

COMMUNICATION:

ADVERTISING BEYOND ADVERTISING

by Marzio Bonferroni

When speaking of advertising and company communication, today more and more often we ask ourselves if advertising plays such an important part, or is it only a particular part of a much more complex system that should not be called so above all, in the third millennium...

...communication.

If we then examine the meaning of the above term, and we take it back to the root from which it comes, the words „community“, „communion“, „common“, and also „communication“ take on a deeper and more total meaning, if we are referring to....

... common action...

of two human beings, one human being and a community, one community and another, within which there is an exchange, with the need of one party being satisfied by the solution of the other.

All economic and marketing theory is based on a very simple principle, as Philip Kotler upholds, on the exchange of „values“ that takes place between buyer and seller. On one hand, there is the need to solve the problem, on the other there is the right solution at the moment when the need can be satisfied.

It is communication, in its role of „bridge“ linking demand to supply, that plays a decisive economic and marketing role, in making one or more people aware that they have one or more needs, and that there are suitable products and services, to solve those needs.

Therefore, it is common action, the exchange of ideas, of information and of dialogue between the parties, that tends to create reciprocal communication activity, which is more and more evident in

... interactivity.

What immediately comes to mind is the enormous revolution created by the internet and, therefore, the speeding up of all interactive processes of demand and supply, up to that real time-linked interactivity that we have on the net with the supply of and demand for products and services.

These go from the most „emotional“ to the most „rational“, and are only feasible if there is an exchange of values, or needs and solutions without which interactivity would not exist as the same economic exchange would not exist.

What is the problem then for us or what role should be entrusted to advertising, or to other techniques, so as to obtain the total satisfaction of the customer, of the general public, or of each one of us, in a new vision involving company communication where it is the public that exposes its needs ?

Let's listen to the target

So, how can we devise new methods so as to obtain a riper, more complete, more desirable form as far as regards the public and, therefore of greater use as well as being attractive as far as regards advertising ? I believe that the best way is to listen to the target and to question it to find out what its

desires are, to then attempt to understand what its needs are and to provide the solution.

To achieve this, we have chosen to run a staged survey involving two different segments of the general public:-

- a) consumers, men and women, of all ages and class;
- b) marketing and communication managers from big and famous companies.

Furthermore, we have consulted bibliography, of both bestselling national and international authors where they illustrate their opinions on new communication trends, these trends being mainly the result of trustworthy research.

We have been convinced by the above to make a proposal- that we will clarify further on- that is meant as a „reply“ to the customer’s needs, the very customer who will receive our communications.

We shall begin, therefore, with listening to consumers, men and women, of all ages and class, which were asked two specific questions:

The first question: „what does advertising mean for you ?“

Replies to this first question have revealed that the interviewees consider advertising a tool which:-

„gets things sold“

„makes me pay attention to a product to get it sold“

„gets people to buy“

„makes a product popular“

„implants the product name in my head in an amusing way“

„gets products purchased even if more expensive, making you believe that they are better products“

„make you have faith in a product“

„persuades me to buy“
„shocks me to make me feel like purchasing a product“
„attracts attention“

The interviews above have been taken from „Beyond Advertising“ (pag, 13/14) by M.Bonferroni-Il Sole 24 Ore, Milano 1996)

There is therefore no public hostility concerning advertising but there is on the other hand suspicion that companies are entities that must above all sell profitably and use any means to do so.

The **second question** was: „what would you like advertising to be for you ?“

The replies to this second question reveal that the interviewees desire advertising:-

„that is based on real aspects of life and less on absurd and purely spectacular situations“

„that provides more information on product use“

„that is more useful, and which informs me in which way I can solve real problems inherent in my daily life“

„that can be used as a method of getting in touch with companies that make the product, of criticism, of obtaining clarification and improvements“

„that is more respectful of the role of women in society“

„that is simpler, less consumer society based and clearer“

„that is less based on people and unreal and improbable situations“

„that provides more information and is more tailor-made“

Therefore, the public reaction is in no way passive but inversely tends to desire a form of advertising more of its own, with more information, and increased solidity and usefulness.

