

SURPRISE! NARRATIVE ADS WORK BETTER

Large companies will go on wasting billions of dollars on ineffective abstract advertising, despite the publication of an intensive three-year study by the Advertising Research Foundation and American Association of Advertising Agencies confirming what most readers of this newsletter already know: narrative ads have more impact. To find out why, read here

That's what discerning observers see as the likely response to the study entitled ***On the Road to a New Effectiveness Model*** which was published last month. It is comprehensive and authoritative. It set out to measure consumers' emotional responses to TV advertising. It examined the impact of ***thirty-three ads across 12 categories***—from brands like Budweiser, Campbell's Soup and MasterCard—were analyzed by ***14 leading emotion and physiological research firms***. The research tools included testing heart rate and skin conductance of the ad viewer to brain diagnostics.

The main findings were:

- Ads that tell a branding story (e.g. a Mastercard ad showing a father taking his son to a baseball game) work better than ads that focus on product positioning.
- Not all narrative ads work.
 - Ads where the narrative is unimaginative and boring don't work (e.g. A United Airlines spot that showed an emotional story of a businessman returning home)
- Ads where the narrative ties in with the brand work better than ads that don't.
- Narrative ads where the audience got involved in the story (e.g. Budweiser's "Whassup" campaign) worked better than ads where the audience remained passive, (e.g. Miller Lite low-carb ads that essentially just said, "We're better than the other guys.")
- Narrative humor could be effective. Eighty-four percent of respondents said the humor worked well in Southwest Airlines' "Want to get away" ads such as a woman accidentally destroying a man's medicine cabinet while snooping.
- Ads where the narrative is distracting don't work. For instance, a Nissan didn't work: at the outset, it seems as though a couple is talking about sex, but in fact they are talking about the car. The audience however never made the transition, having reacted negatively to the conversation about sex.
- Ultimately story-telling ads generate effectiveness by engagement, rather than by repetition or tonnage.

NO SURPRISE! AD INDUSTRY UNLIKELY TO CHANGE ITS WAYS

Will the industry take note and change its ways? Apparently not. Vanessa Facenda writes in BrandWeek: "The report contends that in many ways, advertising is stuck in the past. The 20th

century was dominated by a one-way transactional focus where ads were pushed at consumers. Today, consumers interact with ads to 'co-create' meaning that is powered by emotion and rich narrative. "Advertising has been standing on the sidelines, stuck on the language of positioning," said Randall Ringer, managing director and co-founder, Verse Group, New York. 'Telling a story about the brand is more engaging, memorable and compelling than telling a bunch of facts. What worked 30 years ago with a 30-second spot doesn't work today.'

As a result, discerning observers doubt whether the study will have much impact on practices in the ad industry which is addicted to positioning ads. For instance, Mark Truss, director of brand intelligence at JWT, New York, notes that the storytelling theory is correct, but the industry still has a pretext not to change their ways: the study does not calculate the ROI of the ads for their marketers. "Without the tools to measure and link back to business metrics," says Truss, "marketers and advertisers are not going to embrace [this approach]." As a result, billions of dollars will continue to be wasted. On abstract positioning ads.

Is this result in any way unexpected? Absolutely not. As shown in *The Secret Language Of Leadership*, bad habits die hard, even in the face of strong analytic evidence to the contrary. Studies by themselves don't lead to action. Action will only happen when the findings of the study are communicated in a story.

To read Vanessa Facenda's article, go here

http://www.brandweek.com/bw/news/recent_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003664559