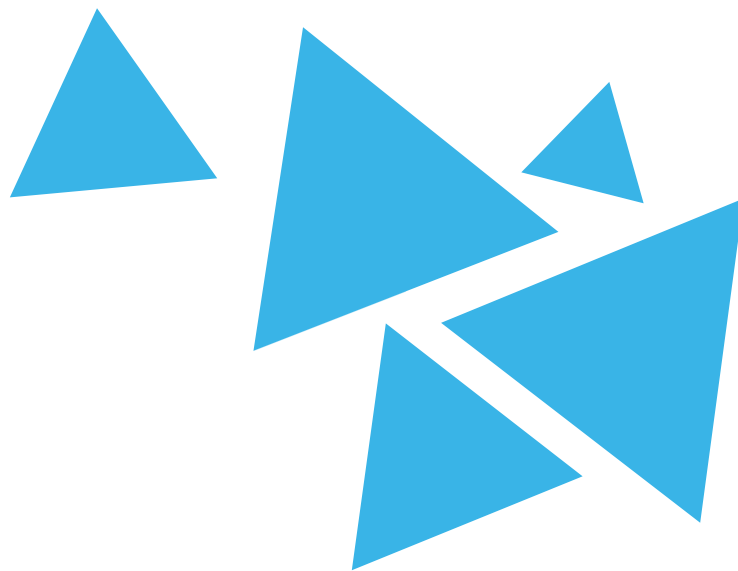


Pathways to Success: The Impact of Narrative Branding Campaigns



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The incorporation of a narrative in advertising campaigns sells products because consumers respond to engaging media. Companies like Apple and Google understand – and perhaps have always understood – the importance of incorporating a narrative into an advertisement campaign. In our current consumer culture, there are a multitude of products and advertisements available to the general public. Companies that create memorable campaigns for their products have successfully grasped the notion that the integration of a narrative generates interest. To establish successful customer-client relations, and to further strengthen current brand loyalty, many companies in past years have taken to integrating a narrative into their advertising campaigns for products and services. In order to keep up with the demanding nature of consumer culture, other companies must begin to incorporate this trend, or risk being left behind in the bustle of today’s fast-paced society.

Viral Marketing

“Hello, ladies, look at your man, now back to me, now back at your man, now back to me. Sadly, he isn’t me, but if he stopped using ladies scented body wash and switched to Old Spice, he could smell like he’s me. Look down, back up, where are you? You’re on a boat with the man your man could smell like. What’s in your hand, back at me. I have it, it’s an oyster with two tickets to that thing you love. Look again, the tickets are now diamonds. Anything is possible when your man smells like Old Spice and not a lady. I’m on a horse.”¹

There are commercials, with their quick jingles and lackluster cinematography, which are ultimately forgettable. While those advertisements may be mildly successful in that they dutifully depict the product they are selling while appealing to their desired target audience ranges, they are often unable to stand out from a crowd of advertisements with similar attributes. On the complete opposite end of the spectrum, (where marketing departments across the world aspire to end up), is Old Spice.

Old Spice is manufactured by Procter & Gamble, a long-standing classical company that has been around since 1837. As a company that has always had its roots firmly planted in the community, it comes as no surprise that Procter & Gamble was able to create one of the most popular and long-lasting product advertisements in recent years. The movement started with the company’s desire to rebrand the product in order to extend its reach to a wider target audience range. In 2010, just prior to the Superbowl, Procter & Gamble launched their “Smell Like a Man, Man” campaign.² Despite the advertisement not airing during the actual Superbowl XLIV, due to the ingenuity and innovation of the campaign itself, the Old Spice commercials were able to go completely viral, and garnered a large following, even to viewers who were not in the target audience. The immense success of their first advertisement prompted a second ad: the “Smell Like a Man, Man – the Sequel,” as well as a series of interactive videos where viewers were able to send questions to Isaiah Mustafa (the “Old Spice Guy”) and receive a personalized video response.³ In a movement that exemplifies what it means to engage your audience, Procter & Gamble published over 200 video responses on YouTube, which were viewed over 46 million times. In fact, according to Procter & Gamble’s website, in the first 24 hours, the videos were viewed more times than President Obama’s 2008 election speech.⁴

¹ Old Spice - The Man Your Man Could Smell Like (Feb. 4, 2010). Advertisement. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owGykVbfgUE>

² “Smell Like a Man, Man” Campaign (n.d). Fact sheet. Retrieved from http://www.pg.com/en_US/downloads/innovation/factsheet_OldSpice.pdf

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

Logically, the commercials make little sense, and the dialogue often jumps erratically. It can be easily said that Procter & Gamble's particular way of marketing the product – the off-the-wall, eccentric humor – won consumers over. Though their commercials were not traditional in terms of a linear narrative, Old Spice was still able to create a series of advertisements that audiences connected with, regardless of whether or not they had any existing attachments to the product. This allowed their company to successfully expand in a way it hadn't in the past. What's more is that once the Old Spice commercials were released, they were almost immediately shared across the Internet. With the free advertising from hundreds of thousands of people, Old Spice didn't have to wait long before they became a household name. The original advertisement has over 47 million views to date on YouTube, and with comments still being added daily, it would be unsurprising if even Procter & Gamble themselves could have predicted the results of their advertising campaign.

