

Creative conflict: Ad messages re-evaluated

Advertising Age; Chicago; Mar 24, 2003; Lisa Sanders; Claire Atkinson;

Edition:

Midwest region edition

Volume:

74

Issue:

12

Start Page:

3

ISSN:

00018899

Full Text:

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[Headnote]

New York Lottery pulls commercial starring grim reaper

[Illustration]

Caption: NEW ADS: The Army is now featuring its crests in a move to show it will win with honor.

THE NEW YORK LOTTERY yanked a commercial off the air that featured the grim reaper as it, like many U.S. advertisers, re-evaluated the tone and content of its messages to see if they would appear tasteless or inappropriate during the war with Iraq.

Other all-American marketers such as Anheuser-Busch Co., parent of Budweiser, weighed whether to produce ads with patriotic themes, although most are likely to shy away in part because of divides in public opinion over the war.

Ad agencies trotted out polls and issued white papers advising clients on what they should do; no one school of thought prevailed.

New York Lottery's ad showed the grim reaper at the door of an old man. The ad was produced by Omnicom Group's DDB Worldwide, New York. A spokeswoman for the lottery confirmed the ad was pulled and that the future of the spot was "in discussion."

Pepsi-Cola Co. spokesman Bart Casabona said cryptically last week that the company was "developing plans" to cope with the onset of war. One executive said that could mean pulling or changing its ads, especially two spots Pepsi was scheduled to unveil during the March 23 Oscar ceremony. One, from Omnicom's BBDO Worldwide, New York, stars singer Shakira, while the second, from sibling Spike DDB, New York, features singer Beyonce Knowles.

Though numerous marketers went dark at some point last week, they and their agency partners closely monitored the war's impact on consumers to determine how to react. "The overall impact on spending is a lull until it is known how the war is going," said Paula Ausick, director-brand equities, Interpublic Group of Cos.' Foote, Cone & Belding Worldwide, Chicago.

'BROUGHT TO YOU BY...'

Consumers are particularly sensitive to media messages during crises. A survey of nearly 1,000 consumers by Publicis troupe's MediaVest found 67% felt they "will pay significantly more attention to the news." But said Mel Bering, MediaVest's president-U.S. broadcast: "No marketer wants to send the message: 'This war is brought to you by....'"

Many marketers are keeping a low profile-the safest strategy during a time of uncertainty. "War is inherently unpredictable, messy and full of risks," said Andy Berlin, chairman and co-CEO of WPP Group's Berlin Cameron/Red Cell. "Anyone who before a war or when it first breaks tries to do advertising on what they think will be the case is an idiot. "

Agency executives reported last week that Anheuser-Busch was considering running ads with patriotic themes. An A-B spokesman said the marketer does not plan to produce new work but will run ads from "a pool of existing creative." The brewer planned to run three 30-second spots during the Academy Awards broadcast.

Susan Giannino, chairman-CEO of Publicis USA, part of Publicis Groupe, believes most clients can't credibly put forth a patriotic message. "Unless clients have a dear compelling reason, such as the Army, I would not advise people to pick up a patriotic theme. You need to make a dear distinction between politics and policy. With the war there is too much split sensitivity."

NO PATRIOTIC MUSTARD

Elliott Penner, president of Reckitt Benckiser's Food Division, agrees. Reckitt Benckiser last week issued a press release underscoring the American heritage of its French's mustard in response to consumers' questions. "Were a 100-year-old American business, and we're proud of that, but you won't see a swell of patriotism from us in our advertising. I never want to appear to be capitalizing on what's going on with political issues to sell my mustard."

On March 20, the U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Army both released new ads. The new Marines' spots, from WPP's J. Walter Thompson, Atlanta, show scenes of Marines in Afghanistan. "Our effort isn't changing, but we have some great footage of Marines in Afghanistan and felt this would reflect a serious effort that appeals to the patriotic side," said Maj. David Griesmer, a public relations officer. The Army's new creative, from Publicis troupe's Leo Burnett USA, Chicago, features unit crests, suggesting the Army will always win with honor and courage.

Pollsters at Yankelovich warned marketers against going dark, saying national crises are actually good times for marketers to advertise because consumers' lifestyles are in turmoil and they may be more willing to change their spending habits. "People's needs change. What they're looking for is comfort and connection," said J. Walker Smith, Yankelovich president.

[Photograph]

Caption: PATRIOTIC: The armed services can wave the flag in advertising.

Fonte: Proquest – Advertising Age Acesso em 03/04/2003.