



The SMMarT Guy

Emotional Persuaders

By Kim Robinson

“People notice things that interest them. Sometimes it’s an ad.” So said advertising legend Howard Gossage, a giant in the field in the 1950s and ’60s, when radio and television (still fairly new) offered the only electronic advertising. He made this statement in response to his perceived need for the advertising industry to quit using the same formula of saying *here we are and this is what we offer*, and instead, to think and act differently. He contended that an advertisement that was different and creative, and well...*interesting*, would do a much better job of capturing the public’s attention than one that simply featured a bombshell model or Hollywood star.

He was right.

The task marketers now face to create advertisements that “interest people” is much more difficult now than during Gossage’s heyday. Back then, the average person was subjected to around a thousand marketing messages a day. Today, it’s at least three times that number—or more—which, due to the explosion of electronic media, creates an exponential rise in difficulty to getting

ads noticed and *remembered*.

The key to creating memorable ads is to push people’s emotional buttons with what I call *emotional persuaders*. These five persuaders are:

Humor (Make me laugh to think well of your product.)

Love (Sex and/or being sexy are linked to your product.)

Torment (Scare me to your product.)

Intelligence (If I’m smart, then I’m smart enough to buy your product.)

Stupidity (Dumb ads that I remember just because they’re dumb.)

Some companies successfully combine two or more persuaders to make their ads truly memorable. A good example was Mr. Whipple, the fastidious little grocer who starred in a long-running TV advertisement for a specific brand of toilet paper. (If you recognize the name Mr. Whipple, then I’ll bet you remember the name of “his” toilet paper.) Many people thought he was funny (the humor button), but I thought the whole concept of a grocer yelling at women for squeezing toilet paper to be just plain stupid (the stupidity button). Regardless the reason, both those who thought him funny and those of us

quit smoking. How romantic.

The torment button and the insurance industry were made for each other. Scaring people to get them to protect their loved ones with life insurance is how the industry creates need for its products. The need is real, so the industry uses fear to *persuade* people to buy their product. On TV today: *Bill never thought of life insurance until his brother DIED and his family was left penniless*. Yikes!

The stupidity button is used to sell a lot of products and services and, to me, one of the most stupid current ones is for an external roll-on headache remedy. I hate the ad, but I remember it perfectly, so I’ll probably buy the product the next time I have a terrible headache.

It is critical to keep in mind that being clever and pushing emotional buttons to get your ad noticed and remembered are useless if people only remember the ad and not the product. I had to see at least 50 funny Geico ads before I remembered the product and not just the joke. That was a lot of money spent pushing my humor button before I remembered the product.

The best TV ad campaign in recent memory was the one for Holiday Inn Express. Each ad showed someone doing something serious—like performing surgery—and at a critical part of the operation it would come out that the “surgeon’s” only qualification for being there was that he spent the night previous in a Holiday Inn Express. “I’m not really a surgeon, but I did spend the night last night in a Holiday Inn Express.” The spots were ridiculous, absurd, and often very funny. And, the entire campaign was absolutely brilliant because the name of the product was the punch line to the joke, so it was impossible to remember one without the other. Fabulous.

But, now I’m getting a headache from writing. Maybe I should buy that roll-on product. ■

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COME AND GET IT!

who thought him insultingly stupid, still remember his name and his famous line, the name of

his product, and the benefit message to the end user (no pun intended) —even though the ad has not run for almost 10 years! Funny or stupid, that ad was memorable, and therefore, effective.

A few examples of emotional buttons pushed to sell products are:

The love button was used to sell cigarettes. When I was in high school, a TV ad that drove me and my girlfriend to buy L & M brand cigarettes showed a young, beautiful couple canoodling while romantic music played over the lyrics: *L & M, the cigarette just for the two of you*. Oh yeah. We were in love so we bought L & Ms. Our “love” only lasted through high school, but it took me 20 years to

