
THE IMAGE OF THE BRAND – A NEW APPROACH TO CREATIVE OPERATIONS

by David Ogilvy (1955)

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When I was invited to speak at luncheon here today, Fred Gamble suggested that I should build my talk around a Creative Credo, which I had recently circulated to some of my friends. That sounded delightfully easy. So I agreed.

But the following week, Sid Bernstein got hold of a copy of my Credo and printed it in Advertising Age.

So now I have decided to take just one plank out of my Credo, and preach you a short sermon on that one text. It happens to be the first plank, and this is what it says:

"Every advertisement is part of the long-term investment in the personality of the brand."

I didn't make that up. I borrowed it, from an article by Burleigh Gardner and Sidney Levy in the March issue of the Harvard Business Review. It is exactly the position we take at Ogilvy, Benson & Mather today.

We hold that every advertisement must be considered as a contribution to the complex symbol, which is the brand image - as part of the long-term investment in the reputation of the brand.

I must confess that I have changed my mind on this subject. When I first arrived in this country eighteen years ago, I bought the wicked old Chicago philosophy, as practiced by Claude Hopkins.

I used to deride advertising men who talked about long-term effect. I used to accuse them of hiding behind long-term effect. I used to say that they used long-term effect as an alibi - to conceal their inability to make any single advertisement profitable. In those intolerant days, I believed that every advertisement must stand on its own two feet and sell goods at a profit on the cost of the pace. This short-range philosophy was being peddled by agencies which had started out in mail-order advertising. Those mail-order agencies knew how to sell - once. That's all they cared about. That was their job.

But they made a profound mistake in applying the principles of one-time mail-order advertising to the creation of campaigns which can only be successful if they sell not once, but time after time, year after year.

Most mail-order advertising is hit-and-run. In-and-out. Caveat emptor, and devil-take-the-hindmost. The less personality, the more coupon returns. The smaller the illustration, the more coupon returns. The fewer idiosyncracies in the presentation, the more coupon returns. The more buckeyed and boiler-plate, the more coupon returns.

All very true, for one-time shots. But those mail-order bullies persuaded a lot of advertisers to use the same kind of boiler-plate techniques for advertising grocery products, and cigarettes, and whiskey, and even automobiles.

With what results? Well, in some cases perhaps, a temporary increase in sales. But in almost all cases, this kind of sleazy advertising has given an incurable black eye to the brands, which have used it over any period of time. And that includes at least two automobiles.

The really evil aspect of that old rough-tough school was that it took such a very short view of advertising. Its practitioners were not building brands. They were not investing money in advertising. They were spending money. They were very shortsighted men.

Today, I have come to believe, with Garner and Levy, that every advertisement must be considered as a contribution to the complex symbol, which is the brand image. And I find that if you take that long-term approach, a great many of the day-to-day creative questions answer themselves.

For example, I have here two campaigns for Thom McAn Shoes, recently prepared in our agency. Look at them. One is an "Amazing Offer," and the other is a testimonial.

We had to decide which of these two campaigns to run. We knew that, on the short haul, each "Amazing Offer" advertisement would sell more shoes than any of the testimonial advertisements.

But we also knew that the "Amazing Offer" would not make any permanent contribution to the kind of image we are trying to build for Thom McAn. So it was decided to run the testimonial campaign.

Now, you may ask how we decide what kind of images to build. There is no short answer. Unfortunately, research cannot help you too much here. You have actually got to use judgment. (I notice increasing reluctance on the part of marketing executives to use judgment. They are coming to rely too much on research. And they use research as a drunk man uses a lamppost - for support, rather than illumination.)

During the last six months, we have seen a remarkable demonstration of image-building for a new brand. I refer to Marlboro Cigarettes. Leo Burnett and his associates used judgment to decide what kind of image to create for the Marlboro image - before they started to create advertising.

And incidentally, they took a risk, which few advertisers would take. They seem to have decided that Marlboro should have an exclusively male personality. What a brave decision.

I find that most manufacturers are reluctant to accept any such limitation on the image and personality of their brands. They want to be all things to all people. They want their brand to be a male brand and a female brand. An upper-crust brand and a plebian brand. And in their greed, they almost always end up with a brand which has not any personality of a kind - a wishy-washy neuter brand. No capon ever rules the roost - and neuter brands get no place in today's market.

It is my guess that 95 percent of all the campaigns now in circulation are being created without any real reference to such long-term considerations.

They are being created ad hoc. Hence the oscillation. Hence the tacking. Hence the lack of any coherent personality from one season to another.

What would you think of a politician who changed his public personality every year? Have you noticed that Winston Churchill has been careful to wear the same ties and the same hats for fifty years - so as not to confuse us?

What a miracle it is when a manufacturer manages to sustain a coherent brand image in his advertising over a period of years. In the past, it has only happened when one strong man, either at the client end or at the agency end, has dominated all the advertising output over a long period. I have in mind, for example, Gordon Seagrove's marathon creative achievement for Listerine. Imagine one man creating all the Listerine advertising for more than thirty years! What a boon for the Lambert stockholders that has been.

Think of all the forces that work to change the personality and image of the brand, from season to season. The advertising managers come and go. The copywriters, the art directors and the account executives come and go. Even the agencies come and go.

What guts it takes, what obstinate determination, to stick to one coherent creative policy, year after year, in the face of all the pressures to "come up with something new" every six months.

How tragically easy it is to stampede into change. But what golden rewards await the advertiser who has the brains to create a favorable brand image - and the stability to stick with it over a long period.

Look at Campbell Soup!
Look at Jello!
Look at Betty Crocker!
Look at Esso!
Look at Ivory Soap!

