

A Millward Brown Lansdowne Focus on The key to Effective Advertising.

"I have discovered the most exciting, the most arduous literary form of all, the most difficult to master, the most pregnant in curious possibilities. I mean the advertisement. It is far easier to write ten passably effective sonnets, good enough to take in the not too inquiring critic, than one effective advertisement that will take in a few thousand of the uncritical buying public." Aldous Huxley

Given the maelstrom that is this current recession, advertising, along with most industries, has taken an unmerciful battering. With less money in the kitty of advertisers, their (not unreasonable) demand for a quantifiable return on their investment, and the proliferation of advertising media now on offer, the advertising industry is being squeezed on many fronts. So the key question to both those commissioning, and creating advertising is, how to maximise this return on investment.

So what makes a good TV ad? Research has shown that there are some key elements that increase the likelihood of an ad performing well, and meeting its key objectives- to introduce or reinforce the brand values and message.

Great advertising effectively communicates great brand positioning – in essence, it communicates the single minded values of the brand. **What sets great ads apart from less successful ads is that the brand itself and the brand message are integrated into the most enjoyable, involving and memorable parts of the ad.** As Gervaise Slowey, MD of Ogilvy and Mather points out, “One of the key roles of TV advertising is to create fame for the brand”.

This is not to say that new or minority brands cannot have effective advertising – more often than not, advertising for such brands adopts a more persuasive, rational manner, as opposed to providing the more emotional platform of building brand equity.

Emotional Attachment to advertising

Seemingly great advertising (no matter how good) cannot compensate if there is a fundamental problem with the brand. Would any advertising agency feel comfortable resuscitating the brand that was Ratners Jewellers following its founder, Gerald Ratner’s much “celebrated” (but regrettably for him, televised) observations about his “crap” products in the early 1990’s?

Where this is not the case, and the fundamentals of a brand are strong, **the challenge is to achieve clarity through consistency – this is what breeds success**. Many successful brands follow the same strategy, messaging and story for many years (although not always the same campaign). The key is to understand the core brand positioning which is then leveraged to focus on consumer interactions with the brand – think of Dove, Barry’s Tea or Guinness.

Understanding how our brains work is key – it’s an advertising jungle out there and our “mental workspace” - central to our ability to think, store and retrieve brand information - is limited. Therefore **personal relevance is paramount to getting into this mental workspace**. The brain prioritises information of relevance to current goals and broader priorities. Most brands are NOT immediately relevant when they are encountered in ads – the advertising idea has to resonate, and emotion and distinctiveness are significant cues for this engagement. As David Ogilvy once observed, you can’t bore people into buying your product.

The ability to engage with the viewer depends on several components – notably involvement, enjoyment, distinctiveness, relevance and personal impact. It is often felt that ads that successfully engage are the preserve of high spending, more “sexy” industry categories (think of advertising for the alcohol or car industries). This is not necessarily the case – cross dressing bearded “ladies” have done wonders for Bounty in the arguably mundane world of kitchen paper. And in years gone by, the animated Mr Sheen flying around a living room caused us to re evaluate our take on furniture polish.

An important trigger to capture the viewers’ attention is their involvement – they can react to ads in a combination of ways; do they see an ad as being passive (either in a positive or negative manner) or active/involving (again in a positive or negative manner).

Ads that are passive and positive are often *gentle, soothing or pleasant*, whilst those that are passive but negative are often deemed *boring, ordinary or weak*. Conversely for those ads that engage actively, they are seen to be *interesting, distinctive or involving* if positive, or *irritating, unpleasant or disturbing* if negative.

Whilst conventional wisdom suggests that all good ads should be associated with being active and positive, this is not always desirable. For example, an anti-smoking or road safety campaign may well be judged on its level of active negativity – their motivations are to change behaviour, and the effectiveness of this can be correlated to the level of shock they can elicit, so in this instance it is appropriate to be irritating, unpleasant or disturbing.

Likewise, more often than not, campaigns for the much maligned financial institutions focus more on passive positive attributes. These can be effective, but the passive nature of these ads needs to be supplemented with high enjoyment levels to really work. The confectionary category is also synonymous with such an approach – how many highly enjoyable ads have as their basic proviso the rather mundane act of chocolate breaking and/or being poured slowly?