We will now go on to deal with the replies of managers from very famous companies to the three following questions:

- Do you think that advertising complexity, as far as concerns the end-consumer has grown over the last five years, or not ?
- How would you judge this complexity, putting yourself in the end-consumer's shoes ?
- How should advertising evolve, keeping in mind the value and the use it should have for the end-consumer ?

A summary of the replies obtained, can be found below:

„...the creation of values in the client-product-company relationship, must be the main objective of advertising...“
(Mr. Balestri-marketing manager Roche patient care)

„...how can we really help the client ? The reply, as far as regards the communication tool, depends a lot on the modern culture of service and the consolidation of the strategic necessity to come up with real and continuous communication with your clients ...“
(Mr. D.Berardi-communications manager Sanpaolo Imi)

„...hedonistic advertising and advertising projecting improbable life styles are not enough any more but, if we agree that the client is the mainstay, advertising then comes another piece of the jigsaw that can become a value...“
(Mrs. D. Bernacchi-marketing manager Liquigas)

„...advertising will play a more and more integrated role in communication, and be capable of becoming more and more direct and personal as far as regards a consumer, that becomes the centre of concentrated attention, having been identified, entertained, involved, conquered and personally convinced. Whoever can propose the richest synthesis of a complex communicative model, as well as obviously relevant contents, will become the victor and have the leading role in the evolution of advertising...“

(Mr. G. Caspani-marketing manager Lever)

„... the consumer, stimulated by the rapid increase in quantity and quality standard of global communication, is more and more forced to follow a selective route (consciously or subconsciously in the quest for and assessment of information on which he can base his decision to buy...”

(Mr. M. De Ceglie-olive oil category director Van Den Bergh)

„...traditional communication methods are considered less then satisfying: more specifically as the result of information being not available enough to satisfy the needs and desires of the end-consumer, who still has to work hard to decodify the message. Communication creatives seem worried above all about surprising, hitting hard and leaving the mark.

The consumer wants more independence and interaction and to play a less passive and dependent role as far as regards the brand supply...”

(Mr. F.Di Lauro – marketing manager Illy Caffé)

(Mr. M.Bellunato – product manager Illy Caffé)

„... the mission of advertising will be that of aiding society in its quest for real values and certainties. The consumer wants to be seen as a human being and not as a target for messages.

This request represents of course an ordeal for advertisers and will also represent their social and ethical responsibility...”

(Mr. L. Di Lelio – Trade marketing manager Black & Decker)

„...certainly, the advent of some new media (e.g. internet and online sales), has increased the complexity of the advertising market. We should not allow ourselves to be blinded by the need to appear different from others and by the need to shock, because too often do we have to see shocking adverts which are absolutely indirect and not very clear as far as regards the product...”

(Mr M.Formisano – Marketing manager ERG Petroli)

„...probably, internet will be, once it has also become a mass media phenomenon in Italy, the medium that will allow us to come to a good compromise between the time available to the surfer and the depth of information available...”

(Mr V.Massiah – Deputy General Manager and sales manager Banco Ambro Veneto).

“...the consumer, if we leave out institutional, no profit, game-based or hedonistic forms of social communication, can consider advertising useful only if the latter helps him to satisfy his needs or even to pinpoint and define those needs so that he will be able to improve his own standard of living...”

(Mr. F Lugnani – Branded product manager GS)

“...I believe that the consumer is rationally searching for less emotive content and greater solidity in advertising but also that at a subconscious level, he is seeking a dream and he therefore appreciates ‘ beautiful’ advertising which is a bit flashy. The services area is a different kettle of fish where info is precise and on time and surely a winning move...”

(Mr.D. Mezzalama –Communications manager Toro)

“...I reckon the consumer is living in a muddled era with too many messages, feeling that he does not have that which he wants: that is, correct information.

It is also true though, that the dream to own things which creates front and status is still common.

Maintaining a balance however is crucial...”

(Mr. R. Pettinelli – Marketing manager Citroen)

“...messages must provide stimulation and pave new routes, suggesting and allowing access to additional service information and if feasible, providing contact and sealing relationships...”

(Mr. F. Piva – General manager Pharbenia/Bayer)

“...I uphold that advertising better said ‘communication’ as far as regards the product, has to broaden its informing horizons so as to capture the attention of the end consumer: in other words, impact and content.

