

Direct mail or junk mail?

Direct mail is an industry on to itself, with an association (Direct Marketing Association) and a whole class of direct marketing specialists. The idea is that direct mail is the ultimate targeted medium. It is also ultimately invasive. Who does not get letters and catalogs overflowing the mailbox? Of course, some of this direct mail comes from organizations (usually nonprofits) to which you have contributed or otherwise been involved with. Some catalogs come from stores you have shopped in. Although not solicited, these items seem to be less junk than other junk. What is junk, in my mind, are the thousands of unsolicited credit card applications and circulars that we get. Those aren't targeted at all. Especially not the circulars (although I am sure there is a circular manager out there that will argue they are targeted by zip code and all that). But as a writer, there is a difference between convincing an existing or former donor to consider giving again to a charity and a mass mailing for window blinds or steam cleaning services. For the latter, direct mail is just another form of advertising. It is basically the same as their electronic or print advertising, and may even be part of a package (newspapers often sell this as an added value...advertise in the newspaper and we will add you to our weekly circular to zip codes you choose, etc.)

The trouble is many people just toss out all direct mail, especially circulars. Thus the garbage can is really the targeted audience. Also, the amount of paper these mailings generate has become the target of many environmentalists out there. Yet the mailings keep coming. I was just in Australia where many mailboxes carry the sign "no junk mail." Unfortunately, we don't have this here in America. And, from what I understand, the mail carrier is required by law to deliver the circulars and other mail to your box.

It would be better for both the direct mailer and the direct

mailee if there were choice involved. If I choose to receive a mailing, I may pay attention to that mailing. If all I do with unsolicited mail is throw it out, the message is not being heard and there is actual harm being done to the environment.

Super Bowl

Today, the Super Bowl is played. New England Patriots vs. Giants, in case you have been out of the country in the last week or so. For advertising and communications people who wouldn't otherwise watch football, this is a must-see game. For the advertising. It costs a lot. Because lots of people will be watching. Some advertisers only run advertising on the Super Bowl. That is their strategy: spend millions once a year to get a large, captive (and hopefully, receptive) audience. It has become sport to talk about the ads, dissect them, analyze them, discuss them. In this respect, they win. In fact, on CBS Sunday Morning, they just had a story about Super Bowl advertising, in fact, giving some free advertising to one of the advertisers. And there is the real value of advertising on the Super Bowl—extra publicity in the form of media attention. Traditionally, this is called public relations and some people call it free advertising. But in fact, this is not free advertising...it is expensive advertising. You get the public relations bang because you spent lots of money. Not because you are newsworthy prima facie.

One other interesting aspect that the CBS story pointed out is that most of the Super Bowl ads will send you to an Internet address. It makes it interactive.

Entertainment Weekly has a gallery of the most “memorable” Super Bowl ads [here](#)

<http://www.ew.com/ew/gallery/0,,20010598,00.html>

The interesting thing is I only remember one or two of these. What does this tell you?

I will probably watch part of the game...and I will watch the ads of course. It's for work.

Headline here

How important are headlines? In news, they are super important, especially to people like me who scan rather than read the newspaper. A headline tells you the bare essence of the story, and it either catches your attention or it doesn't. It is much the same in public relations except PR folk get a chance to have a really long headline and perhaps even add a subheadline or two. You sometimes get extra points for clever.

In advertising...well...I am not sure. Design, graphics, placement and offer make up 99% of an ad. Strong creative headlines can cause interest. But simple headlines, like "We are having a sale" can communicate easily and effectively without trying too hard to be clever. That said, I love headlines that are a play on words or use words elegantly.

One of my favorite types of ads are the ones where the headline tells you one thing, and the graphics tell a different story. Currently here in Washington there is an ad you can see on the Metro for Washington Sports Club. The headline says: "This January, help is on the way." The graphic shows an overweight man, sitting on a couch, watching tv and drinking a soda, while walking his dog on a treadmill. Funny as hell. And makes you look at it and just shake your head. Love it!

Any favorite headlines or ads?

PS—Here's a look at the graphic from the ad I quote above:
<http://www.mysportsclubs.com/regions/WSC.htm>

MLK Day

Since today is Martin Luther King, Jr. day (which, as an aside, should be celebrated by ALL businesses—it often isn't), I got to thinking about tie-ins to holidays. This type of advertising is big in print, specifically newspapers. You know, using the upcoming holiday either for a sale (as in "Our biggest President's Day Sale ever) or riffing on the holiday ("Do it for your valentine"). Many companies take the time to remind you that they are open (if they are retail) or closed (if they are banks) on the holiday.

In public relations, practitioners sometimes find obscure days (Spaghetti Lovers' Day) to give a spin to their press releases. In fact, Chase's Calendar of Events is a book dedicated to listing all the events, holidays and special days for the upcoming year and is usually found in any public relations or event management firm's bookshelf (or CD shelf). Of course, events always have a theme (St. Patrick's Day Bar Hop, Fourth of July Barbeque, New Year's Eve Gala, etc.)

Do these endless holiday tie-ins dilute the message or the holiday itself? In some cases, the answer is a definite yes. I bet most people don't know which presidents are being celebrated on President's day (Washington and Lincoln) but do know that EVERYTHING is on sale at the mall! In a way, we are doing a huge disservice to our civic celebrations and commemorations when we use them to promote sales. Is MLK day a day to go shopping or is it a day to think about how short the

history of full civil rights in the U.S. really is?

The 4 Ps

In marketing communications, we focus on just one of the four ps – promotion. However, as a marketer, you must consider the other three ps—price, product and placement. Often, we concentrate on having the best promotional materials but not the item or service we are promoting. For instance, a beautiful ad might draw attention to your lovely widget, but if your widget is too expensive or is not available, then there will be no sale. Because the truth is, at the end of the day, we are all trying to make a sale. Associations are looking for members. Stores are looking to move merchandise. Even ideas are “sold.” We call that persuasion.

MarComm people don't or can't control the other three ps. But I think it is part of our job as advisers to make sure our clients understand that promotion alone does not make the sale. And it is also our responsibility to understand what the product, service or idea is.