Analysis shows that the types of ads considered enjoyable and involving/engaging tend to be described as exciting, intriguing, funny, sexy, surprising, thought provoking or clever.

The most enjoyable ads are also more likely to involve animals, nostalgia, children and well known music- they are less likely to be based around real person or manufacturer endorsements. High involvement ads often involve spoofs, animals, celebrities or prominent

music. For both enjoyment and involvement, music can be a key component. However, there is a risk that the underlying message of the ad can be “drowned out” by music – it should be used in conjunction with the message of the ad rather than becoming the message of the ad. Testimonials often lack high enjoyment, but can perform strongly in terms of their rational, persuasive message.

Branding is integral to any execution – creating the most involving or enjoyable copy is laudable, but unless there is linkage to the brand, then it is no more than entertainment. Memorable advertising needs to be enjoyable and involving, but above all, linked to the brand. Think of advertising for the car industry – often a huge amount of financial and creative investment is spent on advertising campaigns, and whilst consumers can both remember and appreciate these ads, often they have no idea who the manufacturer was. The bottom line should be effect, and not entertainment. To quote Gervaise Slowey again – “Some brand owners overlook the branding element and instead just focus on the enjoyment aspect”.

In essence, **it is important for an ad to leave traces in the memory, but these must be associated with the brand.** The key is to have the brand integrated within the ad’s storyline. Slowey feels that “if the high point of your ad is the part where the brand is integral, then you are on the money”. It is sometimes referred to as the creative magnifier effect. It is not accomplished by having a highly entertaining ad with the brand simply placed in an arbitrary fashion.

It can be useful to ask “How easy is it to tell the story of this ad without mentioning the brand?” If it is difficult, then the battle is half won. *Seamless integration is critical.* Our research of successfully branded ads has shown that brand linkage is not related to the time at which the brand appears in the ad, and likewise a higher frequency of the brand appearing in an ad does not guarantee strong branding.

Branding can be more easily achieved through brand cues or icons. However, they can be like gold dust and have to be earned. They allow the opportunity to “shorthand” branding into a creative vehicle or message. Think of the Nike swoosh, Coors Light’s Rocky Mountains or the Aero bubbles.

Consistency and support are needed to build cues over time. Such cues allow brands the platform to offer *fresh consistency*, as opposed to being *consistently fresh* (where there is a danger of mixed messages, and branding erosion). A good example of fresh consistency over time is the Guinness variation on the settling pint/the surge. It is a fine line to maintain however, as poor management of your brand cues can lead to a “matching luggage” effect, where one campaign merely blends into another, with any differentiating messages between them being lost.

The Rational Response

There can be a tendency to attempt to pack as many messages into an ad as possible. Research has demonstrated that **the more messages an ad attempts to communicate, the lower the likelihood of any single message actually being communicated.** Our analysis has found that after three messages within an ad, the cumulative number of messages taken out actually diminishes (and all the time you are diluting your main message). 83% of all information people receive is visual – getting the message across does not always mean having the “tell” consumers. Ads containing continuous spoken messages result in viewers actually paying less attention.

In terms of communicating the rational message (how persuasive or motivational the ad is), there are four elements that are influential –

New news – Is it a new angle on the brand, or new to the market (and is this right thing to do anyway)?

Relevance – Does it tap into what the consumer needs or wants?

Differentiation – Are you leading the way or just following others?

Credibility – This is not necessarily about deception, but rather does the ad “fit” with the brand’s heartland?

Previously persuasion was often measured on its ability as a direct call to action (to buy/re evaluate a product or service. David Sneddon, MD of Mindshare, believes the role of TV advertising is changing, and that effective advertising inspires a reaction so that the consumer discusses the brand. “The very best TV advertising now encourages people to talk about and ‘pass on’ the brand. It has a terrific multiplier effect. The most effective ads that those who do that”. In effect TV advertising could become more of a bridge to allow consumers move into the brand via digital media or social networking. He cites an effective example of this as Evian’s Roller Skating Babies – enjoyable and involving – and within the top ten viral ads ever. Gervaise Slowey feels that the advent of digital media is beneficial to TV advertising, as the media mix of advertising can be complimentary to each other, and they are not mutually exclusive.

In short, producing great advertising is far more an art than a science, but there are signposts as to how to achieve this. **Even the most rigorously constructed strategy is nothing without brand insight – which in turn depends on a flash of creative imagination to bring it to life.**

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