

The Perfect Campaign

Posted on

Good-bye to flop-campaigns, good-bye to lost revenues. Muhamed Muneer enumerates on his 'Ten Commandments' to create that perfect ad campaign.

After running the 'Clove- oil' advertisement of Promise Toothpaste successfully for more than a couple of years, Balsara Hygiene Products (India) decided to change the ad copy. They came out with a new campaign stressing the 'extra freshness' angle of their dental cream. Unfortunately, it bombed, plunging the No 2 toothpaste brand in India to No 3 position, after Colgate and Close Up. The whole episode costed the company millions of rupees in lost revenues and ad promotion expenses.

Some years back, ANZ Grindlays Bank launched a revolutionary ad campaign featuring leisure locations in color. It was indeed revolutionary for a bank to go for such a kind of advertising which would have suited a hotel or resort better. The copy gave very subtle hints about the services the bank offered. The campaign obviously was much ahead of its time and so failed to make any impact.

Grindlays withdrew these ads after spending millions of rupees unnecessarily.

These are just two cases in a series of never-ending flop campaigns that occur from time to time. Time and again, advertisers and their agencies seem to fall into a series of common traps when making decisions that involve marketing, media and creative strategies. Often, they result in millions of rupees in wasted efforts. Yet, almost all of them can be easily avoided.

Most of the things that happen in the advertising business are predictable, and a careful analysis of available research and case histories can uncover solutions to problems, which many professionals try to solve intuitively. Most often their intuition is wrong.

During the course of my consultancy and marketing experience, I have noticed a number of oft-repeated blunders that haunt the advertiser and the agency. Given below are ten commandments, which if adhered to would help advertisers make perfect campaigns.

Find out if your product delivers what it promises.

In order to make waves in the market place and to taste the sweetness of success, a product must live up to its positioning promise. Advertising guru David Ogilvy puts it in a different way: 'the consumer is no moron ... she is your wife.'

Noble Soya House marketed their Great Shake as a cold beverage of great taste (The ad copy said: 'Just one sip will get your toes tapping') when it was launched. Their target market was the westernized teenage group and so they suppressed the soya product story. The product flopped badly, simply because it could not live up to the promise it made.

Consumers just hated the bitter after-taste of soya milk. Even after repositioning it in new markets as a nutrition-based drink, it did not do any better.



Years of goodwill generated through the baby food market prompted Glaxo to launch a baby powder, positioned against the undisputed market leader Johnson & Johnson. Glaxo assumed that mothers would extend their trust to this product as well. Thus came out Glaxo Tender Tale. Everything about this product was good except one. The ad pitch was based solely on the Glaxo name and its aura of trust. Unfortunately for them, mothers trusted Johnson &

Johnson more for their baby's outside care! The brand extension just did not work because Glaxo Tender Tale failed to deliver that trust.

In a similar fashion, Aramusk a premium soap for men, was launched by Shaw Wallace (India) way back in 1985, positioning it as an exclusive and expensive soap for men. As ill-luck would have it, most consumers felt that the product was too exclusive and too expensive. They just could not identify with the advertising. Also, the largest group of triers, men of 20- 30 years age, just shied away from the soap, forcing Shaw Wallace to withdraw the ad. The product simply failed to be compatible with the promise it sought to deliver.

Many banks advertise that they are anxious to give loans, but of ten the truth is that they are anxious to give them only to people

who really don't need them and aren't anxious to have them. Hence, most bank advertising lacks credibility.

In short, before you go ahead with a campaign, decide on whether your product is capable of delivering the positioning promise.

Set attainable objectives.

The important thing to understand about setting advertising objectives is that most advertisers do not set sensible ones. But then these same advertisers are not sure if their advertising is paying off either. If you ask them how their campaign is doing you get answers like, 'all of our people like it very much' or 'It's a bit early to tell, but we think it's going to be very successful.'

The truth is that if you are spending Rs 1 lakh or Rs 1 billion, you ought to be able to tell with a much greater degree of accuracy

what it is doing for you, or you shouldn't be spending it. To do this, you need parameters that can be measured, such as increasing advertising objectives with

specific goals, share of mind or brand awareness.

Advertising campaigns are in one sense like military campaigns. In a military campaign, you set an objective like 'March through McMohan line," Then you know when the campaign is over, whether you have won or lost. Successful advertising campaigns have the same kind of criteria. They start with objectives, so you can tell how the campaign is going and whether you are winning or losing. So, perfect campaigns insist on an attainable objective as a prerequisite.

