

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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A FACE IN THE CROWD

We came across an intriguing book recently, written by BBDO's former, long-serving Creative Chief, Phil Dusenberry and entitled, *One Great Insight Is Worth a Thousand Good Ideas*. As the title indicates, his subject matter is about the value of real insights in building brands; but we found his comments on the world of brands in general spot on with our perspective, particularly regarding the ever-declining "degree of differentiation" in that world. When we published our book, *Creating Brand Loyalty*, almost 8 years ago, we spotlighted the "age of sameness" that brands were increasingly finding themselves bound by. Here's Phil Dusenberry's take now about the very same phenomenon:

"I worry about parity not only when I'm awake, but in my sleep. The dream is always the same. Actually it's a nightmare. In it there is a tightly coordinated marching band, consisting of beautifully synchronized trumpeters and trombonists and drummers. There are also high-stepping baton-twirlers in my dream... The only thing unusual about these energetic participants in their uniform. They aren't dressed in the traditional garb of a marching band. Rather, they're dressed in the costumes of America's best-known brand name products. They're a marching brand, not a band. One hundred eight brands of cigarettes lead the pack, followed by 800 brands of fragrances and 230 brands of cereals. And this is where the nightmarish part begins. The cereals, like the fragrances and cigarettes, are remarkably similar. Fruit Loops is strutting next to Loop de Loops, Honey Nut is paired with Nut & Honey, Cracklin' Brand with Oat Brand, Bran Flakes with Raisin Bran...and so on.

The similar performance, look, and even feel (the emotional part) of so many brands in so many categories and classes these days really has most of them lost in the crowd. So, more and more, one of the biggest challenges brand-builders face is to make sure their brands stand out in the crowd...be a recognizable "face in the crowd."

If you think about observing a crowd of people, say, at a ball game or at an airport, what is it that typically makes one face stand out from so many? For most of us, the faces that strike us first and best are ones that have a certain "look" that we don't typically see. Maybe this look ties mainly to a big, bright smile, or unusually colored eyes, or even a shocking hairstyle. Let's be honest, the reason Sanjaya lasted so long on American Idol had nothing to do with his voice and almost everything to do with his outlandishly different hairstyles (and "look") each time he performed.

Whatever the look, though, the faces in a crowd that really *attract* us invariably are ones we have

some aspiration towards: perhaps they are incredibly handsome faces that we wish ours could be like; or maybe with their outrageous colorings and piercings they make a statement we wish we had the guts to make. The point is, faces that stand out usually represent those of people we like or want to be like. Hmmmmm. Wouldn't it be an advantage if our brand had a face that stood out from the "brand/band crowd" Phil Dusenberry imagined--because it represented a face customers liked and wanted to be like?

How does a brand become a face that stands out from the crowd? For this week's Boats & Helicopters we offer a few suggestions for creating and revealing that face.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

- 1. If you want a distinctive face, you start with a distinctive Brand Character.** One of the biggest reasons brands "look alike" today isn't simply that they perform functionally the same; it's because they all go to market with the same Brand Characters. You know, with these kinds of descriptors in the Brand Character part of their Brand Positioning Statements: "Our Brand is trusted, honest, leader-like, intelligent, and contemporary." No wonder, then, when these brands present themselves to their customers (regardless of differing "brand colors") they all look the same. They have to if they are to live up to such a predictably mainstream-crowd Brand Character.

But, if a brand adds some differentiating *attitude* to its Brand Character, a face begins to appear in the crowd. What better example of a face-with-attitude-brand than Harley-Davidson? Everyone can picture the Harley face because it is so unlike that of Yamaha or Honda or Triumph. And the Harley Brand face is remarkably like the faces of its loyal owners. Talk about a "face I like and want to be like"!

- 2. If you want a distinctive face, look to the package.** In fact, most every brand has two faces: what the product looks like and what the packaging it comes in looks like. But, practically speaking, for most brands the face that customers regard as the "brand's look" is that of its packaging. So many brand-builders strive to develop a packaging graphic that will look the same worldwide, you know, so customers everywhere will readily recognize it. Of course, brands like Coke and Marlboro are what these brand-builders hope to emulate. But, in devising a universal look they often miss an even greater opportunity to look different than/ more appealing than other brands in their category. A few years ago in Venezuela, a local beer brand called Regional began putting photos of well-endowed, bikini-clad women on their cans; this was a face (and more!) that stood out from the ordinary beer-can crowd. And we recently were admiring the new Red Delicious fragrance from DKNY, packaged in a wonderfully unique red apple dispenser-bottle (of course, no other brand could so genuinely have the look of the "The Apple" as DK New York). By the way, the DKNY example is a good reminder that package *architecture* is sometimes much more powerful than package graphics at popping a brand's face from a crowd.
- 3. If you want a distinctive face, maybe you can "borrow" it.** A less direct way (than playing with packaging) of showing a face that stands out in a crowd is to simply team up with another "brand" that already has a recognizable and appealing face. And we're thinking here of "brand" in its broadest sense. For example, if you were seeking a face that is more daring or bold than your category competitors, you might do the obvious and

sign a celebrity who is already famous for her or his daring. But you might also go another route and enter into a sponsorship of some extreme sports; assuming you did either of these for an extended period, there's a good chance your evolving brand face would come to resemble these borrowed, daring ones. It's a little like the old principle, "You're known by the company you keep."

As you can tell from just these three suggestions, getting your brand to be a face that stands out in the crowd requires both strategic (as in Brand Character development) and tactical maneuvers. Maybe you cannot change the nature of the crowd your brand finds itself in, but you can change your place in it.

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