

12.2: Keys to Superior Advertising

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

1. *Define* relevance and resonance.
2. *Explain* why having an emotional connection is the common denominator for most successful ads.
3. *List and describe* the five factors that constitute an ad's likeability.

The keys to superior advertising are *resonance* and *relevance*. A great ad makes a deep impression that reverberates inside you and stays with you, while it creates a bond between you and the product. "Just do it."

Relevance and Resonance

Relevance is the extent to which the images, ideas, concepts, and advertised product attributes overlap with the target's needs, wants, values, context, or situation. **Resonance** is the extent to which these images, ideas, concepts, and advertised product attributes connect more deeply in the target's heart and mind. Let's look at a few examples of how the two factors work together and then dig into more detail about how exactly to make a message sell.

Example: Household Challenge Meets Household Humor

Say your client is a bank that wants to promote its home mortgage product—an especially tough proposition in this era of foreclosures and banking scandals. The objective of the message is to show that your mortgage terms won't be as burdensome as the competition's. How can you get this message across? It's not the sexiest idea in the world, but then again, saving money does turn a lot of people on.

Ad agency Hall Moore CHI faced this challenge with its client NatWest, a British bank. Art director Richard Megson and copywriter Matthew Davis worked together to create an animated TV ad that showed a man struggling under the weight of a huge mortgage. He threw his burden into a washing machine and shrank it to manageable size. The message was simple and clear—the idea of shrinking a huge mortgage was appealing and relevant to the target audience of homeowners. This execution delivers both relevance with its image of a large mortgage (as many consumers struggle with these today) and resonance as it graphically depicts the tempting process of shrinking one's debt in the wash. If only it were that easy in real life!

Example: The Resonance of Personal Stories

Now let's consider Adidas' "Impossible Is Nothing" campaign. The campaign originally launched in 2004 to coincide with the Olympics. Ads featured great athletes of the day in clever integration with great athletes of the past. The visuals made it seem as though the athletes were interacting across the ages. For example, in the ad "Laila," boxing great Muhammad Ali goes into the ring with his boxer daughter, Laila Ali. The two spar and Laila eventually lands a punch that sends her dad backwards into the ropes. The film of Muhammad was culled from two of his fights from the 1960s, while Laila was shot in front of a blue screen so the two images could appear together. Although the athletes and the special effects were fun to watch, they were not driving home the message because, ironically, the events depicted in the "Impossible Is Nothing" ads *were* impossible. The impossible was made possible only via an optical illusion, and that didn't resonate with the audience.

Fast-forward to 2007. This time, Adidas found a better way to express the idea of doing the impossible. Its new ads featured personal stories from athletes, both famous (David Beckham) and not so famous (Boston Marathon runner Kathryn Smolen). In the spots its agency 180 Amsterdam/TBWA created, the athletes told true stories of challenges that they had overcome—their own "impossible." For Olympic swimming superstar Ian Thorpe, the challenge was an allergy to chlorine—an allergy that sidelined him until he gradually overcame it.

The athletes hand-draw a picture as they talk. The simple drawings are primitive; they remind us of childhood and thus echo the storyline. For example, twenty-two-year-old American sprinter Allyson Felix draws herself as a stick figure with legs that look like ski poles as she explains that kids taunted her with the name "chicken legs" when she started out as a little kid playing basketball. Later, she says, "I came out for the track team and kind of wanted to prove everybody wrong." Next we see her as she wins an Olympic medal. "People putting you down can drive you to do things you didn't even think you could do yourself," she proclaims. Although the drawings are animated by artists at Passion Pictures, the feeling is personal and human. As Jason Oke of ad agency

Leo Burnett Toronto commented, “After watching these I get inspired and I actually get what it means to attempt something that everyone else thinks you can’t do.”

Just as an ad can resonate with a person, elements of an ad ideally work together to reinforce each other as the childhood stories and drawings of the Adidas campaign did. Another example is an ad for a diet strawberry cheesecake that pairs the luscious image of the cake with the words “berried treasure,” to evoke the connotation of hidden delights and richness that lies inside. The play on words requires some thought, which rewards viewers with satisfaction when they “get it” and strengthens the connection among all the elements—words, images, product, brand, and meaning.

Emotion, the Common Denominator

The common denominator among the most successful ads is that they create an *emotional connection* with the brand. They appeal to the heart, not just the mind.

Video Highlight

Zales: Greatest Marriage Proposal Ever

This Zales commercial uses an emotional appeal to sell its celebration diamond.



A large-scale study that analyzed award-winning campaigns found that the most effective ones focus on emotional, rather than rational, appeals. What’s more, the Gallup organization reports that customers who are “passionate” about a brand deliver two times the profitability of average customers.

We simply can’t take the emotional contact a company has with customers and the emotional impact of its brand for granted. For example, Procter & Gamble traditionally advertised its Pampers diapers on the basis of their performance in keeping baby dry. But, as Jim Stengel (recently retired), chief marketing officer at Procter & Gamble, said, “Our baby-care business didn’t start growing aggressively [in the early 2000s] until we changed Pampers from being about dryness to being about helping Mom with her baby’s development. That was a sea change.” The lesson: wrap your practical products with an offer that appeals to emotions. People are more loyal to brands they “feel,” not just those they think about.

Of course, not all brands necessarily bring a tear to the eye—the point is to figure out just how the brand resonates with its audience and to develop messages that reinforce this relationship. One well-known branding consultant argues that there are three ways a brand can resonate: it can hit you in the head, the heart, or the gut:

- Aveda hits the consumer in the head. The brand is smart, intriguing, and stimulating.
- Godiva hits the consumer in the heart. The brand is sensual, beloved, and trusted.
- Prada hits the consumer in the gut. The brand is sexy and cool, and you “have to have it.”

What Makes an Ad Work: It's Like, Likeability

A large-scale study of prime-time commercials found that the **likeability** of a commercial was the best single predictor of its sales effectiveness. The author noted that “consumers first form an overall impression of an advertisement on a visceral or ‘gut’ level. To the extent that this impression is positive they are likely to continue to process the advertising more fully.”

He found five factors that constitute an ad's likeability:

1. Ingenuity—clever, imaginative, original, silly, and not dull
2. Meaningfulness—worth remembering, effective, not pointless, not easy to forget, true to life, convincing, informative, and believable
3. Energy—lively, fast moving, appealing, and well done
4. Warmth—gentle, warm, and sensitive
5. Does not rub the wrong way—not worn out, not phony, and not irritating

So, at the end of the day, no matter how you do it, you want people to like your ads. That sounds like a “no-brainer,” though many advertising messages don't achieve this simple objective. Why is it so important that people like your ad?

- Likeable commercials are less likely to be avoided (zapped).
- Likeability is the “gatekeeper” to further processing: once a likeable ad gets our attention, we're more likely to think about the message it's conveying.
- The positive feelings the ad evokes transfer from the advertisement to the brand.

SS+K Spotlight

Refer back to Chapter 11 and the three campaign options SS+K presented to msnbc.com. Which of these do you think has the most emotional resonance for the News Explorer?

Key Takaway

An advertisement can grab you in a lot of different ways—but it needs to grab you in *some* way. One way is to be relevant to your situation and needs; another is to be resonant with your desires. If nothing else, be sure people like your ad—it's all downhill from there.

EXERCISES

1. Explain why resonance and relevance are the keys to superior advertising.
2. Discuss the “common denominator” that most successful advertisements have in common.
3. List and characterize each of the five factors that constitute an ad's likeability.

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