Measure utility before price.

One real question to ask while producing advertisements is how much is the utility I am going to get from this really worth?' It is foolish for a retailer to spend lakhs of rupees producing a TV spot for a Christmas sales if the spot is only going to run on a local channel in one market. In most cases, he cannot possibly sell enough merchandise to justify that kind of expenditure. But it is equally foolish to try to sell someone a Rs 4.6 lakhs car or a Rs 15,000 vacation package with a brochure that costs a few rupees a copy. There are times when utility is a function of price.

An example of this is magazine coupons offering special cash discounts on purchases. Coupons in color are perceived as being more valuable and almost always achieve a higher redemption rate.

By paying greater attention to the work that has already been done by other advertisers, a lot of blunders can be averted. In almost all such cases, there is a lot of information available to guide the decision-making process. But most of us are too busy to look for it. Or we tend to think that we know the answers because we have been doing it for years, or that it is a matter of judgement. It may have been a matter of judgement at one time, but not today. That is what separates good advertisers from bad ones.

Base budgets on objective task formula.

Most advertisers still set their advertising budgets using a percentage of either present sales or projected sales. This method puts the cart before the horse and postulates that advertising is the result of sales, when infact it is the cause of sales. It leads to an appropriation based on the availability of funds rather than problems and opportunities. This can be a costly error. Allwyn (India) learned this fact very late. Today, this company has been bought out twice!

A second popular method is to base advertising appropriations on industry figures. For instance, you might use 1% of revenue if you were advertising refrigerators because that is what the industry average is. But industry averages may have no meaning in your own situation. By using them, you tend to forget your own objectives.

Instead of using industry average figures, some companies use their competitor's advertising expenditure as a guide. 'If they are spending Rs 4 crore, then we ought to spend Rs 4 crore too, or may be even a little more to be safe', so went the planning of a leading refrigerator manufacturer. But you are assuming here, among other things, that your competitor knows what he is doing and he may not.

There are several other methods as well, but the one that has the most support behind it in the professional and academic community is the objective-task method. In this method, you look at the objectives you have set for yourself, decide what needs to be done to accomplish those objectives, and then price it out. One should admire Procter & Gamble (India) for sticking to this formula, evident in their spending of several crores of rupees in building the Ariel brand.

Surprisingly enough, if your objectives are reasonable and attainable, the budget you arrive at by this method may more or less approximate the budget that other methods might suggest.

Recognize advertising opportunities.

Sometimes it helps to know a little economic theory, like grasping the basic concept of elasticity of demand. This describes the degree of response by consumers to changes in a product's price. For instance, the more essential a product is, the more inelastic the demand tends to be. That is, if the cost of rice went up by Rs 5 a kg, people would probably not stop buying it. However, if Double Horse Rice went up by Rs 5 a kg, people might switch to Elite Rice,

and if all rice rose by Rs 10 a kg, many people might shift to wheat or other staple foods.

Elasticity of demand is important to understand, because if the demand for a product or service is elastic, and prices can be lowered, as in the case of fans and refrigerators where seasonal discounts attract many new customers, then a real advertising opportunity can exist. This is also the case when a retailer can get

special promotional price from a manufacturer and pass it on to consumers. But too often, advertisers assume an elasticity that doesn't exist and then lowering the price and advertising has the same overall effect as if the prices had been maintained.

Base your actions on valid research.

Even the most experienced marketers have been misled at times by poor research. A few years ago, a major company in the household cleaning products business was steadily losing shares of market to a competitor. In a study, one factor that seemed to make women prefer the competitor's brand was the fragrance. Women, when asked, consistently said the competitor's brand 'smelled better.'

The company proceeded to develop a fragrance which in blindfold tests clearly 'won' over the competitor's. Women definitely preferred it. The new fragrance was put into the product and a new advertising campaign was launched. The sales continued the same downtrend.

The company went back and did some more research. Women did indeed like the smell of their brand 'better' than that of the competitor's. But the product was a household cleaning formula. It was supposed to be strong stuff. And the competitor's brand had a strong, unpleasant odor. To users, that meant more cleaning power. Research had turned up the right answer to the wrong question. The question should have been 'Which product smells like it would clean better?' and not as was originally asked, "Which product smells better?"

Similar invalid research was the catalyst to speed up the death of ICI's Savlon antiseptic liquid. In the laboratory, Savlon was proved more effective against germs than Dettol. This helped Savlon command a leadership position in the institutional markets like hospitals.

