

12.4: Executional Frameworks - How Ads Generate Relevance

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this section, students should be able to do the following:

1. *Compare* and *contrast* the five types of executional frameworks.
2. *Characterize* “star power” and its usefulness to advertising.

An **executional framework** defines how the ad is structured. Executional frameworks get your interest, create the desire for the good or service, and motivate you to purchase it. Let’s look at five types of executional frameworks.

Lifestyle Framework

A **lifestyle framework** shows how the product fits into your life. For example, the “Denny’s Always Works” campaign emphasizes that the nation’s largest full-service family restaurant chain is open twenty-four hours and has a variety of meal choices that meet a range of unique dining needs. Each TV commercial opens with a consumer describing why Denny’s fits perfectly into his or her life. The ads are shot on a striking yellow background with simple, fun animation that accents what the person is saying. An actor portraying a Denny’s guest customer speaks, and then the spot closes with a close-up of delicious food footage. To show different lifestyles, one of the fifteen-second spots opens on a frazzled mom who is amazed that Denny’s breakfasts can fill up even her teenaged boys. “I didn’t think that was possible,” she says. Another fifteen-second spot features a young twenty-something guy saying how Denny’s extends his late night fun, because after the club scene winds down he can still get great food at Denny’s.

Scientific Framework

A **scientific framework** uses research and evidence to show the brand’s superiority over other brands. This executional style is popular with pharmaceuticals or with food products or beauty products that distinguish themselves in terms of their health benefits. For example, when the German pharmaceuticals maker Beiersdorf relaunched its Nivea Baby line of skin care products in Europe, it put a greater emphasis on the line’s extensive dermatological testing. “Clinical tests have always been a standard in the development of Nivea Baby products,” said Ingo Hahn, Beiersdorf’s lab manager for skin care product development. “However, with rising expectations of parents regarding product safety and skin compatibility in baby care, we decided to put more emphasis on this fact with the brand relaunch in 2005, providing our consumers with even more insights in the extremely high standards of the Nivea Baby product safety policy.”

Dig Deeper

Drug makers spend \$30 billion per year on marketing in the United States—triple what they spent just a decade ago. Are the numerous drug commercials of “shiny, happy people” we constantly see on TV too emotional and not factual enough? The U.S. Food and Drug Administration suspects they are, and it plans to produce commercials for a make-believe blood-pressure medicine to test whether images in ads distract attention from required safety warnings. The FDA frequently issues warnings to pharmaceutical advertisers about ads that it says mislead consumers to believe that drugs are safer or work better than the evidence supports. Advertisers use a variety of techniques to convey the mandatory information about their products’ dangers. These range from recitations by actors dressed as doctors to the phrases that stream across an animated blue landscape in a commercial for Pfizer’s painkiller Celebrex. In a large-scale online study involving several thousand respondents, the FDA plans to create a number of ads for the fictitious medications that include different images and text on the screen while a narrator reads the risk information. Some of the visuals will focus on the benefits of the drug, to see if that diverts attention from the safety warnings.

Spokesperson/Testimonial

Using a **spokesperson/testimonial framework**, a “man on the street” or a celebrity praises the product or service. The spokesperson who endorses the product need not be famous. A **testimonial** features an everyday consumer to whom the target audience can relate. This representative consumer praises the product or describes his experience with it. The framework implies that if the product worked for *this* person, it will work for you.

Star Power

In the case of the celebrity, the reasoning is that if a famous person believes the product is good, you can believe it, too. For the advertising to be effective, however, the tie between the product and the celebrity should be clear. When Louis Vuitton featured

Mikhail Gorbachev in an ad in *Vogue*, the tie was not clear. Why would the association with the former Soviet leader who brought an end to Communism motivate a consumer to buy a luxury brand bag?

This framework is effective because celebrities embody *cultural meanings*—they symbolize important categories such as status and social class (a “working-class hero,” such as Peter Griffin on *Family Guy*), gender (a “tough woman,” such as Nancy on *Weeds*), or personality types (the nerdy but earnest Hiro on *Heroes*). Ideally, the advertiser decides what meanings the product should convey (that is, how it should position the item in the marketplace) and then chooses a celebrity who embodies a similar meaning. The product’s meaning thus moves from the manufacturer to the consumer, using the star as a vehicle.

For celebrity campaigns to be effective, the endorser must have a clear and popular image. In addition, the celebrity’s image and that of the product he or she endorses should be similar—researchers refer to this as the **match-up hypothesis**. A market research company developed one widely used measure called the *Q-score* (Q stands for quality) to decide if a celebrity will make a good endorser. The score includes level of familiarity with a name and the number of respondents who indicate that a person, program, or character is a favorite.

A good match-up is crucial; fame alone doesn’t work if people know someone but dislike him. The celebrity may bring the brand visibility, but that visibility can be overshadowed by controversy that the spokesperson can generate. That’s a lesson MasterCard learned when it hired Nick Lachey for its “Major League Dreams” promotion. Shortly before the launch of the campaign, nude photos of Lachey and his girlfriend, Vanessa Minnillo, surfaced. The buzz surrounding the photos and Lachey’s refusal to talk about them during an interview completely overshadowed the MasterCard brand and promotion. It also helps when your spokesperson actually uses the product. The Beef Board faced negative publicity when its spokesperson, Cybill Shepherd, admitted she did not like to eat beef.

