

On knowing your target audience

Knowing your target audience is the primary task of any marketer. How can you craft your message if you don't know who you are speaking to? How can you make sure your potential clients buy your product if you don't where they live, what they like and the other elements that make up your demographic profile? Often, ads don't work because they don't target the right audience. Or, they target the right audience but don't communicate properly. So this brings me to Sarah Palin and Joe Biden during the debate last night. It was very clear that each of them knew who their target audience was and used the proper language to communicate with it. Palin used her folksiness to establish connection with "Joe Six Pack and Hockey Moms" around the US. She used terms like doggone it and gosh darn it to make the point that she is an average person from Main Street Wasilla. Biden spoke in a more formal fashion, to communicate with an intellectual audience and to those seeking a traditional politician. He threw in references to Scranton and Home Depot to assure "Main Street" that he's also in touch with them. In the end, I think both politicians understand who they need to communicate to and did so well. I think if you are a liberal Democrat with environmental leanings, Sarah Palin rubbed you the wrong way. But then again, you are not her target. She knows she can't connect with you. On the other hand, if you are someone who feels politicians are out to get you with their misguided policies, then you loved that Palin spoke to you.

If there is a problem with appealing solely to your target audience during a presidential campaign is that you don't motivate the other side to vote for you. This debate proved that—neither side did much to convince the other to switch allegiances.

What kind of political ad works best?

We've seen lots of mud-slinging via commercial during this year's presidential election. Negative ads work to some extent or they wouldn't be used. However, this morning, I saw Barack Obama's newest commercial. It is all about his economic plan, and he is on camera and talking for all of it. I think it was effective—he laid out his principles and what he wants to do for the American people, and of course, he dealt with the hottest topic du jour, the economy. It made him look serious and proactive. Let's see what McCain responds with. In a way, I think Obama is trying to look presidential to counteract McCain's grandstanding of these past two days.

Undermining character

Warning—this is a political commentary.

We are in full swing into the political campaign season and for sure we will be seeing many ads tagged as “I am (fill in candidate's name) and I approved this message.” In the past few days I have seen many anti- Obama ads approved by John McCain. About a month or so ago, McCain said he would steer clear of personal attacks and talk about the issues. So now, he is attacking Obama personally. There is a story on Yahoo about this. The question is whether this tactic will backfire. To me the question is why McCain has chosen this route. We will probably always see attack/negative ads during political

campaigns. But to me, it is a mark of desperation. McCain's campaign knows that Obama has more personal appeal than McCain, and they also know that people are not always convinced by the issues but more by personality. McCain's attack on Obama highlights what I have been noting about the Republican candidate—he's a bit rough around the edges.

For those who are 100% in McCain's camp and/or are Obama haters, these ads will serve to bolster their position. They will feel even better that Obama is whatever adjective they want to use. However, for those that are undecided, this tactic is so old-fashioned that I do think it will backfire. It doesn't give anyone reasons to think McCain will have better policies.