

A dull category doesn't have to mean dull ads:

Transforming adversity into a creative opportunity

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With spring in the air, many of us are revisiting those resolutions made in the dark days of January to get fitter, eat more healthily or learn something new. But somehow excuses creep in as to why you can't do what you intend to... not enough time, the facilities aren't available... the list of excuses is easy to write! And this is true of the creative development process as well.

Our observation is that perceived blocks can be in place when creating new advertising campaigns: "it's a new

campaign, it'll take time to bed in", "we are a small brand, we won't cut through against brands with more money" or, at times, "this category is really dull it's really hard to do interesting advertising in it". We thought it would be good to unpick this challenge of how to develop interesting advertising in dull categories, but the more we think about it, the more we have come to the conclusion that there is perhaps no such thing as a completely dull category and that anything can be made interesting with imagination and the will to do it!

A big creative idea with a credible brand connection

Kimberly-Clark's Kleenex facial tissue brand operates in a low involvement category with little functional differentiation and high habituation.

Against this backdrop Kleenex devised a campaign which shows how a big creative idea can elevate a brand in a dull category. The "Someone Needs One"¹ campaign is based around the power of simple, but meaningful, social connection, beautifully delivered to an audience focussed on compassion/caregiving. The activity demonstrates the relevance of Kleenex via a simple gesture of care - offering someone a Kleenex tissue when they need one. It is an everyday act of kindness that everyone has the capacity to perform and the activity aligns the brand with people's values of empathy and a desire to fight indifference.

What this brand has done brilliantly is to take the product use and elevate it with credible and compelling reasons to always have a Kleenex to hand. Ingeniously, this campaign premise is so solid that it allows the stories to showcase a wide variety of category entry points - caring for pets, children, parents and friends in lots of different locations and scenarios.

The big idea seamlessly puts the Kleenex brand at the heart of the story which many of our clients struggle to nail at the early stages of creative development. Some may argue that it is doing a category job, but we also know that this is where the majority of brand growth comes from and is appropriate for the leader brand. The campaign boosted sales and market share, and evidence points to a reinforcement of Kleenex's brand memory structures as intended, putting it in a good place for long term success as well.



Figure 2

Consistent thread over time through characters, music and style

Financial services fall within our definition of a dull category because of the intangibility of their offer and the time between investment and benefit - we put off engaging with pensions or signing up for contents insurance, even though we know we should. These tasks require effort on our part for rewards that are too far in the future to feel like they matter.

Communication in these cases serves to create relevance or a sense of urgency for this type of task. Having a consistent creative thread then helps make a brand salient as the "go to" option when you are ready to perform that task. Campaigns therefore need to trigger the right mindset for action and maximise a brand's chances of being disproportionately considered vs. alternatives at that moment of action.

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Insurance brands Compare the Market/Meerkat and Go Compare have both maximised their mental availability via the play on words between the brand name and characters, tapping into a mixed palette of sensory cues and enabling brand learning to occur. The repeated use of these cues, consistently over time improves not just storage, but also the retrieval of brand associations at moments that matter.

Direct Line Insurance's campaign starring Harvey Keitel in his iconic Pulp Fiction role as 'The Fixer' Winston Wolf is another example of a consistent thread, well deployed.² There is an intuitive link between 'The Fixer' and Direct Line Insurance in terms of offering a quick, discreet and high quality service to solve problems. The macabre nature of Winston Wolf's dealings in the film (clearing bodies) helps create a moment of emotional tension when he appears on a doorstep, which is then humorously resolved. This combination of emotional engagement in the story, plus a clear brand message, leads to brand memories being encoded in our minds much more successfully.

The simplicity of the Direct Line big idea lends itself easily to lots of banal events from boiler breakdowns to tenants falling behind on rent, and elevates them with panache.

Think campaign and use the right touchpoints to deliver it

Have you gone beyond media channels and really thought deeply about the call and response between them?

Over the counter medication falls into our dull category class because it is habitual once people find a solution that works. You have to find a way to arrest attention and get people to engage their brains to consider updating their choices.

