

## 5 SURE-FIRE WAYS TO RUIN AN AD!

*{Suddenly its 'rush-hour' for ads that are exhibitionistic, corny, pontifical, brain-dead, boring ... why this hara-kiri; determination to muck it up? What's the secret? MONOJIT LAHIRI attempts a checkout}*

It is a sad commentary of contemporary life that, while communication continues to take quantum leaps towards building bridges – thanks to technological advancements – the barrier between individuals, at a human level, continues to widen, mocking the grand design. Sane and clued-in communicators keep trying to keep the equilibrium in balance, but mostly, it's a losing battle. Why? Because as eminent Social Scientist Ashish Nandy points out, "it is sabotaged by the hysterical anxiety of some individuals, organizations and brand-custodians to be seen, heard and noticed at any cost! Sign of the times, I suppose". Okay, ready to cut to the chase? All set to identify 5 simple identifiable common screw-ups that invariably rain on the [Ad] parade? Lets go ...

### 1. CELEBRITY ADVERTISING

Looking for a quick, instant hit into popular psyche and junta's radar? No problem. Grab a celeb ... either a movie star or cricketer ... and watch the viewers freeze! Whether it's the iconic Big B hawking Binani Cement, Hema Malini singing the praise of Kent Water Purifier, Dhoni championing the cause of Amrapali, even photographer Atul Kasbekar selling a car and Kiran Bedi indicating Ariel as the best ... there's no dearth of confusion being more confounded! Brand-fit? Credibility? Conviction? Who cares? Remembering the ad is the key, remember? [Sure ... and forgetting the product?!]



Selling Proposition. Why does one eat, buy, wear, listen, engage with particular brands, people, things? How does it make them feel special or different?" Sadly, of the zillion ads that blitz our eyes [Detergents, Skin-whiteners, Toilet cleaners, Toothpaste, Hair care] most appear totally interchangeable! Where's that critical differentiation presented with colour and drama? Where's the Big idea?

### 3. Humour

It is true that we live in stress-driven times and escapist entertainment provides a great break, but as the saying goes "No one buys from clowns". Unlike movies or entertainment avenues, advertising has a job to do-and a critical one at that: Sell! If the basic idea is going to be hi-jacked by humour or entertainment that is so overwhelming [in style or substance] it becomes black comedy and savagely self-cancelling! There has to be a definite, visible, comprehensible bridge that links the humour to the brand value designed to impact the viewer/consumer. Examples of corny ads are many, with the recent Volkswagon TVC of the guy with a frozen zombie look, a hysterical stand-out! As Ad & Theater veteran Bharat Dabolkar says "Sense of tumour has replaced humour in many ads, boss! The fit has to be seamless, not contrived and promoting the brand, not the joke or the individual".



### 2. ME-TOO SYNDROME



Once upon a time there reigned the Unique Selling Proposition

as invented by the great Rosser Reeves. It worked because some products were indeed blessed with unique and special attributes. Today, thanks to technology, most attributes are generic, duplicateable and hence vulnerable, leading Guru John Hegarty to say "USP has given way to ESP, Emotional

#### 4. Sex n' Sensationlism



“Sure, sex is a traffic-stopper [Crash! Bang!] and sensationalism can get the eyes and mouth to widen like crazy – but at best, these unusual contortions can produce only a one-time sale and does zilch towards building brand-values or sustain long-term growth”. That was Delhi-based Ad Veteran Esha Guha. She points out to the Amul Macho-Lux Cosy-flavoured Condoms kind of ads and doesn't know whether “to die laughing or puke all summer!” Like Celeb and Humour, this genre also demands a definite brand-fit. Outstanding examples are Axe, Tag, Old Spice - products that promote themselves as uncomplicated “sexual attractant enhancers”. Calvin Klein is another iconic example of successfully imbuing its brand identity with sexuality. Ditto, Victoria's Secret. Blazing the titillation or the nudge-nudge, wink-wink kind invites attention ... of the wrong kind. Nothing more.

#### 5. Fake Patriotism

No ideas? Hit the Patriotism button, guys! Come Independence Day, Republic Day, the Birth/Death Anniversary of any great national leader and suddenly the Ad frat freak out and outdo each other in paying homage to “this great noble soul whose path/footsteps we are committed to follow”. Corny, clichéd visuals accompanied by syrup-drenched text defines these ad aberrations. Does anybody read, notice, remember or care a fig about these zillion ads blitzing special supplements? Not a hope in hell! Sometimes, to try and add value to a product, too. Ad veteran Nargis Wadia points to the recent Gandhi-Mont Blanc ad and is shocked at the “insensitivity and the bizarre connect! For a man who defined simplicity, austerity and a saintly life, this projection was unbelievably weird! Attention at any cost? What's the world coming to ...”



So next time you confront any ad, do a quick checkout. Do any one of these points colour them? If so ... glare, yell, turn the page, pound the remote ... have fun!