

Is Your Ad Killing Your Brand?

By Karon Thackston

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It's funny to me how companies spend thousands of dollars to develop a brand only to wreck it when they create their advertising campaigns. They pour over colors, fonts, logo designs, Web site creation, USPs, and target audience analyses. But then, when it's time to bring their message to the public, it all falls apart.

Case in point: a local technical college in my town has recently begun to run a television campaign. This institution previously had an image of providing cutting-edge training on technically based vocations. They have spent the last several years touting how high-tech their facilities are, and how leading edge their curriculums are. That's why I can't image what happened during the production of this ad.

The background music is slow and rather classical. The pictures are of smiling students carrying books, and of one of the oldest buildings on the campus. The copy did do its job. The copy mentioned how the workplace was changing and becoming more advanced day-by-day. It talked about how even the simplest of jobs now require at least some technological "know-how." But the clash between the copy and the imagery was painfully obvious.

What would I have done differently? I would have chosen each element with the express purpose of supporting the brand. The music would have been more upbeat and modern. The images would have been of students working at computers, or in engineering labs. The closing shot would not have been one of the oldest, stodgiest building on campus, but of the new stucco and glass building they added 2 years ago.

The end result *could* have been an ad that completely portrayed the innovative and advanced curriculums offered by this technology-based school. The copy, the visuals, and the music all working in harmony would bring about a much larger response, and would also reinforce the brand this institution has worked so hard to create.

When you create advertising pieces for your company, look for the branding aspects of each, individual element. As you work through the process, ask yourself these questions:

- What identity am I attempting to portray?
- Do the graphics reinforce that identity?

- Does the music support my brand?
- Is the copy descriptive of aspects related to the brand?
- Do the colors fall in line with how I want to be viewed?
- Is the medium itself appropriate to my brand?

When the final product (whether it be a piece for TV, radio, the Web, or print) is completed, show it to several people who are unfamiliar with your organization. Ask them to describe the “essence” of your business based on this one piece. If your combination is put together right, they’ll be able to do just that.

When you pay close attention to each element you’ll have a powerful end result. When everything works in concert, you will have a much more beneficial campaign that works to contribute to your branding efforts rather than destroy them.

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