

## The Renegade Renegade

One thing you have to get used to early on in a Marketing career is that seemingly absolutely everyone can do your job better than you. The sales force, customers, shop floor workers and all your friends can tell within 10 seconds that your painstakingly crafted ad, promotion or new product is complete rat shit. And they are not slow in letting you know. As demonstrated by my co-columnists one page to the left.

While I have enjoyed reading the contribution of two people for whom I have the greatest admiration, I must confess to a growing sense of unease with the whole concept of a 'Renegade CMO'. That would be one without any need to deliver results in the short term, and where in-depth knowledge of the category or the brands is optional? Sounds a good job, where do I apply?

Alas, those jobs only exist in the form of Monday morning quarterbacking and tend to be unpaid. The paid jobs are a bit more challenging. This is because the beleaguered shareholders of Loblaw's, for example, do actually want a return on their investment. Not some vague promise of growth years down the line, but quite soon please, because they've been taking a bath for quite a while now. Shareholder expectations, translated into tough targets for the short, medium and long-term, can be onerous to deal with from the client side, but they unfortunately are a fact of life when you work in such large companies. That's why you get paid the big bucks.

I have to say that I'm not sure a quick, subjective survey of ad campaigns is a fair means of gauging whether or not Marketing has the CEO's ear in a business, especially the kinds of businesses quoted. The categories chosen by my co-columnists - telecoms,

banking and retail - have always been difficult to advertise effectively, especially when, for various reasons, they are in the middle of turbulent times.

If I was at Bell I'd be a lot more worried about my wires in the ground legacy than a couple of beavers. If I was at Loblaws, I'd be more worried about guaranteeing that Kellogg's Corn Flakes would actually be on the shelf than whether Weston *fills* is the right spokesman. And of course we all know what RBC are worried about right now.

Advertising is not a universal panacea that can cure all ills. If the fundamentals of your business are shaky, either through technological change, botched logistics initiatives or global credit meltdowns, then your brand is going to suffer and sometimes there is not a lot you can do about it in the short term.

They are also extremely difficult categories in which to build any meaningful and sustainable differentiation. I have long pondered the wisdom of those categories rushing headlong into their use of the tools and techniques that were honed over decades to help sell unique, differentiated, tangible products to the masses. Perhaps they would have been better off bypassing mass and going straight to 'me'.

Which is where I agree, in theory, with Tony's assertion on the shift from mass to 'me'. But I am again not sure that it is a universal panacea. I have 'me' relationships with my bank, my telecoms provider and my grocery store because I have to, so they might as well leverage it with all that information on me they have. But if 'me' went mass across the entire packaged goods spectrum, it would be stunningly less effective than mass is today. I would blank it out completely. 'Me' works now precisely because of its contrast to mass. I can handle a few one-on-one brand relationships, but I buy hundreds of brands in a year, 98% of which communicate to me through mass in ways that I can

process in my busy life. The last thing I want is hundred's of wannabe 'me'-relationships with the good residents of Bangalore about chewing gum, shoe polish and the like.

Mass is not dead, but it needs to up its game. To quote Yogi Berra, "*the future ain't what it used to be*", and it is our job as marketers to help map the route out to that better future for our employers through better insights, and provide the transport to get there through stronger, more relevant brands and breakthrough innovation.

But milestones along the way need to be hit. I have a lot of sympathy for the view that the long term is the sum of a series of short terms. Renegades who don't deliver will end up getting shot.