Though the initial fervor and excitement for Old Spice has died down, their campaign has left a lasting impression on the industry today. Not only has it inspired a new generation of advertisements from companies looking to acquire some of that same viral success, it has also set an expectation that commercials can be entertaining and funny, without sacrificing brand integrity or quality. In essence, a company that endeavors to be innovative with all their brands has created one of the most memorable series of advertisements in recent years.

Creating an Emotional Connection

The concept of emotional branding has been present in many different marketing campaigns. Whether through humor or sorrow, anger or excitement, advertisements that target emotions are often among the most successful. At their core, these types of advertisements are narrative-driven, using stories and tales to lead audiences to their products. One such company that has, until recently, been absent from the radars of general viewers is Omega. Omega is a Swiss watch company and is, at its core, traditional and well-respected within its niche community. Though they have sold top quality watches to consumers since 1894, they are perhaps not as well known as the monster companies like Nescafé and Rolex. By no means does this insinuate that they are an unsuccessful company. Indeed, they have thrived as one of the top competitors in their industry. However, by the confines of the product they market, their audience has been limited. With the release of a single advertisement back in 2013, Omega has suddenly jumped forward in the industry and into the minds of consumers.

The Omega Co-Axial Chronometer commercial is a beautifully timeless work of art that has inspired a multitude of consumers, and has allowed for the expansion of their client base. Upon watching the commercial, viewers are instantly drawn in to the gorgeously animated world that Omega has presented. With the thoughtfully-crafted animation and the gentle, almost wistful music in the background, the commercial flows from start to finish, telling a story not just about the quality of their brand, but also about how much time and care Omega has placed into this project. On Omega's YouTube channel, the reception is overwhelmingly positive, with many viewers commenting that this advertisement solidifies their need to buy an Omega watch. ⁵

⁵ Omega Co-Axial Chronometer - The Perfect Mechanical Movement (Apr. 1, 2013). Advertisement. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctj-RDbTBMU>

The positive reception of the Omega Co-Axial campaign is due, in no small part, to their understanding of the human nature and the tendency to gravitate towards, and connect with, emotionally resonant subject matter. The presence of music in advertisements is one of the strongest assets of a campaign. With the creation of this commercial, Omega has tapped into the psychology of music and how it affects the human condition, and this has resulted in an enormous positive reception. According to an essay published in “The Aesthetic Mind” by William Forde Thompson and Lena Quinto, music can be used to manipulate emotions in order to achieve a desired effect: “... Specific attributes of music are individually associated with distinct emotional interpretations, and may be manipulated by performers and composers to convey complex and dynamic emotional messages.”⁶ In the context of product campaigns, the right music can be used to produce a specific target emotion, and this emotion in turn can often create a strong associative connection between the consumer and the product, even where there was previously no connection. Like a score composed for a film, the music in this commercial has, as Thompson and Quinto state, the “capacity to resonate with psychological processes that function in human synchronization, and [elicit] emotional effects related to these processes.”

Omega’s Co-Axial Chronometer commercial is a perfect blend of narrative and promotion, and thus it comes as no surprise that they were ranked 10 out of a list of 39 top quality luxury watch brands by W TheJournal, an online news website that specializes in highlighting high-end watches.⁷ With the continued success of their current narrative campaign, Omega will have no trouble staying afloat in today’s bustling consumer culture.

The Alternate Route

Creating an advertising campaign is difficult. Despite the success of Old Spice and Omega, as well as a multitude of various other companies, not every company that integrates a narrative into their ad campaign will be successful. That the above listed companies were able to succeed is due to careful consideration and planning, creative innovation, and a staff that understands the limitations and where to draw the lines. Other companies have not been quite as successful in their campaigns.

There is no denying that today’s market is a tough one. Companies not only have to take into account their desired target audience, but they are also expected to be entertaining, insightful, memorable, proficiently executed, and politically correct, all within two minutes or less – a tall order by any company’s standards. It is little wonder, then, why there are so many failed advertising campaigns that exist today. This is not for lack of trying, certainly. For instance, Sony’s Playstation Portable billboard advertisement series attempted to create hype for the Playstation PSP’s release of a white-colored model. Generally, the release of a new gaming platform model is met with anticipation and excitement, with many dedicated gamers clamoring to be first in line to buy the new product. The public’s reaction to the promotional material was, however, less than stellar.

