

Tend Your Advertising, Grow Your Brand

By Kelly Walker, M.S.

Go to the bank. Take out at least 10% of your money. Place it in a plain paper bag and light it on fire.

Chances are, a few people will show up to see what the stink is all about. In our media-saturated society, most advertising is something people try to scrape off their shoe with a stick, after they've stomped out the flaming bag you've dropped on their doorstep. Roy H. Williams sums it up quite well in *The Wizard of Ads*:

Is it any wonder that people hate advertising? The noise of color and sound we endure each day can make us feel like we're...surrounded by carnival barkers shouting for our attention. There's more to see and do than we can possibly accomplish. Being intelligent creatures, we have developed complex defenses to guard us from this blight of color and sound. We've become immune to many phrases, statements, and tones of voice...The public no longer pays attention to advertising that is obviously advertising.

Cash burns quickly in the gap between strategy and creativity, and obvious advertising cannot generate the warmth needed to build brand loyalty. "You can tell when ads are trying too hard," says Williams. "Their intentions are too obvious. They impose themselves without speaking to you...great advertising combines density of content with elegance of form."

Be careful not to let your strategy show. Many ads suffer from this transparency...When you fail to put enough creative spin on the strategy, your ad remains flat and obvious. There's no magic to it, and reading it is a bit of a letdown. It's like Dorothy discovering that the Wizard of Oz is just some knucklehead behind a curtain. *Hey Whipple, Squeeze This*, Luke Sullivan.

Too many ads get right to the point with no appeal or are packed with information, a virtual mini-brochure, blurting out bullet-point features. "Every beginner's solution is to put an 'attention getter' into the ad," says Williams.

Bright colors, loud noises, exclamation marks, and crazy stunts are the sad little attention getters most often used...Is this any way to start a romance? I vote for seduction. I'm not talking about using sex appeal in your ads. I'm talking about enticing the customer with a thought more interesting than the thought she's thinking. The skillful use of words is the most impressive of human powers...This does not require shouting. It requires art.

What will make your advertising stand out from the clutter, like a rose growing out of manure? In a word, CREATIVITY. A true master of the advertising craft will tend your messaging with a balance of strategy and artistry, like a master gardener. "However much we would like advertising to be a science," says Sullivan, "The fact is that it is not. It is a subtle, ever-changing art, defying formularization, flowering on freshness and withering on imitation; what was effective one day, for that very reason, will not be effective the next, because it has lost the maximum impact of originality."



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A great ad campaign does not repel, it draws people in like honeybees to nectar—not just to sporadic sales and promotions, but to your brand. It will not train customers to wait for a sale or turn your products or services into a commodity to be haggled over. A great campaign will build brand loyalty—a "tribe" that will be willing to pay a bit more for your brand because it speaks to their intrinsic wants and needs.

A good advertising professional understands elements of advertising such as layout, flow, USP and AIDA. A truly *great* pro understands human psychology, philosophy and the expression of the sublime: that intrinsic quality of transcendent beauty and enjoyment that everyone seeks, but which few are able to evoke through words, art and music. A great ad professional is not just a good strategist. She or he is a great artist, capable of shaping your brand: what your audience perceives you to be (not what you think you are).

Take it from Roy:

If your advertising tells your story in the way one person speaks to another and without any of the clichés or unsubstantiated claims that muddle most ads, then you've probably created a good "Non Ad." Your staff may tell you the ads don't "sound right" because they aren't "slick" like other ads. But isn't that exactly what you are trying to accomplish?