



Who dares (to design) wins

The best way for brands to overcome the credit crunch is to employ bold design to showcase their valuable differentiation and communicate a proactive message to the marketplace

When the going gets tough, the tough get going – or so the saying goes. However, in reality, it is more a case of ‘when the going gets tough, belts are tightened and marketing and communications budgets are cut’. Is it just me, or is that foolish? As the crunch takes hold and becomes a full-blown bite, chew and swallow, the need for brands to clearly express and ‘showcase’ their valuable differentiation, both to the marketplace and the consumer, has never been greater.

With less business, fewer transactions and canny, inventive shopping habits coming to the fore, brands and their mentors need to be smarter and work harder to attract and retain their share of the market.

Slashing the communications umbilical chord – the means by which brands hold their own within the marketplace and ‘speak’ to the consumer – is nothing short of commercial suicide.

Rather than battenning down the hatches, lying low and hiding beneath an endless duvet day, brands need to transcend the economic challenges and reach out to the consumer with a positive and proactive message. Branding, via design, is one of the primary ways of articulating what makes a company or product special, different and relevant.

It can create messages that neither inhibit nor decimate the central brand proposition, but rather leverage the latent permissions that already exist, to target new customer motivations within the brand.



Colin Stout

Lessons can be learnt from the airline industry. The low-cost phenomenon created a new market, but only a few established brands were able to cross the cut-price chasm by leveraging their brand in this new arena. Bmi successfully stretched its ‘brand permissions’ to set up bmibaby as a strong and competitive player, due to the strength of the core brand proposition.

In the retail sector, Morrisons has not only freshened its brand, but also made it more flexible for the challenges of the high street. The new identity not only expresses a fresher, more modern interpretation of its previous

brand, but its simple and unfussy appearance allows it to be considered across a wider competitive set than the traditional ‘big four’ food retailers.

Now is the time to take a deep breath, be brave and unleash bold design – ideas that cut through the cowardice of the market and stand out with a clear point of difference. The need for petrol, banks, airlines, food and mobiles has not gone away, it is simply that the consumer is now buying things differently. The need for honesty and reassurance is greater.

As marketers galvanise their efforts to cut through the gloom, design is a surefire way of demonstrating agility and innovation – two invaluable recession-proof traits.

While the parlous economic situation continues to stack up the column inches, let us not forget that it isn’t the only consideration

in the minds of consumers. CSR issues, technology, style and a volatile environment in flux are just some of the drivers of motivation. The consumer exists in a haphazard and confusing world, and now is the time for design to be used to harness clarity.

The much-scrutinised and talked-about Apple phenomenon is the example from which we must learn. Beautiful products, a fantastic user interface and elegant communications are all very well, but it is bold, agile and audacious design that drives desire. An emotional contract that supersedes need and continues to buck the trend and cut through the recession.

The perfect example of ‘dares’, ‘design’ and ‘wins’. ■

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