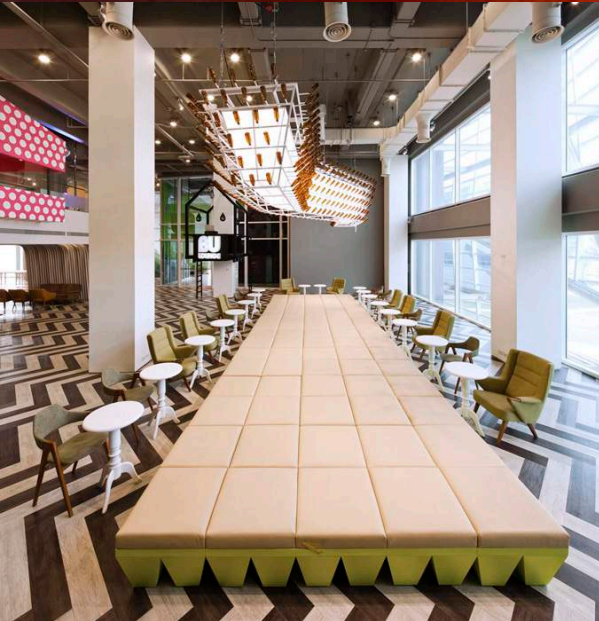


Creating Persuasive Interactions: The Alchemy of Content & Design



The most important thing about a point of view is to have one.

A or B?

I am bored of the content and design debate. For years various pundits have suggested that without content design becomes vacuous decoration or, in the reverse, content by itself misses the opportunity to communicate more creatively and effectively.

This debate of what is more important or what comes first is completely irrelevant. What is critical is knowing that in order to bring these two forces together successfully with all of the associated benefits is to have a clear business goal and a process that is both logical and creative.

Now I hope that word “process” does not present concern. It tends to invite eye-rolls from creatives and designers. Many believe process impairs creativity or limits potential. But there is no cause for alarm, as I am not advocating a rigid one size fits all approach.

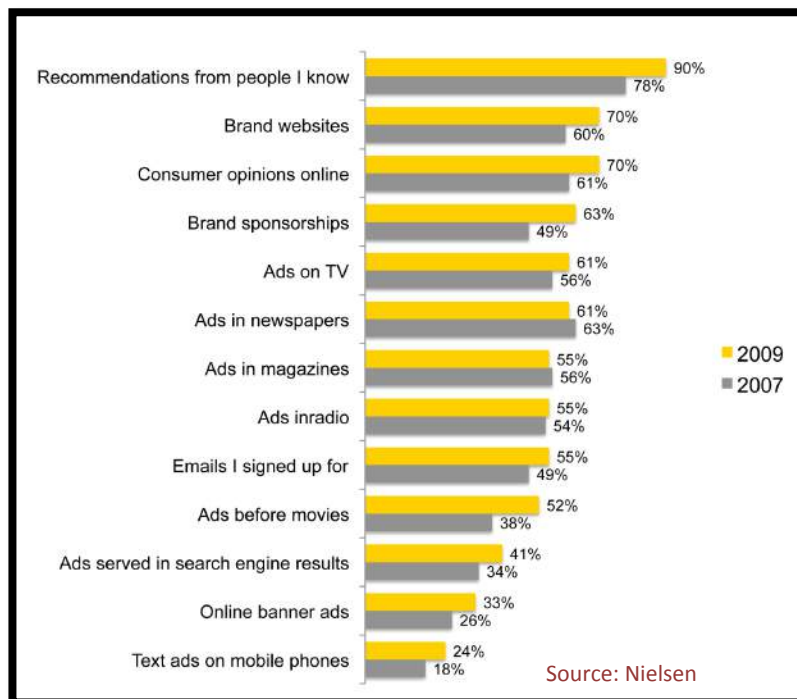


This paper addresses the alchemy of content and design in marketing. So the overriding purpose is develop communications that make people aware of a brand and compel them to try it. It should help consumers cut through communications clutter and noise. The goal of marketing is to sell more, to more people, more often at a higher price and it most effectively does this by informing, educating and influencing behavior. This is an incredible responsibility and great challenge for all of us in communications.

