What Makes a Good Advertisement?

Rules

In advertising there are many rules to be followed to make advertisements successful. There are nonetheless many people in the advertising industry who don’t want to know the rules. They believe rules kill creativity. Actually, the opposite is true. Rules demand greater creativity. To write a poem that rhymes demands more creativity and effort than to write one that does not rhyme. (I am aware that modern poetry must not rhyme. This book actually is a poem.)

Professor Armstrong of Wharton University asks: “The question for you is whether you think cumulative knowledge from experts, typical practice, and research can add to your current knowledge.” That’s a good question. If you think other people over the years, through trial and error, might have learned something that might be useful to you, then this chapter is for you. If you haven’t the time to read this chapter because you are busy inventing this round whatchamacallit, don’t worry about skipping this chapter. A lack of knowledge about advertising is not going to stop anyone from becoming a great success in the industry.
The FCB grid

Back to Covad and Fortune magazine’s puff piece . . .

[Badad and Worsead] pitched to grandma when they worked together at Procter & Gamble, hawking Puffs and Charmin. Believe it or not, selling broadband is a lot like selling toilet paper: The marketing challenge is to strike the right tone and instill a unique “personality” in a product that’s pretty much the same no matter who offers it.

“Believe it or not?” Believe it not! Selling broadband is completely different from selling toilet paper. People already know toilet paper. Most know how to use toilet paper. They have experience with different brands; there is nothing new or exciting about the product. I suspect Covad’s managers sold broadband the way they sold toilet paper because that is what they knew how to do. Give a baby a hammer and everything needs hammering.

Everything that could possibly be different is different. Isn’t it obvious that the selling approach, including the advertising approach, also should be different? It is obvious and there is a well-known framework in advertising discussed in just about any basic advertising textbook: the so-called FCB grid, created originally by Richard Vaughn at the Foote, Cone & Belding advertising agency.² This grid is based on the commonsense idea that ads work differently depending on the selling situation.

Rossiter and Percy in their book Advertising Communications and Promotion Management³ discuss their expanded version of the FCB grid in great detail. Buy their book and maybe you won’t be victimized the way Covad victimized itself. The following discussion is based in large part on Rossiter and Percy’s original presentation and elaboration of the FCB framework.

The first challenge is brand awareness. If the customer does not remember the Covad name, then it is rather difficult for the customer to take any sort of action that will stimulate Covad’s business. Spending the last two or three seconds of the commercial on their “just revamped” brand name will achieve very little. There are too many people out there who do not sit on the edge of their seats when watching commercials.