

DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Monday, May 4, 2015

MORE ON POLITICAL MARKETING AND *OPPOSITIONING*

There are more than 550 days left in the race for the 2016 U.S. Presidential election and the battle lines are already being drawn. On one side, the Democratic Party, Hillary Clinton, former First Lady, New York Senator and Secretary of State, along with Bernie Sanders, Senator from Vermont, have entered the race. On the other side, the Republican Party, there's Senators Ted Cruz, Texas, Rand Paul, Kentucky, and Marco Rubio, Florida. And, there are more to come who are expected to cast their hats into the ring for their Party's nomination. When it comes to elections "it's all for none, and one for none but oneself." The *oppositioning* has already begun against candidates from the other Party, and within their own political Parties. All are perpetrators and targets of *oppositioning*.

Oppositioning is a term we've coined to classify a type of positioning strategy. This is the practice of positioning a competitor to establish your brand's positioning in the marketplace. It serves to enable target-customers to better appreciate your brand's advantage. It also works to niche a competitor, or paint them in an unfavorable and, perhaps, even negative light. This is a strategic approach that has been popular with politicians from the first campaigns. In practice they damn their opposition with vitriol or faint praise to drive preference for their candidacy.

As we wrote in a past issue of DISPATCHES, during the 2012 U.S. Presidential race President Obama effectively painted Republican candidate Mitt Romney, and his Party, as wealthy elitists catering to the rich who didn't, nor would, represent the vast majority of working class citizens. In *oppositioning* former Governor Romney, President Obama positioned himself as the champion of, and for, the "working" (middle and lower socio-economic) class.

This practice of *oppositioning* and specific theme of painting the opposition as self-serving or catering to a privileged class continues to resonate with current contenders. It appears every candidate is attempting to position her or himself as the one for "everyday" Americans in order to win their votes. Every one of them is using *oppositioning* to control the dialogue and, thereby, push their competitors onto their defensive heels, while s/he positions her/himself in a favorable light to gain a competitive advantage.

For example, recently Republican U.S. Senator Rand Paul commented on Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton. Senator Paul stated that former Secretary of State Clinton would need two aircraft during her campaign; one for her entourage and the other for her "baggage." Then there's significant talk from both Republicans and the media regarding the Clintons' financial situation and their astronomical fees for speeches (up to \$500,000.00 per speech), which is nearly ten times above the median "household" income of Americans. In *oppositioning*, as in karma, what goes around comes around.

APR
15
2015

CHAMPION OF THE MIDDLE CLASS



Oppositioning in the Private Sector

The private sector has taken a page out of the political playbook to *opposition* competitors too. During Super Bowl XLIX we observed two notable examples. Each one was crafted to pump-up and unify their target-customers and, thereby, create favorable perceptions of the offending brands by framing competitors' customers in an uncomplimentary light. The first, Chevy Colorado, Motor Trend's 2015 Truck of the Year, shares two photos with "real people" (not actors) of the same guy in the same location and in the same pose, with the only difference being the vehicle in the background (a Chevy Colorado truck in one, a car in the other), to determine how they feel about each guy. The results are clear. Trucks can make people feel different about the guy. And, we feel confident the vehicle (in this case the Chevy Colorado truck) can make or reinforce how the guy identifies and feels about himself. One woman looking at the photos says that the guy in the photo with the car is the kind Mom would want her to bring home while the guy in the photo with the truck is the one she would want to run away with. Note to self: perceptions are reality and we build brands around the perceptions we create, not the facts and figures. By the way, who doesn't want to be the guy girls want to run off with? Cars, particularly "mini" cars, are for namby-pambies, while trucks, particularly Motor Trend's 2015 Truck of the Year are for, well, hard working manly-men.

The second is a commercial for Budweiser Beer. Budweiser, “Brewed the Hard Way,” took on the micro brews with a “macro” brew boldness, claiming it is not the beer for dissecting or being fussed over by those who sip Pumpkin Peach Ale, but people who like drinking beer. Grrrr, RUFF, RUFF! They not only oppositioned the competition but also those who drink the micro-beers, reinforcing and establishing their positioning as the King of Beers and their users like the guy in the photo with the Chevy Colorado truck. You know, the one girls want to run away with.

Another *oppositioning* example that has come to our attention is for “1800” Silver Tequila. The ad doesn’t refer to “1800” as being the “100% Agave Tequila with the exceptionally clean, silky smooth taste.” Instead, it features actor Ray Liotta who borrows from his tough-guy image from the persona he portrays in many of his films. Sitting at the bar he points his index finger like a gun and tersely makes a bar call for “1800.” He looks down the bar where a Millennial, some 20 plus years his junior, in a frilly haircut, is pulling a cherry out of a Cosmopolitan like a child. Liotta laughs derisively at the other to evoke a sense of bewilderment and shame from the Cosmopolitan drinker. Another case of *oppositioning*, this one roping a class of alcohol beverages to position “1800” Silver Tequila as being the spirits for “men.”

