

# It's a new year!

After a nice year-end 2008 vacation, I am back. I'd like to wish you all a happy, productive 2009. New posts will be coming shortly!

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## Macy's pulls out all the stops

Macy's is probably one of the nation's largest retail advertiser. During the year, it probably runs a few full page ads a week in all major newspapers. With Christmas, a make-or-break time, coming up, Macy's seems to have pulled out all the marketing stops. At least in the Washington Post, it has been running several junior or full page ads EVERY day. It has had a sale or coupons or both for practically every day of the week. And today, there is an ad that says that Macy's stores will be open 24 hours a day from Saturday until Christmas Eve.

To me, this seems almost desperate. What is the ROI on this media expenditure? Of course, media prices go down with frequency, and Macy's must be on the highest frequency tier. I will be interested in seeing retail figures for December when they come out.

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# Reality versus reporting

Something very interesting happened this Black Friday...it went well for retailers. But it wasn't expected to. The news media kept reporting that sales were expected to be lower, with fewer people shopping and shopping for fewer items. In fact, they reported this while they reported that people were camping out for sales and even that people trampled to death a security guard in their rush to enter a New York Walmart store. The final numbers are not in yet, but apparently, sales were better than expected and may even have been higher than last year.

This is interesting because a narrative has been formed in the media: economy is bad and people are not shopping, not matter what. Economy is bad, and people are not traveling not matter what. And yet, planes and roads are full and there is no parking to be had at local malls. Even my local bookstore was packed on Black Friday, even though they had no special sales. In short, there seems to be a disconnect between what is being reported (or what reporters think) and what is actually happening. Often, what is reported is not real but BECOMES real. In this case, it seems to be the opposite. I wonder if the panicked reporting about the dire state of the economy is partially a desire to create a black and white narrative or a true appraisal of reality. What do you think?

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## Publicizing your image

Nothing makes a celebrity like publicity. In fact, without publicity, there would be no celebrities. Yet, we often hear of scuffles between celebrities and the paparazzi or stars

taking tabloids to court. Of course there is a not so fine line between publicizing and slandering, and anybody should be careful of crossing that line. Some celebrities are known for being private (quite an oxymoron) and some for being rabble-rousers (Lindsay Lohan anyone?). In both cases, this is part of their carefully crafted public persona. They attempt to control the media's portrayal of them, to suit their purposes.

In today's New York Times, there is an interesting article about Angelina Jolie and her masterful control of the media. Apparently, part of the negotiation involved in giving her twins' pictures to People Magazine included a clause for positive coverage. If this is true, and People denies it, it calls to question whether People can be considered a journalistic endeavour or simply a celebrity publicity outlet. Chances are, it's a bit of both. In any case, People would not exist without celebrities to cover and celebrities would not be celebrities if they were not covered. So, in a sense, People can't afford to alienate celebrities.

I am not sure what I think of Jolie's "carefully crafted" persona. In a sense, what she has done is rehabilitate her image through the use of new imagery (adoptive children from underdeveloped countries, nomadic lifestyle, Brad Pitt). Prior to that, she was a tattooed, blood vial wearing wife of Billy Bob Thornton. In any case, Jolie is a case in point, in that what the media show about you, is what people perceive you as. A lesson that is good for all organizations concerned about image.

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# Where there is chaos there is opportunity

I was just watching television and I saw a response to the credit crisis. It is something called Purchasing Power. Apparently, it is a payroll deduction system for paying for stuff you can't afford. So instead of paying a credit card issuer, you have your pay docked each pay period until you pay off your debt. This approach is as old as the hills, but it hasn't been in the public eye before or in this format. This is the perfect time for this company to advertise its services. Americans will continue to want things they cannot afford, so there is an opportunity to step in where credit cards are stepping out.

The commercial for this company was somewhat low-tech. And I don't want to give the company additional publicity by linking to their website, but it struck me that when marketing yourself, you need to find the opportunities, even in spite or maybe due to an economic downturn.

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## Sometimes clever works

And sometimes clever is too clever. But. There are times when that clever wordplay is just right. For instance, MetLife. For the **if** in life. You see, **if** is right there in the middle of the word **life**. And what does MetLife do? It sells insurance, and you get insurance for the what ifs in life. Rarely does something like this work so well. So kudos to MetLife. I love that wordplay. On the other hand, their campaign also centers around Snoopy. Why? Who knows. The big plus is that it is

recognizable.

Can you think of other really clever ads? I will try to keep a list.

