



• THE BIRTH OF B-TO-B ADVERTISING •

B-to-b ads leave 'em laughing

BY JOHN OBRECHT



BUSINESS-to-business advertising. Now, what attributes does that phrase conjure up?

No-nonsense? Solid? Stuff? It's a safe bet that "amusing" would not be the first response of most people. But take a close look at the work featured in our selection of the best b-to-b ads of the century. Many of those chosen, including several in the top 10, are marked by their humorous approach to selling goods and services.

This is a rich tradition that spans

many decades.

Consider our top choice, McGraw-Hill's hard-sell "Man in the chair." The ad, part of a campaign that debuted in the late 1950s, still seems contemporary in the late '90s with its timeless photo of a forbidding executive and its edgy, salesman-deflating copy.

And nearly a quarter century after his first appearance, Xerox's Brother Dominic is still amusing.

Sometimes the humor is subtle—see *Rolling Stone's* "Perception. Reality." Sometimes it's not—see Remington Rand's man with his head in a typewriter. But either way, it's effective.

For those who still think serious is best, some words of caution:

Your earnest effort may provoke laughter in years to come.

While perusing through old issues of *Industrial Marketing*, the forerunner of *Business Marketing*, we came across an ad in the June 1959 issue from A.H. Rice Co., a Massachusetts-based thread manufacturer. The direct mail piece featured a photo of an automobile below the headline: "The best-tested, best-proved thread for the best-tested, best-proved car in automotive history."

There was no mistaking the horse-collar grille of the Ford Edsel.

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how trade publishers do business. The trade press will be pushed to provide more insightful content on tighter deadlines.

One concern is that as the flow of information increases, public relations and marketing practitioners may be challenged by Web developers who assume they can do it all. That's plainly not the case. Marketing and PR may become undervalued as a practice or diluted by people who see a Web presence as a be-all and end-all.

ALEX ZAVISTOVICH
Director of Public Relations
Strategic Communications Group
Silver Spring, Md.

More direct channel will allow start-ups to flourish

BECAUSE COMPANIES can now do e-commerce directly via the Web, we

will see a reduction in the number of distributors and resellers. Manufacturers will rely less on sales reps calling on companies to introduce new products.

This change will allow smaller, start-up firms to compete in the open marketplace. If the price is right and the company offers a fast turn-around on product orders, why should buyers go to a distributor or "name" brand if they can get the same for less from another source?

Even though the Internet will have a significant impact, unless companies have a well-trained sales force to handle customer inquiries on the telephone and via e-mail, their marketing efforts may still fail.

GEORGE HELD
Senior VP-Director of Client Development
Bridgepoint Channel Marketing Services
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Privatization sets stage for age of global b-to-b

AREBIRTH OF freedom around the world has ignited a brushfire in business-to-business marketing. State-run monopolies in health care, basic materials, telecommunications, transportation and financial services are now being privatized.

As entire industries are liberated from government control, the arena in which the b-to-b marketer plays will expand to many times its current size. Right now, outside the U.S., b-to-b hardly exists as an area of specialization. The 21st century will be business marketing's golden age.

RICHARD SEGAL JR.
Managing Director
Hensley Segal Rentschler
Cincinnati

Next millennium will reshape PR internally, on Net, at exec level

BY KENNETH D. MAKOVSKY



YOU DON'T HAVE to be Nostradamus to recognize this as a period of tremendous change for public relations. Three global trends are reshaping our roles as communicators.

An economic revolution is under way, resulting in an avalanche of mega-mergers. Avalanching gives greater power than ever before to the corporation.

Simultaneously, a communications revolution, enabled by the Internet, fosters individual empowerment and fractionates the media, the public and the investment community. I call this phenomenon atomization.

The third trend, iconization, reflects the growing need to distinguish a corporation by giving it a distinctive, human face. It is the dawn of the CEO-branded corporation.

Avalanching

Nine of the 10 largest mergers of all time took place in 1998, as more than 25,000 companies consolidated. Luckily, our business thrives on change.

INSIGHT Typically, marketers are called upon to help smooth the transition, build identity and persuade target audiences to embrace changing value systems and new products and services. I predict that lucrative practices in internal communications, change management and organizational development will soon be as commonplace as external communications is today.

Another immediate result of the avalanching trend is the increased demand for community relations. As a result, PR firms with strong roots in their communities will be better able than any global Goliath to create a powerful local presence for mega-corporations.

Atomization

Today, an individual in a remote location can, through the Internet, bring a company to its knees. Seventy percent of U.S. CEOs rated their knowledge about what is being said about their companies on the Internet as "very poor" to "just adequate." I predict a wave of online crises will force companies to monitor the Internet.

A further expression of atomization is the fact that news is becoming self-service. People are seeking the sources most interesting and convenient for them. I predict PR organizations will develop media departments like those of ad agencies. The complex and intricate science of reaching target audiences demands it.

Moreover, pinpoint relationship marketing and market research will become key weapons in the PR professional's arsenal. Intuition is no longer enough. It takes research to drive media strategy.

Iconization

One key reason for the rise of the high-profile CEO is the growing complexity of life at the turn of the century. People make sense of the world by attaching names and faces to impersonal forces. Working with their PR professionals, CEOs can give themselves the patina of celebrity.

The next step is to apply that celebrity to the corporation. So Bill Gates is Microsoft, Jack Welch is General Electric and Andy Grove is Intel.

CEOs know a strong reputation is critical to success, and four out of five CEOs say PR is more important than advertising for reputation building, according to the American Advertising Federation. If the CEO is to rely on the top PR executive, that person must be fluent in business language. I predict that qualified PR practitioners at the most senior levels will be a scarce, and well-compensated, commodity in the next millennium.

The years ahead will be complex and often contradictory, challenging and exciting. We will have to demonstrate depth of business expertise and breadth of vision. I predict it will be a period of enormous growth for our industry.

Kenneth Makovsky, president of public relations firm Makovsky & Co., New York, presented this as part of a speech to the Belgian PR Centre, a society of Belgian PR professionals, earlier this year in Brussels.