Gaining confidence from this, ICI went ahead with the campaign, launching Savlon to the household market in direct confrontation with Dettol. The other antiseptic (meaning Dettol) kills only the gram-positive germs while Savlon kills both gram-positive and gram-negative germs-so went the launch campaign. Sadly, ICI did not recognize that semi- clinical messages such as this one holds no water with housewives. Savlon bombed miserably. If they had done their research right, they would have found that Savlon does not sting, it lathers well, it does not discolor like Dettol when mixed with water, it does not have Dettol's obtrusive smell, etc. Then,

they could have positioned it in many different ways.

The case of 'Ms' cigarettes by GTC is no different. However, the invalidity of their research for the first cigarette for women helped them with a valid research for low-nicotine cigarette 'Legend.'

Products are frequently launched and advertising campaigns are rolled out based on the right answers to the wrong questions. Be sure your questions are right before you make judgments based on your answers.

Put message before the medium.

A good media plan should stem from a knowledge of the creative strategy. Too often, it happens the other way around. Advertising is a form of communication and, as in any communication, you ought to base the decision of the form the message will take, on what is to be communicated. For example, you might use the telephone to invite keeps me fresh all day the way I love to stay. someone to a party. But that same telephone would be an inappropriate medium if you wanted to fire someone. A formal letter would be better.

A company in recent times that has blended their creative copy perfectly with the medium is JK Chemicals (India) for their Kamasutra (KS) condoms. The ads pitched on sex and the media was selected only after the creative strategy had been decided. Today, apart from magazines and TV, they are going in for a collaborative advertising with the Malayalam translation of Harold Robbins' 'Lonely Lady'. The Malayalam book will carry KS advertisements throughout the book, and KS models will appear even on the front and back covers.

What other perfect blends can you think of for a condom marketer pitching on the sex angle, other than with the world's best selling author writing predominantly on money, power and sex? Earlier, KS had tied up with 'Debonair' also.

Every time I come across a radio or TV spot giving a telephone number to call or an address I need to write to for something, it occurs to me that it came from an agency or advertiser who planned the medium first and the message second. Those kinds of messages need to be in print to work best.

To have successful campaigns, you need to have your creative message before you plan on the medium of advertising.

Consider advertising's cumulative effect.

Many advertisers, in setting print schedules especially, (where they are less likely to think in terms of reach and frequency), fail to consider the cumulative effects of advertising exposure. One swallow doesn't make a spring and one insertion doesn't make a campaign.

Make sure that when you plan your perfect campaign, you run your ads at least till they get noticed. Yankee Doodle succeeded in launching their ice creams with very low expenses. They released their campaign in winter with a series of ads. Since very few ice cream ads appear in winter, they took off royally by grabbing much attention.

According to a US study, eight insertions (once a week) doubled the number of triers that four insertions produced, but that effect stopped when the ads stopped. Fifteen insertions produced the most triers per ad dollar invested. Clearly, once is not enough.

Use media correctly.

There is a lot of research available as to what works on TV, what works in print and so on. But many advertisers either ignore it or never bother to find out. For instance, some advertisers have very definite beliefs about what are the best days to run advertising in newspapers, but those are always the wrong beliefs. There is a lot of evidence to show that advertising that is run on the days with the least amount of other ads receives the highest readership. Not as popularly believed about Sundays being the best days.

Studies in this respect support the aforementioned viewpoint. One leading newspaper did a survey of their readers and was astonished to find that their best lineage days produced the lowest readership. So, if an advertiser persists in bunching up his ads during Sundays or some other 'popular' day it might result in his receiving a lower return for each advertising rupee invested.

Similarly, other advertisers demand certain positions in newspapers despite the fact that most studies show that ads on the right hand page score as well as those on the left. Ads above the fold do as well as those below the fold, and outside ads fare as well as those printed next to the gutter. Creativity is what really makes the difference. A good ad can outpull a bad one, as much as two times, even if the

position, size, and day of the week are all exactly the same.

Expect advertising not to do the whole job.

Too often, advertisers expect advertising to do the whole selling job. This is obvious if you read their marketing plan which identifies advertising as 'increasing sales.' And yet, with the exception of direct response advertising, advertising almost never directly sells goods. The sale is completed in a store or a showroom. Displays, competitive pricing, the salesmen, and the dealer location among other things almost always affect the effectiveness of your program. Many good campaigns fail because someone expected the advertising to make the sale.

The next time you plan to launch a new campaign, make it a perfect one with the aid of these ten commandments. When you do so you're bound to savor the taste of success for a long time.



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