

ENGAGEMENT

SPEED READ

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- WestPac's Red Button makes saving impulsive

It ought to drive Mad Men insane

Advertising is no longer simply about advertisements, argues IAN HENDERSON. "But it's still all about ideas – and that makes it more challenging, exciting and fun to work in than it's ever been."



Sitting on a plane recently the man next to me did something which struck me as nostalgic: reading a Sunday newspaper supplement he studied an ad – a colour page for the Nissan Juke, if you're interested – then ripped it out, folded it carefully into his shirt pocket and put the rest of the newspaper under his seat. When was the last time you did that?

The way we all use media, respond to messages and relate to products and services has changed utterly over the last few years. Cutting out newspaper ads (let alone sending back coupons in return for a similarly-obsolete digital clock radio) is a thing of the past; and take a look around next time you're on a Tube train – how many people are looking at their mobile screen? So how many are looking at the ads on the train walls?

Tivo boxes have done for the 30-second TV spot; newspapers and magazines are losing readers all the time; and the life cycle of innovations in digital advertising gets shorter and shorter. It should be enough to drive Mad Men insane – but it isn't, for the simple reason that advertising isn't about advertisements any more.

If you've ever worked in an ad agency you'll know who the original Mad Man was – Bill Bernbach, the creative director who defined modern advertising, the inspiration behind still-famous campaigns for VW, Polaroid, Lucky Strike. He would have been 100 in August, but people who create advertising still aspire (or at least they should) to his respect for the consumer, determination to fully understand the product and complete refusal to compromise on ideas.

But the glory days of advertising involving three-martini lunches are certainly past. The time when a single ad in a national newspaper like DDB's 'Think Small' for the VW Beetle could change national opinion have been superseded – not least because there's almost no such thing as a national newspaper any more. Just like there's no single commercial TV channel where, if you wanted to make sure of reaching your audience, all you needed was a thirty second spot in the Coronation Street break.

Bernbach's agency DDB produced ads for TV, posters and (mostly) press. And that's still what a lot of agencies are set up to do – fill specific media spaces with words and pictures. Even online display advertising has developed to fit that model, but it's one that no longer fits the way people use media, respond to messages or even think about the products and services they buy. I'm pretty sure Bernbach would agree that advertising isn't just about producing ads any more. Which from an agency point of view is the best news since the invention of the printing press.

It means advertising agencies – and the advertisers who commission them – have to try harder. We have an almost infinite, and growing, number of ways to reach our audience. Those 3,000 commercial messages we're said to see each day are the flotsam on top of a tsunami of often much more relevant stuff we actually want. The audience is getting phenomenally good at filtering out the messages it doesn't want to hear – it has to, just to stay sane.

So here's an idea from Korea. Tesco wanted to be the biggest retailer there (of course) but didn't have nearly enough stores. Korean consumers are even further ahead of the UK in the way they use mobile and other technologies. Put the two together, and ... you get ad posters in train stations that look exactly like Tesco store display stands, full of all the products people most want, right where they stand waiting for the train home. Each has a QR code, so you simply point your phone at it, click and it goes into your virtual shopping basket (see



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ADVERTISING HAS TO BE AS RELEVANT AS AN EMAIL FROM YOUR MUM. AS EXCITING AS A NEWS STORY THAT DIRECTLY AFFECTS YOUR LIFE.

also "Fad or future?" p36) and the groceries are delivered soon afterwards. Could this be the future of the high street? Advertising or not, it's a genius idea.

Or take Gatorade. Most men between 30 and 40 in the USA don't get enough exercise, even if they played sport when younger. Sports drink-maker Gatorade and their agency found groups of ex-sportsmen in the right age bracket who had played matches that were inconclusive through draws, injuries or weather. Having inspired them to replay the match they got them together to train, practice and get fit again. They even found the original cheerleaders and bands – and the rematches made great PR with some appearing on national TV news.

Without spending much on conventional advertising, Gatorade did some genuine good for a lot of people; motivated millions more; won over a generation of sports people to the brand – and, unsurprisingly, shifted quite a lot of cans of fizzy drink.

And just in case you're wondering if this kind of thinking applies to financial services, here's another one – this time from WestPac savings bank in New Zealand. It's a big red button marked 'Save'. It makes saving an impulse purchase, much like buying a

snack bar; any time you feel like saving you just press the button on your phone and a pre-determined amount is transferred from your current account to your savings account.

The big red button becomes a product that is also a behaviour the advertiser wants to influence. And, as a product, it can be advertised in the conventional way, using press ads and posters. It sounds simple, and it is. And, like the best simple ideas, it's remarkably effective.

People are now able to be their own editors, selecting media and messages that mean something to them and using them in the way that suits them at the time. To get past those filters, advertising has to be as relevant as an email from your mum. As exciting as a news story that directly affects your life. As much fun as your favourite music. It has to be welcomed as part of your life, not an interruption.

Advertising is no longer, except in special cases like my friend on the plane, simply about advertisements. But it's still all about ideas – and that makes it more challenging, exciting and fun to work in than it's ever been.

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