Trust & Consumers

Consumers are now armed with more information and possess more commercial savvy than ever before. They cannot be fooled by robotic interactions on social media. They can immediately assess value versus price in their mind when contemplating competing brands. And they are extremely hesitant to trust marketing claims of superiority at face value. This last point is important because if marketing is to create longstanding relationships then trust is critical.

Never before has this been more true. Nielsen’s Global Online Consumer Survey of over 25,000 consumers from 50 countries points out that people no longer trust traditional institutions. They rely on friends and family for recommendations on brands and that trend is growing. As marketers and consumers we all know this. But how do we deal with it?



Ten years ago we practiced loud and expensive mass marketing. Now many are enamored with social media as a panacea for all communications. While social media is growing in use its measurement and effectiveness remain unclear. Television is still the dominant medium according to research from ZenithOptimedia from 2014. The conclusion is no one channel will dominate and it will always be a mix of media based on where the desired consumer likes to spend time.

The resulting challenge is twofold: determining the most appropriate media and coming up with amazing communications that create persuasive interactions. These are the communications that help consumers connect and engage when they are hesitant to trust brand claims. These communications acknowledge and leverage the relationships consumers have with the people they do trust by providing value in the communications.

This value can take many interesting forms including entertainment, information, special offers, and the promise of association with like-minded people. This is achieved by asking three questions that influence content and design.

What do you have that is unique?
 Who wants or needs it?
 How do they like to be engaged?

These questions have guided every marketing plan I have created. They appear simplistic but each starts conversations regarding the role of content and design in creating persuasive interactions between brand and consumer.

What Do You Have That Is Unique?

I apologize upfront for referencing Apple. It is cited so often as a best practice that I fear it is losing impact. But the example I use is from a campaign that has been largely panned by industry critics and customers.

This campaign is important because it indicates a huge pivot point in their brand position. The criticism is ridiculous in its lack of comprehension of the intended strategy.

Apple has made its mark by offering consumers products we didn't know we needed. The campaign from TBWA \Media Arts Lab moves Apple from a sterile power from on-high to a more approachable and personable provider of must-have gadgets backed by great service. That latter point is the most important.



They starred stand-up comedian Josh Rabinowitz as an Apple Store Genius who is apparently always on the clock. He solves domestic crises on a plane, helps an expectant father get his priorities straight and deflates a bizarrely out-of-touch discount shopper.

That is all well and good but what they are really communicating is how integral Apple products are to one's life and how they are rigorously supported. It is a message less about selling and more about servicing which, in turn, cleverly brings it back to sales.

They are leveraging an insight that represents a huge business opportunity. Given that so many of us are walking around with multiple Apple devices we need to know that their shelf-life is longer and less disposable. This hits on the economic climate and on issues of sustainability but is really striving for loyalty based on the value and quality of product. Apple is still saying, "You must have this product" but now it is stated in the guise of utility, reliability and value.

Who Needs or Wants Your Brand?

This question is actually two as wants and needs are different. Needs tend to focus on tangible, practical benefits while wants are more emotional and involve intangible associations.

Canadian Club came up with one of my favorite campaigns from the last several years that I believe tries to position its product as both a want and a need (this example may reveal more about me than illuminate the topic!). It comes from BBDO Chicago and is one of those great examples of content and design working as they should which is together and seamlessly.

The ads leverage nostalgia and though intended to be gender-agnostic they tilt towards men.

The headlines entertains, challenges, and invites you in for more. Both the bold copy and washed out Polaroids grab you. The overall layout is a bit of an homage to the iconic VW ads of "Think Small" and "Lemon" created by Bill Bernbach of DDB. This format is consistent through the series of posters and print. The large copy and large image work in concert balanced with the smaller copy and smaller images.

They also pass that test of removing either the copy or the images. If done, arguably both could stand on their own. I have done the test many times with guests to my home. I contacted the art director at BBDO Chicago who graciously sent me the posters and they still hang in my basement bar.



How Do Your Customers Like To Be Engaged?