Panadol in Indonesia made people take notice with their Pejuang Tangguh³ campaign, which asked people to nominate a 'tough fighter' in their life.

It tapped into the shared value of support between the brand and its consumers. Tough fighters who deserved relief were aligned with the pain relief properties of Panadol and turned into compelling stories. It garnered over 1000 story submissions and amplified on Facebook.

Guilty of stopping at videos of strangers doing inspiring things on Facebook? We are! So, this was a good channel choice for this campaign as people are attentive to snappy, emotional and personal stories here. This marriage of idea, format and appropriate media reached 15.5m Indonesians and helped Panadol increase its average consumption by 8% between March - May 2017.



Figure 3

Likewise, Advil's Distant Memory⁴ enabled another OTC pain relief brand to regain its equity and consumer connection in the US with an omni-channel campaign portraying the incredible things that consumers do when pain is behind them. The activity was different to Panadol's approach in that it focused more on what could be achieved by banishing pain to 'a distant memory'.

Emotion in advertising is not about the creative wrapper, but the response it generates. The high efficacy of Advil was central to what generated emotion, while the creative wrapper captured and held cognitive attention. The launch spot during the Super Bowl drove the largest incremental sales volume in over five years for Advil; sales increased 3%, significantly outpacing the category.

Be creative with media partnerships and placements

This is a pointer to think beyond shopping between available media choices and encourage you to take a step back to think about how best to tell your story if you had no restrictions. Some of the best campaigns are deployed via media formats that are not off-the-shelf options. The right media partnership can elevate your campaign from good to great.

National Telecoms squeak into our dull category basket by being something you don't switch without a lot of perceived effort. People get locked into financially draining plans because they can't be bothered with the personal admin required to move.

Rather than investing solely in traditional communication methods, Deutsche Telekom decided to do something which would both make people feel good about them and benefit humanity. They created a mobile game called Sea Hero Quest⁵ that involves navigating mazes. Aside from being fun to play, the data from this game is serving to address an important health challenge – Alzheimers (or a

related dementia). The data helps provide a baseline read to researchers, enabling them to develop diagnostic tests and effective treatments to help stop or slow dementia-causing diseases. Now there's a reason to stick with your mobile service supplier!

Another route to media creativity is to hack the format and turn limitations into strengths. American Auto insurance brand GEICO has a long history of taking its dull subject matter and getting noticed and remembered through (insightfully) surreal fun.

In a recent example, GEICO acknowledged the viewability challenges of new media and hacked this limitation with a video of a spaghetti eating dog⁶. They saw that viewership rates for YouTube pre-roll ads are generally poor and don't sufficiently acknowledge how crucial the first few seconds are... if you don't hook people at the start, you've lost them.

GEICO maximised the odds of the brand and message being communicated effectively in the first five seconds. Rather than cutting down or re-purposing their 30 or 15-second TV spots, they embraced the format flaws and adopted an attitude of 'If you can't fix it, feature it'. The campaign 'Unskippable' delivered the advertising



Figure 4

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message in the first five seconds, and then encouraged viewers to stick around for some pure entertainment for putting up with it. Commenting on this reciprocity, GEICO have said; "The simple idea is you just reward viewers and consumers. You just give them all these little bits of enjoyment – and dogs eating spaghetti. Dogs-eating-spaghetti is the new cats in online videos."

Moving forward

These campaigns clearly show that there is always a way to have excellent communication, even if operating in a category that is a bit dull or automatic. A brand may need to work a little harder to arrest attention and maximise salience, but this doesn't have to be a complicated mission. Elegantly simple big ideas such as those used by Direct Line and Kleenex show that a harmonious marriage of emotion, branding and category entry points can be both intriguing and familiar at the same time. Every episode infuses the brand with meaning and distinctiveness along the way.

When embarking on this creative journey, an investment in research like our neuro integrated, iterative labs and sales validated comms evaluation methods approach can help explore, bring in an independent consumer led voice and set you up for long term success.

Dull categories don't have to mean dull ads. So, even if dogs eating spaghetti is not right for you, we hope this paper offers inspiration on how to draw the audience in, no matter what the category.

References:

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