



BACK TALK

BY SANDER A. FLAUM

Marketing like it's 1999?

Have you ever browsed through books on the history of advertising? Some of those ancient ads are curious: “They laughed when I sat down at the piano but when I started to play!”

“At 60 miles an hour the loudest noise in this new Rolls-Royce comes from the electric clock.”

Yesterday such headlines caught the attention of readers and moved them not only to plow through lengthy ad copy but also to buy. Today they just seem quaint. Who would run anything like them today? What happened?

One possibility is that they fit the then-dominant media — magazines and newspapers. In the 1940s and '50s people loved to read. Really! Later, as radio and TV came in, jingles muscled feature-and-benefit copy aside. If you grew up on “Plop plop, fizz fizz,” you’re already thinking of the jingle’s next line.

Today TV’s influence is waning as new media, represented by smartphones, notepads and other mobile devices, take charge, especially among millennials. These 18- to 34-year-olds spend roughly 20 hours a week on mobile apps. Many use their TV sets as nothing more than monitors for displaying downloaded content.

It’s easy to reach the Viagra and Depends generation — just buy Saturday-afternoon TV during a golf tournament. But how do you grab the young hipsters’ attention? Mobile devices are hardly advertising-friendly. Pop-ups can be blocked and ads scrolled past. There’s little room for selling on Twitter or Instagram.

One idea is to seek millennials in the rare times when they’re not on their mobile devices. Although they may have their noses glued to mobile, they still have to surface for air, if only to see whether the traffic light

has changed. Consider Geico Insurance. Best known for its humorous TV ads, Geico advertises everywhere: skywriting at the beach, billboards on freeways—even with insurance apps promoted by talking pigs.

Another way to reach millennials is to drop big bucks on brand placement for sporting events. These messages aim for little more than name recognition, but hey, today that ain’t bad.

A few advertisers have run ads in movie theaters. Skype recently produced a five-minute commercial featuring a Russian pet detective. Well received in theaters, the video has been even more successful on YouTube. Imagine making an ad that your target audience searches for and then recommends to others! If you don’t believe me, check out “Skype pet detective” on YouTube.

Maybe Marshall McLuhan had it wrong. The message is the message, not the medium. Remember David Ogilvy’s famous “man in the Hathaway shirt” campaign? Every ad featured a mysterious and sexy eyepatch-wearing “Baron Wrangell” modeling the advertiser’s shirt. Ogilvy’s catchy idea catapulted Hathaway to instant market dominance. He later insisted that the ads wouldn’t have worked without lengthy body copy. But I’ll bet the campaign succeeded simply because it intrigued and connected with the target audience. In short, it stopped and sold.

And that’s what we always have to do—whether we’re marketing to millennials or—a few years from now—to their kids.

Sander A. Flaum, MBA, is principal, Flaum Navigators, and executive-in-residence and chairman, Fordham Leadership Forum, Fordham University Graduate School of Business Administration.

Maybe McLuhan had it wrong: The message is the message

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