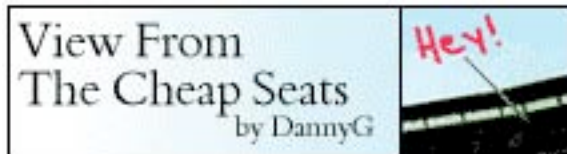


VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS



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Scrubbing Bubbles and Flubbing CEO's

Strong advertising reflects corporate culture—and outsiders need to beware

When William Perez was unceremoniously dumped at the CEO of Nike after only a year on the job, speculation was rampant that he didn't fit in with the Nike culture.

But as was mentioned in BusinessWeek, Perez committed a greater sin: He didn't get the ads.

An article reported on Perez's viewing of a Nike basketball spot:

His concern: The ad explained nothing about the product, and it had minimal brand presence. "I came from a rational world of communications," Perez said.

Perez's background included a 36 years SC Johnson & Son, the home of Pledge, Ziploc, Scrubbing Bubbles, and Raid and all sorts of other household products. So he knows a little something about getting people to buy mass quantities of product. But he didn't understand the Nike brand, or so it seems.

For argument's sake, let's assume that the difference between Nike and S.C. Johnson can be easily shown by their marketing. So how do two successful companies both achieve major success utilizing two very divergent ad strategies?

Well, the answer is simple—no one in marketing or advertising can definitely say whether emotional beats rational; whether entertainment value beats product benefits. There's no one right answer and there never, ever will be. And if the Perez case is any indication, some people simply can't change from one mindset to the other.

Most agencies don't have iron-clad beliefs in this debate. Agencies tend to do what clients want, and therefore end up producing ads and strategies that are a muddled combination of benefits and emotional appeal. The research people get a say, the creative folks get a say, the clients get a say, and soon the ads face strangulation by committee. A feel-good approach with benefit copy points uncomfortably crammed in. Combine both successfully and you've got a miracle. And miracles, as we all know, are rare.

One wonders what would happen if Raid pursued a pest death-is-glory "Just Kill It" strategy, and if Nike pursued a benefit-oriented "now with more cushioning, making you 15% faster than those other sneakers" approach. While they could do those types of ads, both SC Johnson and Nike would be messing with what, for each company, is a tried-and-true formula.

We simply don't expect to form an emotional bond with Ziploc or Pledge and we don't expect to learn why Nike would be better than its competition. At least not in the TV ads. But go to Nike's website and you'll find more product benefit information than you ever wanted to know. Maybe Perez wasn't willing to give consumers that much credit. We'll never know.

With companies like Nike out there, and companies like SC Johnson out there, both successful, we'll continue to see advertising that stretches from one extreme to the other. The hard-sell will get harder, the soft-sell will get softer, and the debate over what's more effective will never end.

But don't worry about William Perez, though. Somewhere, there's a benefit-oriented marketer who needs him. And for his 12 months of not fitting in at Nike, he's scheduled to get \$8 million in severance. That'll buy a few mansions' worth of Scrubbing Bubbles and Raid for sure.