

Thank you and Goodnight

Success usually comes through one of two ways: selling better stuff or selling stuff better. Of course the trick is to know the difference between 'better' and 'differently'. So in that vein I am nominating two brands for Brand of the Year, each of whom I think does know the difference, and has performed one or both of those tasks admirably.

My vote for selling better stuff goes to the venerable Campbell Soup Company. In 1897, the Campbell's Soup Company sent the inventor of condensed soup, a Dr. John T. Dorrance trekking through the USA like a one-man Tupperware party, conducting taste tests to convince housewives to buy canned soup instead of making their own.

The barrier he was working so hard to overcome was that housewives a century ago invariably made their own soup, and refused to believe that soup from a tin could taste as good and be as nutritious. He won the battle, only for doubt to creep in once again in more recent times, where any pre-prepared foods are seen as being inherently not very good for us. Couple that with our unreasonable demands that food not only be good for us, but also be 100% convenient and just as tasty as the real thing, and the soup category would seem to be doomed.

Ain't necessarily so. Selling better stuff in this case means the same quality as before (just reminding us how good that is), but in better formats. By working hard to educate us as to the freshness of ingredients used, coupled with convenient new formats that suit our hyper-busy lifestyles, soup is now a booming category for Campbell's.

Another organisation I wouldn't have given a prayer for ten years ago is Shoppers Drug Mart. Cramped aisles, ludicrously high prices, out-of-date products, everything out of-stock. It was a nightmare. The Bradley family never spent a dime in Shoppers for the first 8 years of our residence in Canada.

Then we had one of the new design Shoppers open in a strip mall near our house, and after one prospecting visit, we were hooked. It is everything a modern shopping experience should be. Bright, airy, welcoming and with a product range that makes a visit to Shoppers a fun experience for the entire family. We are constantly seduced back by the next tailored offer from our Optimum card and it is now our store of choice for prescriptions, Life brand OTC's, toiletries, top up cereals, magazines, potato chips, Halloween masks and so on. Yes, we could get all bar the Life brand cheaper elsewhere – I have an infallible ready reckoner that a visit to Shoppers costs \$40 a bag - but that is not the point. Shoppers simply sells stuff better than just about anyone else around.

Quickly on the advertising front, I think the year has been a bust. My big disappointment was the 'new' Canadian Tire campaign. I know that neither Canadian Tire nor Taxi have any responsibilities beyond those to their shareholders, but I had hoped that the coming together of an iconic Canadian brand with an iconic Canadian agency could come up with something we would all be proud of. Am I the only person who sees the irony in the nation's biggest seller of WD40 seemingly being unable to find a tin to fix those gratingly squeaky signs? Perhaps they are as baffled by the new store layout as am I; if I wanted to converse with the staff to find things, I'd already have been at Home Depot.

And on that note, I shall be signing off for good. It has been fun sharing with you my take on our profession, but you probably need some respite by now. Composing this column has inspired me to try my hand at writing a book, so thank you to all the people who e-mailed me encouraging comments about various columns. I would never have thought of it otherwise.