

MARKETING

SHOW ME THE EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

June 11, 2007

In advertising, as in any business, there are tenets, adages and rules we all follow. It's rare that we question them and even rarer that we truly understand why we adhere to them.

I recently attended the "Hungry Dogs & Chocolate Wrappers" conference in Toronto. Leo Burnett presented findings from its pilot research project in partnership with CanWest MediaWorks and The Ideas Research Group.

This was the second time I had seen Leo Burnett's presentation on engagement. As an experiential marketer, our team is constantly asking ourselves why our medium is not front and centre in the minds of the marketing community. I also came to realize that while their findings exude common sense, they are definitely not common knowledge.

Each time I have seen Leo's presentation I look around the room to see if Cameron Crowe is behind a camera somewhere, getting covert footage for Jerry Maguire 2: Ad Agent. Just like Jerry's mission statement, Leo Burnett's memo to the advertising industry smacks of common sense. While many of their conclusions are wonderfully simplistic, they are also groundbreaking for an industry that seems to have lost its edge.

Leo Burnett breaks down what makes people notice advertisements into six categories: resonance, context, polarization, affinity, esthetics and personal stuff. But digging deeper, I think they can break down into two overarching categories: what makes people notice the ad and what makes people act because of the ad.

While resonance, polarization and esthetics get the ad noticed, it is the context, affinity and personal stuff which move the audience to act. And if context is the key to creating an emotional fit with the audience (as Leo Burnett's findings suggest), then affinity and personal stuff are merely forms of that context we desire to evoke.

Context is the key to unlocking the door to action. But how do we generate context with our audience? The answer, according to the cognitive scientists, is to offer the audience an experience.

A recent study in Marketing (Feb. 2007) noted that samples were the most effective method of product introduction among the "very first" adopters (89%). Yet face-to-face experiential tactics continue to lag among the preferred strategies. A study by TBA Global (Feb. 2007) found that experiential marketing was the most effective way for companies to develop a bond with customers, beating out, in order: advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, online, and public relations.

So why is experiential marketing considered an afterthought by many advertisers?

I agree with Leo Burnett's suggestion that as an industry we are "reductionist;" we constantly ask the same questions and try to simplify messaging for our audience. What's the reach? What's the frequency? What adage do I follow?

Because of this, we have become redundant and complacent in our media mix. Safe GRPs and predictable ROIs consistently trump innovation, ingenuity and intelligent risk-taking. Yet for each benefit measurement provides, I fear our dependence upon it reduces the value of campaigns and ideas.

As noted in the presentation, the most effective advertising offers its audience some sort of value. Give the audience an experience and they're much more likely to engage and respond. Perhaps this is why progressive agencies such as Leo Burnett are turning towards experiential marketing to complement their existing media mix. They have realized that great traditional creative is only part of the equation. Context via experience is the other. They have realized that the more important question to ask, and the one most often neglected, is "what is the impact?" This is where our industry needs to be today. I think I can hear Jerry now: "You complete my media mix."

QUENTIN EVANS
GENERAL MANAGER, SMAK
TORONTO