⁶ Schellekens, Elisabeth and Goldie, Peter. *The Aesthetic Mind*, 2011. ePublication

⁷ Swiss Watchmaking: Key Figures (n.d). Online article. Retrieved from <http://www.wthejournal.com/en/pages/swiss-watch-industry-figures>

While the basic design work of Sony's billboard was aesthetically pleasing, utilizing a minimalist's approach with simple black and white colors, their method of delivery left something to be desired. Instead of depicting the product itself, Sony's billboard featured an image of a white woman dressed in all white seemingly assaulting a black woman dressed in all black. On the background of the billboard sat the text, "White is Coming," a play on the popular television series Game of Thrones "Winter is Coming" tagline. The advertisement was entirely distasteful and inadvertently racist, and backfired completely. Though the billboard remained despite protests from a variety of media outlets, the statement Sony released in its aftermath was less of an apology than it was a complete denial of the outrage that was sparked from the billboard. Sony Weekly, a magazine that is run by the company in question, released the following statement: "The marketing campaign for the launch of the White PSP in the Benelux focuses on the contrast between the Black PSP model and the new Ceramic White PSP model."⁸ There was no mention of the racist connotations present in the billboard, nor was there any acknowledgment of the general outcry from consumers and casual viewers alike. By glossing over their mishap in advertising, rather than issuing an apology for their mistake, it would be unsurprising if a respectable number of Sony's customers decided to boycott the product. What can be absolutely certain about this blunder is that Sony lost a good deal of respect, which, in an industry that relies heavily on the trust and support of its customers, can be dangerous.

Another advertising campaign that fell short on several different fronts is the "To Fly, To Save" campaign, released in late 2011 by British airline company EasyJet. EasyJet was inspired by British Airways, another British airline, which had coincidentally re-launched a very similar ad campaign just a week prior. British Airways' campaign was centered on the slogan, "To Fly, To Serve," which harkens back to the airline's proud history as a long-standing company that focuses much of its attention on providing superior customer service. It does not come as a shock, then, that EasyJet's follow-up campaign attempt failed to impress audiences. In fact, the only thing EasyJet succeeded in was making the public angry.

The advertisement in its entirety read as the following: "To Fly, To Save. When we launched 15 years ago, those four words summed up what we believed in. And they still do. We don't need to paint them on the tailfins, like some advertising slogan. That would just be a waste of your money."¹⁰ British Airways did indeed paint their "To Fly, To Server" slogan on the tailfins of their planes as part of their updated brand, and to attack it only a week after the campaign launched came across as rather tactless. While EasyJet themselves may have seen this approach as a competitive, yet all-in-good-fun jab at a rival airline, a majority of public viewers did not feel the same. The airline was hailed as being jealous, pompous, and unprofessional, with many people finding the blatant callout to be in poor taste. While this act certainly gave EasyJet their share of publicity, it can easily be assumed that this was not the sort of publicity the airline was anticipating, and the backlash caused them to rethink – and regret – their campaign choices.

Creating an advertising campaign is difficult. Despite the success of Old Spice and Omega, as well as a multitude of various other companies, not every company that integrates a narrative into their ad campaign will be successful. That the above listed companies were able to succeed is due to careful consideration and planning, creative innovation, and a staff that understands the limitations and where to draw the lines. In order to successfully integrate a narrative into a campaign, companies must take their audiences into careful consideration, and understand the cultural, economical, and sociological differences – and subsequent difficulties – that can present themselves. By not doing so, they are risking not just a failed ad campaign, but also the permanent reputation of their company.

⁸ 10 Failed Ad Campaigns (Oct. 28, 2013). Online article. Retrieved from <http://www.businesspundit.com/10-failed-ad-campaigns-that-actually-drove-away-customers/?img=45062>

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ EasyJey Mocks BA (Sept. 23, 2011). Online article. Retrieved from <http://www.marketingmagazine.co.uk/article/1095178/easyjet-mocks-ba-to-fly-save-ads>

Moving Forward

Procter & Gamble and Omega are just two companies in hundreds that have already successfully integrated narratives into their advertising campaigns. They were not the first companies to do so and nor will they be the last. It is a growing trend, rapidly expanding as more and more companies begin to observe the correlation between narrative campaigns and the increase in sales, as well as client growth and retention rates. There is a growing expectation for more engaging advertising campaigns, and those that do not take note of this trend are already putting themselves at a disadvantage against competing companies.

Memorable product campaigns are ones that engage their audiences. Whether through off-the-wall humor or eliciting an emotional connection through a beautifully crafted advertisement that resonates with audiences, products that have successfully grasped the notion that the inclusion of a narrative campaign generates interest are one step ahead of the curve. These companies that take the risks and leap at opportunities to innovate will not only see an overall increase in generated interest and sales of their products, but will also gain a loyal consumer base that will provide a lifetime of support.

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