

When Bay Networks was around they unveiled a new tagline, “Adaptive Networking”, with a great deal of fanfare at Networld / Interop. It fell flat and invited all sorts of questions that didn’t have good answers. When I got a call to help them out I asked them what it meant. They told me that they hadn’t worked that out yet. Yet another B2B company caught in a consumer marketing trap.

The Tagline Trap

By Gib Trub

Do Taglines Have Any Value in the B2B World?

First let’s get the semantics straight. Taglines are those 3 or 4 word slogans that you hear at the end of commercials or see in the general vicinity of a logo in a print ad.

A tagline is usually meant to inspire interest and serve as a unifying campaign device that will be memorable and drive association with the brand and its positioning. It’s a line that proudly points out the unique value of the brand.

In the consumer world we can rattle the great or really annoying ones off the top of our collective heads:

“The real thing.”

“Just do it.”

“Have it your way.”

“Please don’t squeeze the ____.”
(If you’re over 30 you know the answer don’t you?)

Go ahead name some more. Everyone has an easy list of ones they love and hate.

Now try this drill to test the value in the B2B space. Name one tagline that appeared in print only (no radio or TV commercial use) and wasn’t done by your own company or a key competitor of yours.

Any luck?

In five years of giving this test, I’ve had only one correct answer. And I don’t remember what it was.

Here’s another telling test. The following 12 companies and their taglines were chosen from current business pubs. They were picked because they’re all well-known B2B brands that are consis-

tently major advertisers, predominantly in print.

See if you can match the line with the brand.

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|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Dell | A. The next level of performance |
| 2. HP | B. Inspire the Next |
| 3. AT&T | C. Imagine it. Done. |
| 4. Samsung | D. It's how we get things done. |
| 5. Unisys | E. Inside and out |
| 6. Sprint | F. Go farther |
| 7. Network Solutions | G. Yes you can. |
| 8. Computer Associates | H. Invent |
| 9. Cognos | I. The Power to Know |
| 10. Hitachi | J. Where information lives |
| 11. EMC | K. The world's networking company |
| 12. SAS | L. Simplify, Automate, Secure |

The truth about taglines, as this last exercise drives home, is that without broadcast to accompany them they don't serve as memorable ties between the brand and the position you're trying to establish. So the big question is, are they ever worth the time, effort, expense and aggravation associated with developing one that everyone can sign off on?

The answer is sometimes.

If you accept the premise that they have no emotional value in a print-media only campaign, and instead focus on the practical applications there is sometimes some merit. If you have a new / emerging brand with little recognition and a name that doesn't clearly communicate what you do for a living, a tagline can be a reasonable communications aid.

A good example -- when Amazon.com launched there was no way that anyone could guess what they did for a living. The line "Earth's largest bookstore" served to teach us what the brand stood for and therefore why we should care. Amazon's line had attitude and was a perfect to introduction to the first real consumer, e-commerce site on the web. In the B2B world attitude is difficult to

pull off well and in a print-only environment, trying to be clever in a tagline

usually fights with the specific message of the ad, or risks being “cute.”

B2B ads have to work immediately. No one reads them the way they read ads about the things with which they are passionate. You’ve realistically got a shot at getting the average reader to understand that you solve a problem they have, remember ONE brand name and respond to an offer if it is for something they think will be of value. That’s it. And that is how you begin to build a brand and establish a position.

Adding a tagline that offers yet another bit of information or positioning language is usually overload. If you try and write a line that always is supported by the main advertising message you hamstring the creative.

If you decide you really need one, the best rule of thumb is: Keep it simple, and get out of your own way. Start by writing lines that are based solely on the category and your unique functional benefit. And if you can do it with a little creative flair, it will be pure serendipity.

Quiz Key

1-D, 2-H, 3-K, 4-E, 5-C, 6-G, 7-F, 8-L, 9-A, 10-B, 11-J, 12-I

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