Tourism is highly competitive and travelers are now more discerning with higher expectations. If we are taking our two precious weeks off and spending significant money we are looking for some guarantee that our destination will deliver. One way to do this is to engage prospective adventurers in a highly tactile manner.

During their daily commute San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit riders faced an unexpected scene at the Montgomery Street Station. With a clever 3D illustration the station's tunnel was reborn as one of Utah's scenic icons namely the Delicate Arch in Arches National Park.



The extensive regional campaign included network TV commercials, digital outdoor, online display and social media promotion. The forced-perspective feel of the installation started with a 3D illustrator scanning the entire tunnel in all of its dimensions, and continued with the scans being plotted based on GPS coordinates in a 3D architectural rendering program. The result gave experiential marketing a new dimension and commuters a quick trip to Utah.

Persuasive Interactions

Each of the featured brands asked all three questions of themselves. Apple's example represents a positioning content change, Canadian Club is a fine balance of content and design, and Utah favors a design immersion based on their offer of unique travel experiences.

Each case promotes and emphasizes an interaction with the brand that is meant to engage. Whether it be about awareness, consideration, trial or purchase all three brands entice the consumer with a promise of benefit. Apple is all about understanding the human aspect of technology, Canadian Club is meant to facilitate connections, and Utah promises a new experience that one may not have considered.

All require the brands to insert themselves into the consumer's lives or present themselves in such a way that consumers invite the brands in.



Knowledge
After sales support
People to people
Consistent experience



Recalling memories
Creating new memories
Return to simple pleasures
Making connections



Immersive
Experiential
Educational
Pleasantly "Intrusive"

Once those three questions have been answered an incredibly challenging step is to creatively and strategically introduce the brand into the consumer's "trusted circle". This has to be with meaning and value. It requires authenticity so the consumer and their peers do not reject it for being grafted on unnaturally.

Communicators provide consumers with information to make better decisions. Branding is and always will be a democracy with consumers voting with their dollars. The role brand plays in a consumer's life and the purpose of its communications is to relate the benefits of association whatever they may be. These benefits become the dialogue between brand and consumer, consumer and peers. Each interaction around a brand's benefit has the ability to persuade.



Here are other examples where content and design create persuasive interactions.

Communicating Intensity

The first is Coca-Cola's Sprite. They are now fine-tuning their approach to targeting teens in the United States with a specific campaign and tagline. The campaign highlights the experience of drinking a Sprite and is described as "a unique, sudden hit of intensity".

Kevin Keith, group director-integrated marketing content at Coca-Cola, says, "We've never linked [the product experience] as overtly as we have now. Most brands go to a lifestyle brand without connection to the product experience. We're trying to link to the product experience more sharply."

The opening line of the launch spot is, "This is way more intense than I was expecting!" and the campaign carries the tagline, "There's nothing soft about it."

Sprite executives say the new campaign and tagline allow Sprite to hit on teen "passion points," such as music, skateboarding and film. In the second half of the campaign, the brand promotes a contest for film students.



Only time will tell but I see this campaign and strategy to be the opposite of the persuasive interactions we have so far discussed. It seems forced, unnatural. The look-and-feel, tone, and the copy do not mesh. It seems to be creative by committee. It could become fodder for online abuse at the hands of the very audience they are trying to engage. We are sure to see the “soft” tagline used in humorous parodies or it will just fade away.

Bangkok New

Physical environments are a powerful way to use persuasive interactions and provide the opportunity to create that desired but elusive alchemy between content and design. Bangkok University has set out over the past few years to express its physical presence in increasingly creative ways.

It resembles a Tim Burton movie but it commits to a whimsy and freshness not commonly associated with a university. More importantly, it promotes student interaction not only within the whimsical space but among the student body.

