

## INTEGRATED BRAND MESSAGES

A marketing career is punctuated by the regular appearance of grammar-defying new phrases that purport to describe some aspect of what we do. Paradigm shift was a good one about 10 years ago, and I'm sure you'll all have your own favourites. But I have really struggled to come to terms with one of the more recent ones which now appears in advertising briefs with alarming regularity: that being "360 degree message."

Like many of the customs and practices of marketing, this one has sprung from seemingly nowhere – I swear I never heard it in the first fifteen years of my career – and immediately become an almost mandatory concept.

I believe that it came about as a response to the nasty, horrible sales guys bastardizing our carefully honed brand personalities with their "Buy One Get One Free" promos in Price Chopper's flyer. Once these day-glo yellow monstrosities started plopping onto the doormats of the brand custodian, the innate control freakery of the average BM was fully activated into a multi-level plan of counter-attack.

Stage one was the emotional phone call to the poor miscreant in Moose Jaw: "It's supposed to be a premium brand, you moron! HELLOOO!!!" When that failed to achieve the desired effect - which could be detected by noticing that you had been put on speakerphone, down which came the muffled guffaws of the rest of the sales office - stage two was rolled out: "Right, I want to approve every flyer!" This would usually last three weeks before the white flag would be raised; the BM not having been able to do anything else other than plow

through a seemingly infinite pile of garish-looking flyer ads, 90% of which had already gone to press.

So sterner measures were needed. If advertising messages could be designed at source to work in every conceivable location, from T.V. to urinals to Price Chopper flyers, then content could be supplied to all and sundry, accompanied by dark warnings of instant dismissal should the Encyclopedia Britannica like style guide not be slavishly followed. And hence was born the insatiable demand for advertising agencies to come up with integrated messaging.

Now, while I will be the first to agree that anything is better than the anarchy of the past, I for one do not subscribe to the view that having the same message in each and every medium is in fact the optimal approach.

Firstly, I totally believe that all messages about a brand to the consumer, from ads, to P.R., to media choice, to packaging, to product/service delivery should be cohesive; but I do not believe that they should be identical. This is because such messaging completely ignores the varying rational and emotional stages that are gone through with almost any purchase.

Think about buying a car. It usually starts at the emotional level, either seeing one next to you at the lights, or watching the slo-mo beauty shot in the T.V. ad. All very emotional. Then the rational stage kicks in with specs, prices, options and checking out other manufacturers similar vehicles coming to the fore, courtesy of brochures or the internet. Then, when one gets to the dealership, the heart skips a beat at the first sight of the impossibly shiny showroom model,

but the approach of the salesperson immediately punctures the mood, and intense rationality kicks in a vain attempt to make sure the bastard doesn't screw you on the price. And when the deal is all but done, the sudden mention of a \$500 dollar sports package upgrade option prompts an immediate impulse purchase and everyone is happy. It just seems to me that if the same trite message were given at each one of those stages, it would irritate the punter to the point of boycotting the brand for life.

I believe that every product or service has its own rollercoaster of facts, feelings and powerful emotions where, at each stage, there needs to be the right message delivered in the right way. I call this the Consumer Influence Chain™. The consumer is actually very poor at telling us how it all works – particularly where any impulsiveness is concerned – but it is our job to figure it out using a combination of purchase cycle observation, common sense, appropriate research and a lot of hypothesis testing. And when you do figure it out, marketing suddenly seems a whole lot easier.