This means concocting communication that gives the end consumer a valid reason why he should go for one product rather than another...”

(Mr. G. Rusconi – Marketing manager detergent sector Henkel)

“...the stupefaction we look for in our advertising communications is akin to shock, clamour, sensationalism: we aim at shocking the consumer armed with spectacular frame shots and provocative headlines consumed in the brief arc of a flight. And these do not affect the consumer...”

(Mr. M. Sasso – Marketing manager Manitoba Italia)

“...it seems to me that the cluttering of advertising is today the main complication, if we look at it from the consumer end. Advertising should evolve by broadening its range of tools so as to reach chosen targets. Integration of advertising with more specific and informative forms can maximise the return on investments...”

(Mr. P. Verderosa – Marketing manager RAS)

(The interviews have been taken from „Multicreativity“ (pag. 15-36 by M.Bonferroni-Il Sole 24 Ore, Milano 1999)

COMMENTS

The answers above are only a drop in the ocean of research on the subject, published by distinguished authorities on the

phenomenon of communication and marketing, even if from a different angle, concerning the current trends in progress.

We will now attempt to pinpoint certain key concepts that become clear after analysis, aware though of the fact that the market is in a state of constant evolution.

a) The 'complexity' factor.

Over the last few years, this has become increasingly evident, while it was evident only in its absence in case history where brand awareness, based essentially on advertising impact, determined growth, increased market share and brand turnover. The phenomenon of complexity, well known in the scientific field, has nowadays become the norm on a marketplace with brands abounding in every commodity sector, channels and communication media abounding and myriads of messages abounding within a society with an increasing number of media vehicles and things to say.

It hinders the advertising agency in its mission to on its own decide the success or not of a particular brand, and to increase its brand awareness as well.

In such a situation, advertising becomes for a brand a crucial factor, but advertising for the brand does not become a guarantee of consumer loyalty and, therefore not a guarantee as far as regards market share and turnover

b) Living together globalization and individualism.

We have been thrown into the era we are now living in by the take-off of Internet, a phenomenon distinguished by its entrepreneurial broadening that has had to come to terms with the growth of the individual.

Almost as if each individual had opposed the process of globalization, each individual seems to claim, admittedly to a different extent, different personal needs to those of the masses.

We find ourselves therefore increasingly in the presence of individual massed identities and not in the presence of

massed identities as it was during the uniform, standardized manufacturing era.

Every person, each identity, needs recognition, needs to be called by name and surname, to be understood and accepted for his desires, be they emotive or be they rational, to be considered a complete human being with both merits and defects constantly on the lookout for new ways of life involving increasingly elevated degrees of gratification.

c) The need to receive and dispense value.

If, as it appears evident that it is so, the consumer becomes consciously active and puts on the table his emotive and rational needs, which he wishes to exchange with the one who can satisfy these needs, then, it is the brand which must focus on these, make it clear that these needs have been understood by approaching the human breed of society. Advertising can then reward consumers, by giving them products and services which respond to their need of self identification.

Enterprise asks itself what to do. What is the new vision ?

In a nutshell, a solution which provides a new vision of communication and which is of use to a company whose objective is to dominate a new, complex marketing situation, could be the following:-

Clearly demonstrate to the total target its own uniqueness of brand, its own particular mission and market positioning while simultaneously informing each and every consumer comprising the target that the brand is right behind him and understands the personal and unique needs that form his project of self-identification .

Therefore, the brand is able to offer the consumer the exclusive information and services he desires so that he can accept and purchase the tailor-made product designed to satisfy his needs.

The advertiser will still have to, for this reason, turn to mass media so as to reach his target, should it be a mass target, or to specific media, should the target be specific.

The brand communicates its own uniqueness and its own positioning, creating favourable conditions for a trust-based relationship with each unique consumer, where its information

content and services provided are aptly customised to satisfy individual consumer needs.

Advertising, still a necessary cog in the wheel, takes now the role of 'means' and not that of 'end' in the communication machine, forming a bridge linking the brand to the end consumer, both engaged in a bilateral relationship.

This is why the Internet is of paramount importance.