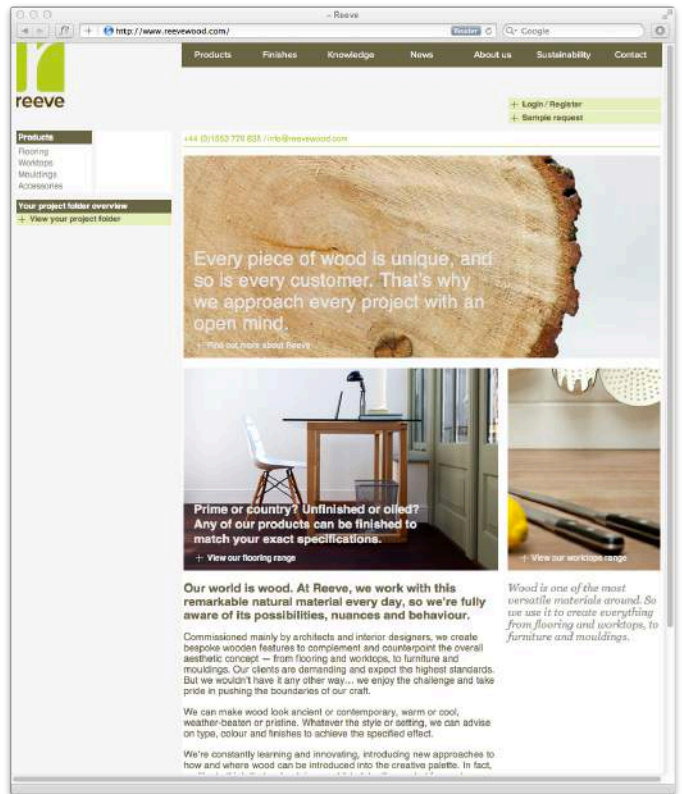


Not Wooden

London-based Felt Branding has created the branding for Reeve who works mainly with architects and interior designers to create bespoke wooden features from flooring and worktops to furniture and mouldings. The Reeve logo is recognizable as both a letter "r" and a graphic representation of a tree.

Felt worked closely with Generation Press to further reference wood and by bringing an understated tactile element to all printed materials. It engaged copywriter Jim Davies of Total Content to create Reeve's tone of voice which has been applied consistently through print and across the company's website.

Everything works in concert beautifully without being trite or predictable. It is equal parts artisan, green, and business-minded. It works.



Well Packaged?

I have always loved packaging when done right. Here is an example of a something that works in content and design and another that should be lauded for its creativity yet chastised for its failure to recognize business realities.

The IKEA food packaging is perfectly reflective of the company's minimalist, simple yet fun brand. The Kraft speculative packaging from a design student is fantastic but would not win for shipping or shelf space efficiencies. Content and design must always consider real commercial implications.



Colorful Communications

The Finnish brand Waldo Trommler Paint needed to stand out as it entered the United States market. While there are still product quality considerations in this category most consumers focus on price and ease of use. Not wanting to compete solely on price, Waldo Trommler Paint decided to differentiate on shelf and on package. The eye-popping packaging is strong, vibrant and playful.

Bold colors and loud typography communicate the use of each product. The smart color combinations make the brand attractive to commercial painters, interior designers and do-it-yourselfers. The back of each paint can communicates important storage directions and other information are displayed like a page from a newspaper. The combination of icon and copy is extremely clever for the category. It is a total system.



Being Persuasive

These examples show that through well-envisioned and executed communications that marry content and design we have the ability to drive Persuasive Interactions. This is necessary given a world full of sophisticated consumers overwhelmed by choice. Content and design can create a dialogue focused on value and authenticity. When we introduce these communications into the consumer's circle of trust it produces broader and deeper engagement.

Every combination of content and design should be derived from an ultra clear business strategy. Recall the examples provided in this paper. Waldo Trommler Paint's packaging can be linked to a very clear business strategy. Sprite's is less clear and reflects an air of desperation for market share.

The ultimate purpose of all marketing is to sell. The most effective marketing I have seen takes a nuanced approach. The focus is on educating, entertaining, and delivering value rather than a hard sales pitch. What I call Persuasive Interactions are predicated on offering value. This helps sell more, more often, to more people.

Even if we follow the process laid out there is no guarantee we can be successful one hundred percent of the time. The alchemy that takes place between art and business and content and design is frustratingly elusive but when accomplished the satisfaction is undeniable and the results impressive.

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