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## Ways of seeing

In the end, as consumers (of products and of media), we see things the way we want to see them. If anything has become clear with this presidential campaign, is that voters (consumers) see what they want to see, and so does the media. There is no such thing as lack of bias. Everyone knows Fox News hangs to the right, and in their eyes, McCain won the debate last night. CNN is considerably more liberal, although they throw in two Republican strategists to their panel for a mix, and they say Obama won. My personal view is that neither candidate did well and that the town hall format was a mess.

It continues to shock me just how different people see the same thing differently. Where some people see patriotism (Sarah Palin speaking about America) other people see racism (her saying that Obama is un-American). If you do a search for Sarah Palin's racist remarks on Google, you will find an AP story about this, along with a great many blogs decrying this. I found a blog today that claims, erroneously, that Obama is a Muslim. And so the social media and the mainstream media can really serve to muddle the facts. Of course, we are seeing an upsurge in "fact checking" from organizations such as Factchecker.org. But where are those "facts" coming from? Which facts are we choosing to check?

I think that as consumers of media, we need to acknowledge what we are looking for and we need to question the motivation of media outlets. Remember too that media is paid for by

advertising dollars and ultimately, that makes the most difference. Remember a few years ago that when Ellen DeGeneres was on the sitcom Ellen and she came out, some groups threatened to boycott the advertisers that advertised on that show? It works the other way too...some advertisers won't advertise on one channel because of bias. And more importantly, some commentators will not interview somebody because they disagree. For instance, Campbell Brown of CNN had a spat with the McCain campaign that led to McCain canceling his appearance on Larry King Live.

Now more than ever we need to understand that what we see is not the whole story. As consumers, we need to find out what the story is and our best chance in the political season at least, is to read each candidate's position papers (via web or campaign) and to watch the debates and perhaps skip the "analysis." In the end we need to develop our own way of seeing. And the media needs to be more transparent about why they see what they see.

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## **On seizing opportunity and speaking diplomatically**

We are in the middle of rough times economically and politically in the United States. We have to deal with real economic worries, chiefly about the safety of our money within the banking system. So, now, what used to be a footnote on all bank ads, has become a selling opportunity: the FDIC logo. All banks want to reassure their customers that the FDIC backs their assets. Some banks have increased the size of FDIC logo and others such as Schwab are using it during commercials on TV. Schwab clearly created their newest campaign to reassure

its clients that their assets are safe. Another banking opportunity seems to be the CD. You may have noticed that more banks are advertising their CDs, with their “higher” APYs. Today’s Washington Post featured ads for both Commercial Bank and Wachovia CDs. Again, these are FDIC insured and promise “real” returns, unlike the volatile stock market.

A couple of days ago I saw Laura Bush being interviewed by CNN. This woman can teach everyone how to speak, convincingly and politely. She is a real pro! The interviewer asked if Mrs. Bush thought that Gov Palin had enough foreign policy experience. Mrs. Bush said no, she didn’t because it wasn’t her role. She also said she was excited to be able to vote for a woman on a Republican ticket. I can’t do Laura Bush justice by paraphrasing her, but I can assure you she answered the questions, not with obfuscation (as Sarah Palin does) but with tact and diplomacy. She knows how to communicate assuredness. She is calm and can stick to talking points without sounding like she is sticking to talking points. Overall, I think she is the best thing in the Republican party.

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## **Another guest post**

Here’s a link to another article I wrote for Habla Blog.

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## **Campaigning on a website and**

# a prayer

My friend Jennifer sent me a link to her friend's blog in which Barack Obama's website DESIGN is discussed. So thanks Jennifer and behold the power of social media. In any case, after reading Jin's blog entry (not sure of the name of the blog), I decided to visit both John McCain's and Obama's websites and see for myself. Mind you, **I am not comparing the candidates on issues**, though they both have a drop down menu of issues (Obama has more issues and goes more in-depth). I am just looking at what they have both done to appeal to voters.

I had visited both sites before and certainly McCain changed his-fonts and layout, to look less "militaristic" and more friendly, I think more like Obama's. See for yourself.

John McCain:

The pros:

- nice splashy home page
- you can "personalize" by home state or whether you are a supporter or not.
- a blog and a shop for "gear"

Barack Obama

The pros:

- Has a splash page collecting funds for Hurricane Gustav victims
- Clean upbeat design
- **A tab for Spanish (only problem is that it is not updated to include Biden)**
- Blogs and gear too
- You can create a "MyBO" page
- You can connect on almost all social media

I think both candidates realize the importance of the web, but



Obama's campaign has fine tuned more toward GenY and Social Media users. He has also included Spanish speaking voters. Both candidates make it easy to donate and to volunteer. As to contact information, McCain's site is more straightforward than Obama's and offers a telephone number.

**Which candidate's website do you think has a better design?**

- McCain
- Obama
- Can't decide
- Both

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