The men who have been responsible for the advertising of these immortal brands have understood that every advertisement, every radio program, every TV commercial is not a one-time shot, but a long-term investment in the total personality of their brands.

It helps to keep the brand image on the rails if the manufacturer and his advertising agency will take the precaution of engraving on a stone tablet a simple definition of the image, which they wish their brand to acquire over the years.

Once you have a definition of this kind, it will be less easy for changing ad-managers and changing agencies to muddy the image.

So, I say, write down a definition of your own brand images. Restate it at frequent intervals. See that everybody who works anywhere near your advertising understands it. And stick to it.

(The copy platform derives from the brand image, and it can change in the light of product improvements and competitive activity. But the image itself should hold firm.)

Believe me, it is not easy to get agreement within an agency or within a client organization as to what kind of brand image to create. All too often, the brand image represents a compromise, a blurred, wishy-washy compromise.

Blurred images don't inspire much loyalty among consumers. You all know about the lack of brand loyalty in the detergent field. It was found here in Chicago that less than two percent of housewives stick to the same brand of detergent for as long as one year. By coincidence, the researchers tell us that there is only one brand of detergent which has any well-defined image in the consumer mind. All the others are wishy-washy neuters.

Aren't these two things connected - the lack of brand personalities and the lack of brand loyalties? And isn't the lack of brand personality caused, more than anything else, by the fact that all the detergents are using the same claims, each of them trying to be all things to all people?

I wonder when one detergent will summon up the courage to be a little different. Isn't the beginning of greatness in advertising to be different, and the beginning of failure to be the same? So says Roy Whittier, and so say I.

It has only been during the last few years that the researchers have been able to tell us what kind of image and personality our brands have already acquired in the public mind. Some manufacturers have been sobered by these reports. They find that their brand image has serious flaws, which have been hurting their sales. And then, if they are courageous, they ask their advertising agencies to set about changing the image of their brand. This is probably the most difficult task advertising can be called upon to do, because the present image of any brand has been created over a long period of years. It is the result of many different factors - advertising and pricing, and the name itself, and the packaging, and the kind of TV shows the brand has sponsored, and the length of time the brand has been on the market, and so on.

Most of the manufacturers who now find it necessary to change the image of their brand want it changed upwards.

Maybe their brand has acquired a bargain-basement personality - a useful asset in times of economic scarcity, but a grave embarrassment in these boom days, when the majority of consumers are on their way up the social ladder.

It isn't easy to perform a face-lifting operation on an old bargain-basement brand. In many cases, it would be easier to start fresh with a new brand.

You know, we have spent only \$300,000 on creating a brand image for Hathaway in the last four years. I don't think the money would have done the same job for an established brand with thirty years of ordinary advertising behind it.

Right now, we are engaged in trying to modify the image of an entire country - Puerto Rico.

We want people to think of Puerto Rico as a country in renaissance, a country of beautiful mountains and romantic beaches, inhabited by brave and friendly people who are equally proud of their Spanish traditions and their American citizenship.

I believe that we are also on the way to success in building a well-defined image for the Schweppes brand. Here again, it would have taken far more money and far more time to do the job for an old brand. But with Schweppes, we were fortunate enough to get the baby at birth.

One of the most courageous, and apparently one of the most successful jobs of face-lifting is now going on in the Cola field. About three years ago, Al Steel and John Toigo apparently came to the conclusion that Pepsi-Cola's previous advertising had created the wrong personality for the brand. And they seem to be succeeding - much faster than many of us had believed possible.

I am astonished to find how many manufacturers, even among the new generation, believe that women can be persuaded by logic and argument to buy one brand in preference to another - even when two brands are technically identical.

The greater the similarity between products, the less part reason really plays in brand selection.

There really isn't any significant difference between the various brands of whiskey, or the various cigarettes, or the various brands of beer. They are all about the same.

And so are the cake mixes and the detergents and the margarines and the automobiles. And, I might add, the different brands of salt.

The manufacturers who dedicate their advertisers to building the most favorable image, the most sharply defined personality for their brand, are the ones who will get the largest share for these markets at the highest profit in the long run.

By the same token, the manufacturers who will find themselves up the creek are the short-sighted opportunists who use too much of their advertising funds for wheeling and dealing.

Surely, the time has come for more of us to sound the alarm, to warn our clients what is going to happen to their brands, if they spend so much on factory packs and coupon redemptions that there is no money left for advertising to build a personality for their brand.

Sure, deals will get you display space on the stores, and features. But they can cost too much. And they don't build the kind of indestructible image, which is the only thing that can make your brand part of the fabric of American life.

And so I say, let us try to take a longer and larger view of our creative responsibilities.

Let us plan ten years ahead, on the assumption that our clients intend to stay in business forever.

Let us create sharply-defined personalities for their brands.
Let us stick to those personalities without wavering, year after year.

And let us remember that it is almost always the total personality of a brand, rather than trivial product difference, which decides its ultimate position in the market.

About the Author

David Ogilvy (June 23, 1911 – July 21, 1999) was not just a notable advertising executive, but, according to Kenneth Roman, he was (and still is) "the most famous advertising man in the world". He has often been called "The Father of Advertising" and in 1962, Time Magazine referred to him as "the most sought-after wizard in today's advertising industry." As founder of Ogilvy & Mather (www.ogilvy.com) he has expanded the bounds of creativity. At the same time Ogilvy brought the long-term concept of "brand image" from the academic world into business reality and thereby put a clear limit to short-term advertising goals. Or as he put it: "*Every advertisement is part of the long-term investment in the personality of the brand.*"

Ogilvy published two very popular and now famous books on advertising and brand management that are still worth reading today:

Confessions of an Advertising Man
(1963)

Ogilvy on Advertising
(1983)