Healthcare products and brands are not immune to *oppositioning*. While clinical studies are underway competitive brands will attempt to manage a dialogue to frame those compounds and/or their organizations in a questionable light, or away from their brands. *Oppositioning* is also evident in DTC (Direct to Consumer) advertising between Cialis and Viagra. A key product difference between the two drugs is that Cialis works to remedy E.D. for 36-hours whereas the effect of Viagra lasts for just 4-hours. Yet Viagra works to turn their limited-time efficacy into a positive by attempting to undermine Cialis’ longer duration. The women appearing in the latest Viagra advertising claim it will not only enable men to get and keep an erection but they also say, “and remember you only take it when you need it.” Why have a drug floating around in your system when it isn’t needed? However, Cialis advertising counters that you don’t have to plan around it (not said, “as you would with Viagra”) so you can be ready when the moment is right.

The last pits brand against brand in the truck category. Specifically it is a video comparing the torsional rigidity of the Chevy Silverado 2500 HD (Heavy Duty), which employs rolled-form steel for its frames versus, as they say, their “supposed competition,” the new 2015 Ford F-150 (representing trucks using stamped steel or aluminum), for supremacy as “the working vehicle.” A test is employed to simulate the impact of uneven road conditions (i.e., the kind of terrain that may be experienced at job sites) on the bed of the truck. The result is less twisting for the Silverado truck bed than the Ford F-150. Importantly, whereas the tailgate of the Silverado can be opened to allow for work the Ford’s cannot. The inference is that the Silverado 2500 HD is, therefore, better for work! Or, if you prefer, the Ford F-150 doesn’t really work for work!

Why *Oppositioning*?

There are a few reasons why marketers employ *oppositioning* among which are:

- ***Control the dialogue*** – Basically it’s about managing a dialogue in their favor, repositioning the competition and attempting to force competitors off their positioning strategy.
- ***Establish your own positioning*** – In *oppositioning* competition marketers establish their positioning strategy, what their brands are and are not.
- ***Gain appreciation for differentiation*** – *Oppositioning* cans serve to get target-customers and stakeholders (including sales personnel) to understand and appreciate their differentiation.

- ***Force competitors into reacting and making mistakes*** – Mindless reactions versus thoughtful responses serve to: tie-up competition by causing them to chase for ways to respond; throw them off their game; and, possibly make mistakes.

BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

Here are some thoughts for your consideration regarding the use of *oppositioning*:

1. ***Determine if it has a place in your marketing.*** It's really not for everyone. If it does, make certain any *oppositioning* you undertake complies with regulations and withstands legal scrutiny. Anticipate it will provoke a reaction and plan for it.
2. ***Find a place where you can win.*** Trucks are rated for payload, fuel economy and towing but in this test Chevy chose frame rigidity, which it was clearly and dramatically able to demonstrate. Importantly, tie it back to your positioning, which in this case is about being made, and being better, for work.
3. ***Choose from two sub-classifications of oppositioning – direct and indirect.***
 - **Direct**: This is marked by directly pointing out negatives regarding the competition, or turning aspects of the competitors' products and/or services into negatives.
 - **Indirect**: This is achieved by raising questions about select aspects of the competitor in such a way as it guides target-customers to draw conclusions that turn them against the competition and into the arms of your brand.

Of the two approaches, we favor (if we were to engage in *oppositioning*) the indirect approach. The direct approach could alienate competitive customers, the very target you may be trying to win over to your brand, in that it openly challenges their choice and, as such, could lead them to rationalize their decision and become even more entrenched in their choice. On the other hand, we recognize that the direct approach has some important advantages. It could be useful in energizing your customer franchise and reinforcing their choice of your brand. The direct approach to *oppositioning* also works to overcome any cognitive dissonance your target-customer may have in the purchase of your brand. Finally, it may be employed to energize other constituencies, such as the sales force, not only because it provides them with ammunition to use with customers but also helps them feel superior to the competition and gives them a taste of being winners (bordering on self-righteousness). However, this could also lead to arrogance and be off-putting to target-customers.

The indirect approach is subtle but can be very effective. It undermines competitors' customers' confidence in their brand and helps them to discover your brand. This process of discovery leads to conversion, going beyond occasional switching, to establish loyalty for your brand. The degree of loyalty will obviously depend upon the target-customers' ability to experience more, or something better, or meaningfully different, with your brand.

4. ***Use oppositioning selectively, and tactically*** – It can aid product development, ensuring that meaningful differentiation is engineered into emerging new products.

You may also use it tactically to reenergize current customers and your sales force. It may also be employed tactically to undermine the confidence of competitors' customers thus providing them with the opportunity to discover your brand.

- 5. HOWEVER, REMEMBER, ANY *OPPOSITIONING* MUST BE APPROVED BY LEGAL AND REGULATORY!** Even the politicians claim "this ad has been approved by ..." Don't go anywhere before clearing your *oppositioning* claims.

Whew, we have 18-months more of political *oppositioning* before the 2016 U.S. Presidential election! Well, let's use it as an opportunity to learn more about how and where *oppositioning* works and doesn't work.

Richard Czerniawski and Mike Maloney

Richard Czerniawski

.....
430 Abbotsford Road
Kenilworth, Illinois 60043
tel 847.256.8820
fax 847.256.8847
.....

Reply to Richard:
rdczerniawski@cs.com or
richardcz@bdn-intl.com

Mike Maloney

.....
1506 West 13th Street, #17
Austin, Texas 78703
tel 512.236.0971
fax 512.236.0972
.....

reply to Mike:
mikewmaloney@gmail.com or
mwm@bdn-intl.com

