

Giving People What They Want Before They Know They Want It

Fred S. Goldberg

Published online: 20 January 2011
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Abstract When advertising is able to capitalize on products or services that give people what they want just before they know they want it, it makes for an extremely powerful marketing tool. More often than not, advertising is unable to generate significant awareness or motivation to motivate a potential customer to purchase the advertised product. Yet there is a body of work, limited as it may be, that more often than not has been able to accomplish this. All advertising works to some degree, but the kind that promises people a benefit even before they realize that it is something that they truly want, works better than the other kind. This is particularly powerful when the product being advertised gives people something they want before they even know it. There are obstacles to developing advertising that is fundamentally new and fresh and with which people are not familiar, but the rewards are worth the effort to overcome them. Reviewing some of the most successful marketing accomplishments reveals the use of advertising that has these elements.

Keywords Advertising · Effective advertising · Powerful advertising

Advertising often tries to anticipate and exploit the prevailing consumer culture and attitudes. When it succeeds in this regard it can be very effective. When ads are able to capture the essence of a desire or an envy, expressed or not, they have a good chance of being successful at persuading and selling. And when they are able to anticipate what society and consumers will respond to in advance and take advantage of cultural nuances, it can perform even better.

Observing this last point, David Belasco the famous showman said of being successful: “Give the people what



they want just before they know they want it.” This is very true for advertising.

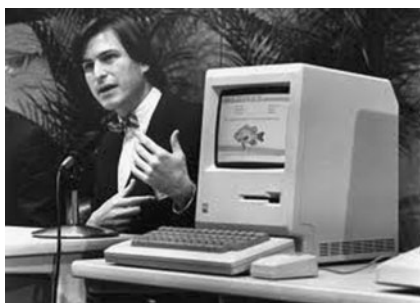
The advertising that introduced the Volkswagen “Beetle” to America did this all very well. It presented an automobile for the first time as simply simple, reliable, sensible, different and scary honest. It captured America’s minds and hearts by anticipating people’s desires and their appetite and envy for just such a product. It was self-deprecating but loveable and was able to reach into the preponderant psyche of the day.

Bill Bernbach, whose agency created the ads, was mindful of this: “You can say the right thing about a product and nobody will listen. You’ve got to say it in such a way that people will feel it in their gut. Because if they don’t feel it, nothing will happen.”

In 1984 people didn’t know it but they were just waiting for a computer that was really easy to use. One they could avail themselves of intuitively, immediately and not

F. S. Goldberg (✉)
425 Golden Gate Avenue,
Belvedere, CA 94920, USA
e-mail: fredsgoldberg@hotmail.com

struggle having to learn. That's when Steve Jobs introduced the Macintosh to the world.



People didn't think too much of the importance of teddy bears until one came along that could "talk" and with which children could interact on a one to one basis. That would be Teddy Ruxpin. Other clients that were able to accomplish these same insights include Dell Computers, Cisco Systems, Lazer Tag from Worlds of Wonder, EA Sports video games and Boston Market. All amazing marketplace triumphs.

Some examples of clients who were perceptive enough to provide people with a product or service before they wanted it include Net Air (on demand private jet service), Interactive Network (interact with live television programming), Health Central (on line health information). These, and others unfortunately, were too far in front of the demand curve and failed.

But regardless, there are many more examples where advertising simply and directly hit a sweet spot in consumer desire or envy, and resulted in huge sales successes because of it. Most of the time, without people even realizing they had a yearning and appetite for the enjoyment and/or satisfaction that the products offered. Exactly what Belasco had predicted when giving people what they want before they knew they even wanted it.

Identifying a nerve, an emotion that makes people truly hunger for a product or a service is what most advertising is supposed to do. It's surprising then how little ever actually accomplishes this objective. There are a number of reasons why. But when an ad *is* able to tap into a meaningful emotional, psychological and/or sociological focal point, more often than not it can result in a grand slam success. All advertising works, but the kind that is able to reach deep down into this humanistic arena works by far the best.

One of the reasons for the glut of ineffective ads is that just about everyone believes they are "experts" on advertising. Not just in assessing them, but even in developing them. Who doesn't think they can write an ad? Nowadays it's even become fashionable for advertisers to ask their own customers to help write the ads for their products. This circumstance has resulted in heightened interest and increased publicity, but little great and effective advertising.

