

How low-involvement products can engage consumers

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This article demonstrates how marketers can create high impact marketing on low engagement products, such as financial products.

- State Street's award-winning Fearless Girl campaign turned a low engagement product into an international statement.
- Work needs to create conversation: one of the greatest challenges for brands today is the plethora of content available and the busy lives consumers lead.
- Brands are competing with culture, not with each other: those that create collateral produce work that is mostly invisible and unmemorable while the marketers creating culture are able to transcend advertising and see their work shared.
- Embrace unexpected touch points, for example Trump's Make America Great Again hats.

According to Brent Smart, chief marketing officer of insurance conglomerate IAG, there's no such thing as low-involvement products, only low-involvement marketing.

"Low involvement, low interest, low engagement, low tolerance – that's what I've got for those words," he said.

"They're marketing terms that are actually excuses for doing low involvement, boring marketing. They're excuses for creating marketing pollution and if there's one thing the world doesn't need, it's more marketing pollution."

Smart noted that certain products have an unfair advantage when it comes to being interesting by being beautiful, original or innovative – words few people would use to describe insurance.

"(Insurance marketers) have to create interest seemingly out of nothing," said Smart at the Mumbrella Finance Marketing Summit in Sydney recently.

Making finance high involvement

Smart believes these principles can be applied to the traditionally low involvement category of finance. There's certainly precedent with the most recent example belonging to State Street Global Advisors, and its **Fearless Girl campaign**.

"When that brief hit people's desks, a lot of creatives would be like, 'When's lunch?' It's not the most exciting brief, right? And yet, probably the most influential piece of creative work in the world in the last 12 months came from that brief," said Smart.

The Fearless Girl campaign took home 18 Cannes Lions including four Grand Prix trophies.

"The most important thing about this brief is that State Street had spent many years championing the cause of female leadership," said Smart.

"They'd done research on it. They'd written white papers on it. They'd held conferences about it. All that stuff was really low involvement. Then they created this little statue and suddenly everyone was talking about it. And not only that, they saw a 348% increase in trading volumes. They're the third biggest fund manager in America so they come off a big base. That is the power of high involvement creative."

"If you can do it for an invisible, intangible product like the wind, or for an exchange traded fund, or for the Yellow Pages, then surely you can do it for financial services. Surely you can do it for any product," said Smart.

Taking action

The question remains as to how to deliver on turning low involvement briefs into high involvement work. Smart's advice for marketers is to start by banning the word 'for'.

"It's the word you always hear before an average piece of work. This is good for the brief. This is pretty good for the budget. It's good for this product. It's good for the category," he explained.

"But here's the thing: consumers don't think about 'for'. They don't see a piece of work and say, 'Wow, for that tough brief, that's a really good piece of work'. They don't think like marketers."

In fact, Smart pointed out, most people really don't think about advertising or marketing at all in their day to day lives.

"People don't give a shit about marketing. They just really don't. And we are kidding ourselves as marketers and brand managers if we think they spend as much time thinking about our brands as we do. Because they don't. And that is the real challenge that we all face as marketers," he said.

Smart believes one of the greatest challenges for brands today is the plethora of content available and the busy lives consumers lead.

"The other thing you hear in every single focus group ever, from every consumer, is, 'I'm so time poor, I've got no time'. That's the tension we all face. There's too much content and not enough time to watch it. Right? So creativity is not a choice," he said.

Brands and advertisers have to be interesting. They have to take a chance to be noticed especially given the number one thing they are competing with is culture.

"Pepsi's not really competing with Coke. P&G's not really competing with Unilever. I'm not really competing with Suncorp. And new bankers aren't really competing with each other. As marketers, we're competing with culture."

And most of the time, culture is way more interesting. How come those same time poor people find 10 hours to binge watch an entire series of Game of Thrones?" said Smart.

Those that create collateral produce work that is mostly invisible and unmemorable while the marketers creating culture are able to transcend advertising and see their work shared, much like an episode of Game of Thrones.

"And the marketers that are doing that are having extraordinary results," said Smart.

He believes the best example is Procter & Gamble's 'Share the Load' campaign which topped the WARC 100 earlier this year. The campaign was designed to get men to share the clothes washing load communicated through a symbol included on clothing tags, a surprising but ideal touchpoint.

"It was a really smart piece of thinking," said Smart.

Working your touch points

Touchpoints are the key to achieving cut through, Smart said. And when done right, even the most loathed touchpoint can be effective. Even pre-roll video.

"I love this quote from Andrew Essex, one of the founders of Droga5. He says, 'It's even harder to imagine anyone celebrating a birthday for the banner ad's even less admired younger cousin, the pre-roll ad. The dreaded thing before the thing.' It's such a great description – the dreaded thing before the thing. 'The only format in advertising history so neurotically self-aware of its own annoyingness that it provides a countdown until when it can be skipped'."

That may be the case but the example of US insurance company GEICO and a self-deprecating pre-roll ad that involves a family frozen at the dinner table while a dog helps itself to their meals demonstrates the medium isn't dead.

To drive his point home, Smart chose one final example of a low involvement touch point that had a major impact – the humble baseball cap. Utilised by Donald Trump during his election campaign, the Make America Great Again baseball cap was described by the President's ex-campaign manager as "a disruptive technology".

"He wasn't talking about social media which was the absolute disruptive technology for Obama the first time he was elected," said Smart.

"He wasn't talking about big data or artificial intelligence. He was talking about a hat. Trump created a movement, an anti-elitist movement. What's the best symbol you could find that stands for everyday Americanness? It's a baseball cap."

While Hillary Clinton was busy pumping her marketing budget into television advertising in the final months before the election, Trump's biggest single line item of expenditure over the same period was hats. Smart feels marketers have something to learn from this.

"Not only is it a disruptive piece of technology, it's a disruptive piece of marketing and disruptive channel planning," said Smart.

"To borrow from the Trump hat, I think we can make marketing great again, and particularly make marketing great for low involvement products," he said.

All that needs to be done, according to Smart, is to ban the word 'for', work harder to compete with culture and

embrace unexpected touch points.

"The most important piece of advice I would give to anyone who is working on a low involvement product – and this comes more from my 20 years of working in advertising than it does my short time as a CMO – is be a high involvement client, not a high maintenance client," he said.

"As a client, as a marketer, you have the power to make your agency really, really care about your product. Even if it is a low involvement product that people don't care about, you could really get your agency to care about it by championing great work. By celebrating great work. By making great work."

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