Because consumers tend to view the brand through the lens of its spokesperson, an advertiser can’t choose an endorser just based on a whim (or the person’s good looks). Consider Tupperware, which decided to mount an advertising campaign to support its traditional word-of-mouth and Tupperware party promotional strategies. The brand is sixty years old and harkens back to 1950s-style June Cleaver moms. In its attempt to stay relevant and up-to-date, the company looked for a modern image of the working mom. Rather than going with a spokesperson like Martha Stewart, who would reinforce the old image of Tupperware, the company chose Brooke Shields as their spokesperson. “We’ve seen her go from a model to an actress to a Princeton graduate...then be open with issues she’s had with depression,” said Tupperware Chairman-CEO Rick Goings. That, he said, meshed perfectly with the company’s new “Chain of Confidence” campaign, which is dedicated to building the self-esteem of women and girls.

Dig Deeper

In the “old days,” a celebrity got paid to endorse an advertiser’s product. Today, it’s quite possible she got a piece of the company instead. Increasingly, stars insist on greater involvement with the brands they hawk. Rapper 50 Cent owned part of Energy Brands Inc., the maker of Vitaminwater, before Coca-Cola bought the company for a lot of money. He personally endorsed a drink called Formula 50 that the company named after him.

Ellen DeGeneres endorses Halo pet products—but this celebrity pet fanatic (she has two dogs and three cats) also owns about 15 percent of the company. As one of the executives involved with the company explained, “Most people see an awful lot of endorsements where there is no real connection between the celebrity and product. We wanted someone who would help get the Halo brand on the map and make us known to a broader audience.” DeGeneres agrees: “Me being famous will help this company grow.”

Should a spokesperson be required to divulge a financial interest in a company she endorses?

Spokescharacters

Celebrities can be effective endorsers, but there are drawbacks to using them. As we previously noted, their motives may be suspect if they plug products that don’t fit their images or if consumers begin to see them as never having met a product they didn’t like (for a fee). They may be involved in a scandal or upset customers, as when the Milk Processor Education Program suspended “Got Milk?” ads featuring Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen after Mary-Kate entered a treatment facility for an undisclosed health issue.

For these reasons some marketers seek alternative sources, including cartoon characters and mascots. After all, as the marketing director for a company that manufactures costumed characters for sports teams and businesses points out, “You don’t have to worry about your mascot checking into rehab.” And researchers report that spokescharacters like the Pillsbury Doughboy, Chester the Cheetah, and the Snuggle Bear do in fact boost viewers’ recall of claims that ads make and also yield higher brand attitude.

In the early days of advertising, product spokescharacters were simply still-life visuals, but the decreasing cost and increased power of computing has made animation much easier. Claymation California Raisins sing and dance, and the bald, muscular Mr. Clean comes to the rescue of a housewife in distress.

An avatar is an increasingly popular alternative to flesh-and-blood endorsers. This word is a Hindu term for a deity that appears in superhuman or animal form. In the computing world it means a character you can move around inside a visual, graphical world. Now, some advertisers turn to avatars that can come to life on Web sites and in virtual worlds like Second Life. The advantages of virtual avatars compared to flesh-and-blood people include the ability to change the avatar in real time to suit the needs of the target audience.

Demonstration

A **demonstration framework** shows the product in use to illustrate its performance and effectiveness. Television and video are the best media for demonstrations. This framework is a favorite for cleaning products of all kinds (household, laundry, automotive) and to showcase the unique benefits of traditional products. Just think about all those crazy gadgets you see on TV infomercials—“It slices, it dices, it washes your car...”

A new format for a traditional product also benefits from demonstration, such as the headache medicine HeadOn. This product’s advertising includes demonstration and (seemingly endless?) repetition of the slogan: “HeadOn, Apply direct to the forehead.” From a creative standpoint, the execution is mundane and campy, but someone is buying this stuff: the commercials have more than doubled sales.

Slice-of-Life Framework

A **slice-of-life framework** presents everyday people in an everyday situation, like riding in a car with friends. Wal-Mart used this kind of execution in a commercial that showed a young family going on vacation. The bored kids torment each other in the minivan until they finally arrive in Orlando. The title card then explains what you’ve seen: “Wal-Mart saves the average family \$2,500 a year. What will you do with your savings?” The value proposition is clear: shopping at Wal-Mart throughout the year will save you enough money for a vacation. The spot ends with the slogan: “Save money. Live better.”

Andrea Learned, coauthor of the book *Don’t Think Pink: What Really Makes Women Buy* has found that when selling cars to women, slice-of-life frameworks are the most effective. The best car ads show average looking women and men in slice-of-life situations. “Women respond when an advertiser fits the car into consumers’ lifestyles instead of putting it on a sporty pedestal with overly gorgeous models,” she explained.

Key Takaway

An executional framework defines how the ad is structured. Like advertising appeals, different frameworks are appropriate to different advertising contexts. These include lifestyle, scientific, testimonial, demonstration, and slice-of-life.

EXERCISES

1. List and briefly characterize the five executional frameworks that provide an advertisement’s structure.
2. Describe why “star power” is important to the advertiser.
3. Explain how an avatar can be used to connect with a target audience.

This page titled [12.4: Executional Frameworks - How Ads Generate Relevance](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Anonymous](#).