Advertising agencies have long considered themselves the experts in constructing ads, and are of course not particularly fond of the trend of having customers take their shot, at development, which is growing. That is to have consumers write the ads. After all advertising agencies get paid for their "professional" and "expert" advice. Only very occasionally does it turn out that a consumer or a novice is actually able to come up with an ad that has the magic required to achieve a direct and important impact on the sales of a product or service. And ironically, it is only occasionally that even the "experts" at the ad agency can do so.

There is actually some required underlying understanding and thinking that goes into the development of effective advertising, that which truly is capable of motivating people and having an effect on their opinions. Understanding the popular culture is one essential component. People generally don't realize just how influenced they are by advertising. They don't understand, nor should they, that most advertising messages are crafted based on some considerable and precise underlying strategic thinking. Ads are not just ideas and thoughts someone pulled out of the air and threw down on a piece of paper, which then became a print ad or a television commercial. Those are the kind that customers who try to write ads most often end up with.

Really powerful ads are carefully devised and employ complex underlying plans and stratagems to achieve an expressed goal. They have dynamic psychological and sociological underpinnings. These ads often reflect society and the role that the advertisers' product or service play or can play in the current milieu. The most effective ones reflect an innate understanding of the way people think and act or want to think or act. While these are primary goals of advertising there is so much advertising that is not developed in this manner and is therefore not nearly, if at all successful in motivating the intended target. As such much advertising can be considered waste and irrelevant or at best a lost opportunity for the advertiser.

The morass of ineffective advertising out there is one of the reasons advertising research, quantitative and qualitative, has flourished. Attempting to unearth motivating messages. That and to protect the backsides of marketing and advertising executives who haven't a clue what effective advertising is about or how to get it. "But our research concluded such and such."

And so, this kind of communication research often fails to identify any real motivational levers. Trying to understand underlying societal ebbs and flows by asking people about them is a tricky business. And it gets exaggerated when just about everyone professes to have "objective" opinions about ads which they are more than willing to offer in any number of situations. Of course they do not have objective opinions, but rather emotional ones.

Research and testing of ads, has a huge tendency to soften and sandpaper or even eliminate the most creative, edgy and powerful ideas. Those are the ones most likely to engage and motivate the customer. Why? Because people tend to respond best to what they are familiar with and not to what is new and different. It's natural to be critical of things with which we are unfamiliar and which we judge against our present experience. At the end of the day, even with the most insightful strategic thinking the strength of a truly great advertisement comes down to reflecting and expressing something to which the intended audience can truly relate. It is not dissimilar to art, music, architecture or theatre that "moves" someone.

The effective ad needs elements of newness, greatness, uniqueness, and relevance. History is not made looking over one's shoulder, but that is indeed part of the process so often applied to the development of advertising, advertising that is supposed to modify behavior of people living in today's world. When you think about this it is quite ironic. We try to look back in search of answers about tomorrow.

There has always been resistance to new thoughts and ideas. It has been true for endeavors in all fields requiring elements of creativity and insight. Things that are new and different, those beyond the periphery of familiarity are not easily accepted by society. Being careful not to fall off, because the world might be flat.



The Transamerica building in San Francisco when first proposed was skewered for its design. Today it stands as the defining aspect of the entire San Francisco skyline and has become an icon of which most San Franciscan's are extremely proud.

New thoughts and ideas being rejected and later on being accepted and embraced must surely be as old as humanity. Real creative insights and ideas are not developed by just anyone, in a vacuum; they very often will never be researchable; they frequently meet with resistance and yet they somehow very often reflect well the most obvious cultural and societal trends and beliefs that people will embrace and respond to.

In 1985 a product was introduced to America called California Cooler. The advertising and the process that led to its development demonstrates all of the things just discussed.

California Cooler was a pleasant tasting alcoholic beverage identified as a wine cooler but packaged in beer bottles and four packs. The folks who started this company in Stockton, California, Michael Crete and Stewart Bewley, had first commissioned an ad campaign, which was ill founded. It was without meaningful strategic insight or emotional motivation. It was very expected without an

element of newness. It never caught the public's imagination and with good reason.



The product was incorrectly positioned and directed at the wrong target. They tried to convince wine consumers that this totally new beverage was a substitute to be used as a replacement for white or red wine in those situations where wine was typically served: cocktail parties, next to food, to upscale folks. The ads that had been developed were essentially wine ads into which they substituted California Cooler for wine. The commercials contained all the mandatory and expected elements of wine advertising: good looking people, nibbling at appetizers, nuts and crackers, partying in designer clothes and smiling at each other as they experienced happy times.

