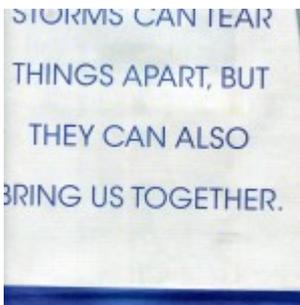


Dominion vs. Pepco: How ads reflect corporate culture

Last week, I wrote about an ad campaign Pepco is currently running (there have been at least two or three more of the same ad I mentioned) in the Washington Post. Today, I noticed a full page ad on the back page of Section A in the Post, by Dominion Power (which services parts of Virginia and which had a million or so customers without power).

Because of the size of Dominion's ad, here it is scanned in two parts:



Notice anything? Dominion ACKNOWLEDGES the problem, and focuses on their customers. There is no apology here either, but there is a more human touch to this ad than Pepco's. Both Pepco and Dominion say the same thing – the storm was devastating and the circumstances were challenging—but with different sentiment.

I believe that all marketing communications reflect a company's corporate culture. Some companies are more formal,

some are more humane and some are more playful or fun. Some companies—think law firms—are all about formality and adherence to strict protocols. These companies will usually have dress codes and rigid standards of conduct. Their advertising/communications will also be formal and rigid. Other companies—think entertainment—are more relaxed. Their advertising is generally more creative.

WTOP (news radio here in Washington) hosted an incredible session last week with eight utility executives. Each company had suffered power losses from the derecho storm. They all said similar things—the storm was unexpected, they weren't prepared, tree trimming would not have helped since whole trees came down and burying power lines is very expensive. What was different amongst them was the tone. Dominion's executive said almost the same thing Pepco's Tom Graham said, but he said it without the condescension. He acknowledged how hard it was for the customers—Graham was concerned with his talking point (“reliability”) and with making excuses.

You can see the difference in corporate culture in Pepco's advertising versus Dominion's. Dominion is more down to earth, whereas Pepco doesn't seem to understand that “customers” are people. Pepco is more formal, more wordy. Dominion was inclusive (“Storms can tear things apart, but they can also bring us together) while Pepco was divisive (We were tested and we responded). For Dominion, there's an attempt at solidarity with customers.

What do you think? Do you think these ads reflect different corporate cultures and priorities?