

Good Morning, Costa Rica or Originality Counts

By June Campbell

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Originality counts -- and you'll be counting your sales figures when you implement your original ideas in your product line, marketing and sales materials.

Take a look at many of the headlines and advertisements that you come across on the Web and in newspapers and other media.

Same old, same old. Most barely make an impression on your consciousness.

On the other hand, who will ever forget the Energizer Bunny? That rabbit is one original little hopper. Bunny, of course, was the product of a highly creative advertising team. The rest of us will have to struggle a little harder to find original ideas for our small businesses.

Originality counts, but being original isn't always easy.

Here's the thing. Most people within an identified culture or ethnic group are hot-wired to come up with very similar responses when presented with a word, concept or product.

But strangely, we all tend to think our response is unique and special and that no one has previously thought of it.

I've noticed this for a long time -- at least for as long as my name has been June, which is to say, all of my life. Ever since I can remember, on being introduced, people are prone to announce gleefully, "JUNE BUG!"

I don't mind being called June Bug. There are worse names. But I do marvel at how each and every person who says this believes that I am hearing this wonderfully witty remark for the first time. Yeah, the first time this morning, maybe.

You'd think I'd know better than to fall into the trap of "same old, same old" thinking myself, given that I've been complaining about it since childhood. But no.

A few years ago, I attended a 10-month multimedia course. One of our assignments was to write the story line for a Costa Rican travel video. We were told that film star Robin Williams would be providing the voice-over in our imaginary film.

I gave the matter a couple of minutes thought, and suddenly I had my brainwave. The video would

open like this:

The sun rises over a gorgeous, tropical beach.
Robin Williams' voice rings out:

"Good Moooooring, Costa Rica!"

(Those who don't catch the connection, run to the video store and rent Williams' award winning film, Good Morning Vietnam).

Afterwards, I learned to my embarrassment that approximately half of my classmates had used the identical opening. And worse, students in previous classes had also come up with this opening scene for the same assignment. The instructor was very sick of Good Morning, Costa Rica.

The lesson is clear. If an idea, headline, name, joke or other response leaps into our mind quickly, we're not alone. It's a given that numerous others have had the same immediate response -- and each and every one considered it unique. If the idea was obvious to you, guaranteed it was obvious to many others as well.

The truly original response is likely to be one that pops into our mind later -- after we've slept on it, or while we are daydreaming about something else completely.

And why is originality so important? If you are in business, it means you'll come up with a different product, a different service, a different advertising headline than the one used by your competitors.

If you're in a creative field, it means you'll be remembered and known for your original work.

If Margaret Mitchell had named her novel "A Civil War Romance," the book would have been a good read. But would it have had the impact of Gone With the Wind?

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