It is quite remarkable how terribly wrong the thinking behind all this really was. How could it have happened? How could it be so off? How could so much money have been committed to produce commercials and then spend four million dollars behind it in the media, when it was so specious, misguided and inappropriate?

How? They were lemmings. The agency and the clients. It was a classic example of a big monolithic “professional” advertising agency, believed to be the “experts,” leading an inexperienced client down a road backed up with a mess of thinking without insight. The strategic recommendation proposed was one without controversy. The clients not knowing any better bought into it.

Deeper investigation and additional thinking would have revealed that wine was never considered a refreshing

beverage. Wine was sipped and savored, rarely if ever “chugged” or used to quench a thirst. Mostly used to accompany food. Unlike beer for example, wine was reserved to be drunk at very different and often more special occasion and with very different motivations. Beer on the other hand was a friendly, thirst quenching, refreshing social lubricant, as well as a personality statement or badge for the drinker. A person's brand reflected his personality and image. All of this was much more akin to the California Cooler drinking experience.

California Coolers were sold in single 12 ounce tall neck bottles; in cardboard packs like beer; they were stocked chilled in retail store coolers and stacked on supermarket shelves right next to the beer; they had screw caps just like beer; they were often drunk right out of the bottle like beer. All told they were far more similar to beer than to wine. And if you placed a bunch of beer bottles of different brands on a table among a bunch of wine bottles of different brands the consumer would quite easily sort the beer from the wine onto two ends of the table. If you asked them where California Cooler would best fit they would always place it along with the beer bottles. It followed quite logically that the appeal for California Cooler would be much more to beer drinkers than to wine drinkers.

This was the argument that our agency put forth when we began work on the California Cooler business. We contended that both the drinking experience and the taste that consumers experienced with wine were dramatically different than that which California Coolers offered. And while the taste was different from beer, the experience that consumers had was far more similar. Parenthetically it was also pointed out that beer incidence of usage and per capita consumption was vastly greater than wine offering far greater volume opportunity (and chance of success) than the wine market ever could.

We recommended targeting the light and medium beer drinker and the non-beer drinker in search of a beer drinking experience but not really liking the taste of beer all that much, if at all. These consumers were heavily women but also a significant chunk of men, particularly young men. Very young men and women...like teens who had a proclivity for 7 & 7 and Rum and Coke and not Chardonnay or Cabernet. Something like 80% of women and 50% of men did not actually like the bitter taste of beer at the time.

California Cooler offered people the chance to enjoy the experience of camaraderie and the social aspects of beer drinking without having to acquire the taste for beer. It offered much broader usage occasions than wine. California Cooler tasted sweet and good, more like lemonade or fruit punch. It had the additional “benefit” of a higher level of alcohol than most beers. California Cooler was truly a

revolutionary new drink delivering a beer drinking experience but with a uniquely appealing taste.

This was a breakthrough insight into an effective way to position and sell California Cooler. It came from an understanding of the culture of the beer drinker, who made up the majority of the population. It did not come from research findings, but rather human insight and understanding. Even with the most mundane advertising developed against this discerning thinking, the product might well have been a success. However as is often the case the combination of an incredibly insightful strategic position and a brilliant unexpected creative execution resulted in a lethal combination and exceptional marketplace success for California Cooler. A highly creative idea was coupled with the positioning of the product as a beer replacement taking advantage of a sagacious cultural understanding and enlightenment.

California Cooler: One More Reason to Hate California

The cultural and iconic things that people believed were part of the California lifestyle were identified and made fun with. The advertising introduced California Cooler as yet another leading edge lifestyle thing, unique to the Golden State. Many of the fads and fixations that people outside of

California thought made the place filled with fruits and nuts, along with a certain liberated and liberal mind set. Different, fresh, new styles were always emerging from the west coast and generally crept eastward being slowly accepted as a next new cool idea.

For the first commercial we cast a young east coast man sitting at a bar probably somewhere in New Jersey, in a plaid shirt, a middle class working kind of guy. He is on a bar stool at a bar, next to a pal and he's in a complaining mood. He grabs the bottle that his buddy next to him is drinking which is a California Cooler, while the other guy looks on at him amused. And he complains about California, and all things California.

He says: "I hate California, you know what I'm saying? It's like (sarcastic mimicry) Have a nice day"... "Surf's Up...A Huh A Huh. I mean, their idea of culture is yogurt...A formal dinner party means you wear socks. Blonds everywhere...pink tofu...excuse me? Soy burgers...I really hate it."