It represents the quintessential potential as far as regards interactivity between brand and end-consumer in the wake of Fax, Telefax, Freephone and mail that still today perform satisfactorily the task assigned.

To conclude, brand-end consumer communication will become increasingly bilateral in nature and will evolve into „a relationship based principally on trust“ , to be instilled and preserved, with the level of success of the creation, development and maintenance of brand loyalty becoming the deciding factor in the rise and fall of a corporate brand.

2. THE NEED FOR A NEW VISION OF COMMUNICATION

In the context of the transition we have attempted to describe from a market dominated in the past by advertising to one under the reign of communication (or dominated by several techniques, one of which is advertising), it must be understood that the unique, self-identifying individual we have before us and who we will have to deal with if we want to emerge victorious in our new marketing battle, is a human being composed of two distinct and complementary cerebral compartments or spheres we will have to take into account when we are planning and creating advertising messages: the emotive and the rational.

The consumer is like a house with two doors, two areas where he must come under consideration and be given satisfaction if total communication is to be obtained. The key to one door, that leading to the sphere of emotivity, is forged of elements of that sphere, that is, emotively attractive elements such as pleasing things, irony, sensuality, attraction that attracts the target. The second door, that leading to the sphere of rationality, can then have a key, not any longer an 'end' but a 'means', forged of elements of that sphere, that is, editorial content, useful information, instructions on use, purchase terms and so on.

A new method of communication, besides leaving sufficient room for message creativity, should have clear indications of which communication tool to adopt to emerge the victor in the two door struggle and to therefore touch on the consumer's highest degrees of satisfaction. Without the communication, it would be virtually impossible to gauge the desire and behaviour pattern, vital if the consumer is to purchase the product.

Furthermore, this new method should be representative of the new vision of communication we have attempted to trace, a vision where it is the company which stands before its market and its target, showing itself capable of mobility and profound understanding of its market, sharing a common philosophy and method and accepting to integrate one or more aspects according to its own vocation and specialisation. To put it in different words, I uphold that both method and vision should be shared by all the forces which contribute towards the construction of the great monument of company brand communication, each working force giving its maximum in its own field, be it an Agency, a company co-operating with another company according to the principle of business to business, or be it a supplier of know-how or media. Metaphorically speaking, I would say that a vision of marketing communication could be compared to the medical field, where each specialisation sector must begin with the vision of 'a healthy person' who is both unique and generally healthy, to then contribute towards the state of optimum health by giving his own particular specialisation.

3. THE PROPOSAL FOR A NEW METHOD OF COMMUNICATION

The method we will now outline has its root in the scientific principle of interactivity or multiple activity which when applied to our professional sector can be seen as teamwork, bringing about the creation of a common strategy with ensuing interaction of all the techniques of communication.

The objective is to get messages and media combined in a coordinated programme to reach common objectives.

The human being that can be reached by a communication creating brand awareness and positioning is calling out for more and more confirmation of his own 'self identity'.

He is a complex creature who needs to be both emotively and rationally satisfied.

Therefore, we think that the complexity of a human being can only be satisfied by a complex system or method of communication, and no longer by a single technique

This method has been illustrated as follows:-

$$(C1 + C2 + C3) S=C$$

$$C =V$$

Where

C1 = advertising

C2 = relationship communications

C3 = loyalty

C = communication

S = synergy

V = recognised value (solving needs...)

The above represents teamwork, where each technique functions at the same level of importance as the other

techniques of communication, contributing towards an initial common strategy to then draw up an optimum media plan, within which each medium, following a single strategic line, can with creativity and messages reach pinpointed reference targets.

Conclusion

All those who consider communication ' a common action' promulgated by both corporate brand and consumer and who would like to see a faithful bond of reciprocal loyalty of both, will find in bibliography confirmation of the unstoppable and transforming trend we are now witnessing also in the world of marketing communication.

There are those that are not part of this line of thought, and well, they are still around, those who think of the present as a nasty moment to grin and bear and then...it will all pass anyway and all will be just the same again...those who resist the winds of change...

In fact, the past, which must be admitted has given us the present, will never come back, so it is the time to open our eyes , be realistic, be brave...and act, by putting the consumer in the customer's place in the very centre of our thoughts as we have discovered at last that he or she is a human being.