

By Bill Guertin

The 800-Pound Gorilla

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Use Honest Messages To Be Understood

What is your concept of beauty?

“Waking up every morning and living a happy, healthy life is beautiful,” says Julie.

“I feel beautiful whenever I keep a positive attitude,” says Gina.

Stacy says, “I have always been a curvier girl. And always will be.”

And Madison Avenue was shocked.

This past year, six ordinary women without previous modeling experience were chosen to represent Dove Firming, a new lotion product that helps firm and tone skin while moisturizing.

“Real women have real bodies with real curves,” the campaign stated. “And Dove wants to celebrate those curves.”

Firming the thighs of a size 2 supermodel is no challenge. But these women represented Everywoman, much larger than a size 2, and proud of it. These six ladies’ images were splashed over everything from magazine and TV ads to buses and billboards.

Have you seen them? They’re the six average-looking ladies enjoying life and having fun during the photo shoot... in their underwear.

This campaign succeeded because it boldly goes where advertising has never gone before.

It’s honest.

Other companies are starting to pick up on this amazing new concept of honesty. Ameriprise Financial, formerly American Express Financial Services, was recently written up in the Wall Street Journal as questioning the effectiveness of traditional ads.

While casting for their new TV ad campaign, Ameriprise was caught off guard.

“We tried actors, and found that it was just too staged,” said Kim Sharan, Ameriprise’s chief marketing officer. “They just didn’t seem to be genuinely able to envision what they would be doing in retirement.”

So their ad agency went out and found real people, like Yoshi and Kyoko Kosaka, a couple in their 50’s who run a vintage bike shop. These “average people” are filmed talking about their financial goals, their challenges, and their fears about getting there. The Kosakas and others in the campaign became part of a public-relations spotlight, including some interviews with the media.

Slick is out. Honest is in.

Long live honesty!

If you're a business owner or manager, you might be concerned that your messages aren't being perceived by the public as totally honest. That's good. You should be concerned.

Here's a simple test to find out:

Do you tell your honest story in your advertising and marketing, or do you tell the story that you believe others want to hear?

It's easy to fall into the trap of sounding like everyone else. "Safe" advertising is actually the most dangerous advertising you can do, because none of it sticks with consumers; it's wasted money. What do you truly do well? Tell people what it is without using exaggeration.

Do potential customers know how or why you got started in business?

Many great ad campaigns have started with telling the unique story of how a company came to be. Taco John's tells their story on the radio consistently about "a man making tacos in Wyoming" that grew into a national fast-food chain. Mancino's sandwich, the grinder, comes in a box that tells the story of how the grinder first came to be. These honest stories are excellent in building a human feel to a company. What's your story, and how could you use it in your advertising?

If you have a business slogan or tagline, does it give a clear image of an advantage of doing business with you?

It doesn't have to be clever; it just has to be connected with who and what you are. Olivet Nazarene University uses a double entendre in their student recruiting materials: "We Believe. You Belong Here." Kankakee Community College also has an excellent tagline: "Start Here. Finish Anywhere." For generations, Home Appliance and Heating has painted "Where Fast, Friendly Service Is Never A Problem" on the sides of their repair trucks.

Use as few words as possible to paint a clear, honest picture of what the customer will receive, and you'll probably have a good slogan.

Do you tell others what you're not?

If an auto repair shop doesn't do foreign vehicles often enough to be an expert, they may wish to consider saying so. "We're not experts at Mercedes-Benz, but if you drive a Ford, there's no one better in town to work on your vehicle than A-Plus Auto Repair." The small percentage of business you may lose will be more than compensated by the added business from those who know what you do best.

The naked truth is a marketing tactic worth considering. You may not want to pose in your underwear for your next billboard campaign, but others will indeed find you more beautiful.

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