At this point he is looking at the California Cooler bottle ... "I even hate what they drink."

The bartender asks: "What'll ya have buddy?"

And our spokesperson points to the bottle as if he hasn't said all of the above...and says "One of those".

Then the announcer said: "California Cooler. One more reason to hate California".



It was brilliant. Truly brilliant! However, it turned out not only did the fellow in the commercial "hate" California, some of the California Cooler clients had problems with the idea too. Stewart Bewley, one of the founders, hated it along with a bunch of other folks. They felt we were going to turn people living outside of California off by raising all these things that people think are weird about the state (Duh! That was the idea). And, in addition some argued that we would turn off the people who resided in California, because we were making fun of their lifestyles (Duh! That's why they lived there).

All of this was complete non-sense. But they insisted on testing the advertising. And after they had run a battery of qualitative research it confirmed their beliefs. People outside of California thought everybody and everything there was weird

in California. People inside California were not bemused when their "pink tofu" and "yoga" was criticized. People in focused group situations love to intellectualize and particularly about advertising when asked. And that's indeed what they did.

Many are critical of things new and different. Maybe even more so with advertising. The best of which move people in inexplicable and emotional ways. This is a significant problem in a testing environment where people react to advertising far more rationally and which is not representative of the real world. They want to explain their reactions and are uncomfortable showing emotion or even admitting they have been affected by an ad. Clients are not much different and often approach advertising similar to the "testing" laboratory trying to be rationale and unwilling to

take into account the emotional part of the equation. (It is interesting to note here that the famous Apple Macintosh 1984 Superbowl television commercial was quantitatively researched among hundreds of consumers and found to be a highly inferior piece of communication. It was tested via ASI (Audience Surveys Inc) and received the lowest score *ever* recorded at the time for a business-to-business television spot. The enormous success of the Macintosh the day after the commercial actually ran is well documented.)

Michael Crete, the other California Cooler founder, was a staunch believer in the strategic insight that had been identified and he absolutely loved the “Hate” advertising idea as well. After much nail biting by Bewley and others, and much more dialogue, Crete prevailed and the campaign went on the air. Michael and Stewart had spent millions of dollars on the previous ads with nothing to show for it except a diluted bank account. Awareness of the product remained low, as did trial. What was needed was to raise awareness and stimulate trial. And “One More Reason To Hate California” did just that driving both up dramatically and doubling sales in a very short period of time.

The initial television ads took a confident leadership stance and capitalized on mainstream beer imagery while reinforcing the relaxed, informal, social and fun aspects of the beer drinking experience. It was awareness generating because it was new and fresh and fun; and it was trial oriented because it invited tasting the next neat and cool thing from California. By using California as a branding device it preempted the competition and defined the entire category as the California Cooler brand itself.

The campaign successfully contrasted the east coast urban ethic realism with California permissiveness. Just about everyone east of Lake Tahoe had some California envy and these ads tapped into it. It was a real understanding of some of the cultural aspects of living in

California and what that meant to people across the country. It didn’t hurt either that it positively reinforced the feelings of Californian’s about why they chose to live there in the first place. It was an immense success. “Gutter checks” at parks and parking lots was but one measure whereby empty California Cooler bottles were found among empty beer cans and bottles. There was a very low incidence of wine bottles in the vicinity. Total California Cooler case sales grew exponentially.

Proving again there are huge benefits in finding a strategic insight and coupling it with a fresh conceptual idea. And when this combination anticipates and motivates the potential customer it can be stronger still. Add to the recipe the ingredient of understanding the cultural dynamics taking place around us and in society, the results can be Brobdingnagian. It is that result of apprehending the inner nature of things and of seeing intuitively; spotting a neoteric idea that grasps, comprehends and internalizes what may be obscure to others. Those are the ideas that people will too often reject.

It should be obvious that advertising plays an important binary role in our society. On the one hand it helps fashion the prevailing thinking, attitudes and belief systems as to how we think about things be they products, services or issues. On the other hand it can draw from aspects of the culture itself and the society at large in the creation of the concepts that become the advertising. It is a symbiotic relationship. Advertising feeding people with information that shapes the culture and at other times drawing from the popular culture to create the concepts that in turn mold the culture. And so on....

Fred Goldberg is the former CEO of Goldberg Moser O’Neill, a San Francisco advertising agency.