

Propaganda

Last night, I was fortunate to visit a magnificent exhibition at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, entitled State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda.

As the curator explained, propaganda is inherently linked with advertising and public relations. In the beginning of modern advertising and PR, propaganda people were running the show. Edward Bernays, the “father of modern PR” was a propagandist. But propaganda is not inherently negative. Propaganda is simply the propagation of an idea, using various means.

Unfortunately, as with Hitler and the Nazis, propaganda has been used to propagate evil and incite violence and murder. It is a testament to the power of propaganda that the Holocaust was as widespread and supported as it was.

The Nazis understood the power of mass media, and they understood the power of symbolism and word choice. They understood that you had to dehumanize your enemy. They used words that had emotional appeal to the Germans of the day, like “freedom.”

The Nazis made radios cheaper and widely available, and then proceeded to use radio as a way to send out their propaganda within music shows. It became illegal in Nazi Germany to listen to foreign radio broadcasts, punishable by long imprisonment. So the way propaganda worked within Nazi Germany was to use all media possible and by the suppression of all opposing viewpoints.

In any case, the lesson to learn is that words are powerful. We that work in the promotion business, be it advertising, PR or marketing have the power to persuade and that is not something to be taken lightly.

Random thoughts

Radio Commercials

Does it seem to you that every time you are listening to the radio, and a commercial break comes on, you get commercials on all other stations as well? Does it also seem to you that commercial breaks/DJ gab fests on radio go on for way too long?

It's great that there is still so much advertising on radio, but I think that by making the commercial breaks so long radio stations risk losing their listeners. If I am listening to station, and a long commercial break comes on, I switch stations until I find one that is playing music. If these breaks were shorter, there would be less risk of alienation, IMO.

Different name, same location

Why is it that store owners think that by changing the name of a store they will get tons of new business? I was just walking home and saw that a day spa/salon just changed their name (and to something a lot more utilitarian). I thought, well, the problem was not the name of the salon, it is the location! Hard to get to, off the beaten path, etc. I don't know if the salon was sold to another owner, but in any case, when I see too many names on the same store front I tend to think problems.

As if we thought Iran was democratic

I am not sure why Iran bothered to hold elections. Why pretend they are a democracy? Let me point out that the actual leader of Iran is not the president but the Ayatollah, the so-called

Supreme Leader. Anytime you have someone ruling a country who is not elected and calls himself the Supreme Leader you are not dealing with a democracy. The problem is that the west wanted to believe that elections=democracy. They do not. It is not good marketing for Iran to hold elections and then repress the protests when it appears the election is a sham. Talk about a public relations fiasco!

Are we losing radio too?

Advertising dollars

It doesn't make it into the news too often, but radio is hurting from the same causes as the newspaper industry is: advertising losses. In radio's case, it has a lot to do with Ipod and MP3 players. But it has a lot to do with the recession too.

Format change! That's the solution!

I was just reading this *Washington Post* article about a classic rock station here in Washington that is (AGAIN) changing formats to adult/pop contemporary. The station's owners seem to think this will attract a younger, female audience. It might, if it weren't for the fact that nearly every other radio station in the market plays Pop and AC. It seems inane/insane to switch formats in this economy. The article says that they station had good numbers, yet it was not enough.

You can't (and shouldn't) please everybody

It seems to me this has something to do with what brought Wall Street down: GREED. The idea that you have to have the most,

and by a large margin, to be the absolute leader. It does not serve the listener, and it certainly will not accomplish it in the end. People become fiercely loyal to a radio station and its DJs. Whenever there is a format change there will be upheaval and resentment. And frankly, in this market, this particular change causes a homogenization that is truly unbearable.

What about segmentation and target audiences?

When all radio stations play the same music, you can assume they all have the same audience, right? So, if you are trying to reach older people, where are you supposed to advertise in Washington? My point is that a variety of formats allows media buyers to reach different target audiences. Not everybody is seeking for women, 18 plus. Some may want adults, 40 plus or another segment. In a sense, format changes affect the entire market.

Losing sight of what you are

It seems to me that when you aim for the mass, you actually end up losing what makes you special. This particular radio station has gone through several format changes and I predict will either change again or go off the air. In the era of the Ipod/MP3 player and declining revenue, the solution is to offer something that can NOT be found elsewhere. That is how you find an audience, and more importantly, how you build a LOYAL following.

