may lose inspiration (and jealousy) because many shelter magazines have ceased publication, including *Home and Garden*, *Oprah at Home*, *Martha Stewart Blueprint* and others. The article in today's *Washington Post* blames low ad revenue and not declining circulation. So folks, we have our answer to the print question. It is all about advertising. Advertisers are cutting back on their print advertising budgets, and thus, magazines are dying. What this may lead to is a rise in advertising costs as fewer magazines are left to provide ad pages. Demand vs. supply. And then, fewer advertisers will want to advertise.

Trying too hard?

Inside today's *Washington Post* not only was there a special "commemorative" inauguration insert, but another insert that is titled "Progress" and has today's date on the bottom. You could be forgiven for thinking it is yet another adulatory piece about Barack Obama, due to the progressive, historic nature of his inauguration today. However, you would be wrong. It is about Audi, the car company. This insert tries to define progress for me—for instance, "Grown men spraying giant bottles of champagne," and "leaving behind yesterday's idea of luxury." These inane headlines are being equated to "progress is a woman dominating a man's sport," and most egregiously, to the idea that our country is finally embracing a person of color as president. Audi wants you to believe that the company is just as progressive as the United States. What exactly makes Audi progressive? That of course, is not answered.

I have seen lots of advertising that takes advantage of momentous events. Many companies advertise during special events in what is generally image advertising or brand-building. And I get that Audi is engaging in the same. However, I wonder what the strategy is. The insert, even though it is on newsprint and not glossy, is expensive. Audi is also running the same campaign online. So is the idea that people will buy today's newspaper as a keepsake so they will also read the Audi ad? Is the idea to equate Audi with Barack Obama? In my opinion, this will fall flat. Like I said before, I don't find evidence in the insert of Audi's "progressive" nature. Also, people who buy the paper today will be totally focused on two things: information about the nuts and bolts of the inaugural and info on Obama. An extra supplement that is irrelevant will get thrown out.

Did you see this insert/campaign? If so, what did you think of it? Please leave comments.

UPDATE: Also, Audi sponsored Inauguration night's NBC and ABC newscasts, so that they could be presented with limited commercial interruption. That's a lot of marketing dollars....and again, is it worth it?