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COMMERCIALS THAT CONFUSE, CONFOUND AND SELL NOBODY ANYTHING

By Patrick Quinn

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I may be missing something, here, but it seems to me that, in advertising terms, the loonies have taken over the asylum. What is getting me all lathered up is the preponderance of TV commercials that go out of their way, not only to confuse their target audience, but also to project an alarming image of their product.

I'll elaborate. The first example is the sad, but fortunately short story of a current tv spot for a company called Debenhams. Now, Debenhams is a large UK department store which has branches in many major cities throughout the country. As such, it has an excellent reputation and an enviable turnover.

Well, this outfit is running a commercial which has two distinct scenes. The first shows a man sitting in a room at a table, and beside him is a back-projection of a pond. As he sweeps an object off the table and into the pond, we see ripples in the water. The second scene is of a young girl in a room and the back projection is of some trees, each carrying a profusion of autumn leaves. As the girl moves around the room, the leaves begin to fall.

So far so good; and as an exercise in special effects this spot is exemplary, because the last thing you'd expect to see in your living room is a pond or a stand of trees.

Anyway, we are now treated to a voice-over which says, to the effect, that if you drop into Debenhams you'll find lots more of

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the same. My question is: the same what? Throughout this commercial, we are not actually told what it is we are being offered.

I assume it is wallpaper, but I could be wrong – it might be personal back projection.

The second example concerns a new computer from Apple–Mac. The spot opens with an explosion and a man being thrown against a tree. The camera then tracks towards a house, in the side of which is a gaping hole. The camera continues through into the house, showing us debris falling all around and large holes in the walls of successive rooms. We finally track towards a

computer, and the voice–over says something like: Introducing the fastest, most powerful computer in the Mac stable.

The message I interpret from this is that the new Apple–Mac is so powerful it explodes. Not only that, it will probably reduce your home to rubble.

Oh, yeah, I must rush out and buy one of those.

Am I alone in thinking that these two commercials, despite their huge production values, are less than clever? On the one hand, the advertiser neglects to tell us what it is that he's trying to sell. On the other, we have a product that is reminiscent of Mission Impossible and self–destructs when you switch it on.

Given all of this, I'd like to pose a question. When the respective ad agencies presented the storyboards for these commercials to their clients, did nobody on the client side raise a query or two? Like: since we're spending all this money, shouldn't we at least say what we're offering? Or: is it really a sensible idea to associate our computers with explosions?

Of course, it could be that I am missing some wonderful new marketing strategy that will shortly be revealed and will make me look extremely foolish. Though I doubt it. And I doubt it because I saw a beer commercial the other day (Stella Artois, I think), in which a man on a balcony actually spat on the people below. You have to be a very brave advertiser –or a very stupid one –to ally your product to this kind of imagery. And this crudity seems to be more and more prevalent.

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I leave you to ponder all of this. Meanwhile, you'll do no better than visit www.wordpower3.com. There, you'll find an e-book that could make your working life a whole lot easier. It contains close to 200 ready-made headlines, taglines, copy openers and clinchers, plus a comprehensive theme-finder that will give you just about every promotional word and phrase you'll ever need.

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Patrick Quinn is a copywriter, with 40 years' experience of the advertising business in London, Dublin, Edinburgh and Miami. Over the years, he has helped win for his clients just about every advertising award worth winning. His published books, include: *The Secrets of Successful Copywriting*. *The Secrets of Successful Low Budget Advertising*. *The Secrets of Successful Exhibitions*. *Word Power*.

Hard-sell Commercials vs. Identity Commercials

By Kahlia Hannah

Hard-sell Commercials vs. Identity Commercials by Kahlia Hannah

There is a man who owns a locally based chain of used computer stores in the city where I live. It is my personal opinion that he should be presented with an award for producing the most annoying television commercials in history. That award probably wouldn't mean much to him, as he is now a rich man who couldn't care less if his commercials are ridiculous. After all, those commercials made him the rich man he is today.

This man I speak of was a pioneer in the world of hard-sell commercials. His commercials were tacky, irritating, obvious and brass. They were also fact-based, convincing, high-energy and memorable.

Your hard-sell commercial does not need to encompass the entire range of adjectives I used to describe those particular hard-sell commercials.

The hard-sell commercial has a few common identifying traits that have nothing to do with being annoying.

- * They often include prices.
- * They show as much merchandise as possible.
- * They often tell of a promotional offer or sale.
- * The company or product name is usually on the screen through the entire commercial.

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These four traits are common for one reason; they increase sales. This is why:

- * The advertiser should include the price if it is exceptionally low. Low priced items get customers off the couch and into the store.
- * Show potential customers some merchandise and they will often see something they want. You will also give people a sense of how much selection you offer.
- * Using promotional advertising creates a sense of urgency. People will have to buy your product within the allotted amount of time.
- * If you keep your name on the screen during the entire commercial, people will see the name even if they mute their television during the commercials. They also become familiar with the font, logo and color scheme you use, and will recognize

it when they see it again.

Now, you may be wondering, if hard-sell commercials work so well, why don't all the Coca Colas and McDonalds and Volkswagens use them? Because they are more concerned with selling an image. When companies try to sell an image instead of an identity, their marketing is not fact based. They often sell the intangible benefits: you will be cool, you will be sophisticated, and your entire well-being will be improved by using our product. Creating an image can sometimes become a game of who looks better, instead of who is better.

We all like to dream, but most of us are grounded in reality. We may occasionally be taken in by the model with flowing, auburn hair who only spent five dollars on a box of store dye to achieve it, or the car full of partying teenagers who love their car so much they would rather remain in it than attend a party, but we will never believe it.

The reason hard-sell commercials work so well is that they promote the tangible, rational benefits of a product. It is difficult to promote the practical value of perfume or beer.

So when you decide to market using television commercials, remember who your audience is: people who have jobs and kids and responsibilities. In other words, real people who live in the real world.

Kahlia Hannah provides marketing advice and popular promotion packages. See her low-cost direct marketing and PR deals at <http://MarketingHelp.NET> Reach Kahlia at <mailto:kahlia@drnunley.com> or 801-328-9006.



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