

Can one dollar do the work of two?

by Jonathan Plazonja

Let's face it, there are few shortcuts in life. The book is almost always better than the film. The gym will always trump the Thighmaster. And you've got to know the chords before you can try to solo. That said, what marketer hasn't wondered, "**How do I stretch my budget?**" What marketing firm hasn't asked, "**Is there a way to give my clients a bigger bang for their buck?**" There is, and it boils down to one little word: **Creativity**. Because properly utilized, creativity can get one dollar to do the work of two. Or five. Or ten. Or even a hundred. Simple math is on my side. Let's break it down.

Common sense dictates it usually costs roughly the same to produce and run an effective piece of communication as it does to produce and run an ineffective one. The research costs the same. The media costs the same. The photography, illustration or programming often cost the same. The hours spent huddling in stale conference rooms is the same. *The sole differentiator, then, is the creativity you employ to deliver your message.* Unfortunately, this isn't always as easy as it sounds.

We live in an era of unprecedented "connectedness." Computers and instant messaging keep us tethered to work, family and friends. Cell phones and PDAs alert us to world events or tell us how the markets are doing. Yet the downside of all of this technology is a mind-numbing information fatigue, not to mention the inescapable reality that our target has never had more ways to bypass our messages. To opt out.

On the client side, modern technology allows your competitors to imitate or even duplicate your point of difference almost overnight. So the differentiation isn't always *what* you say, but *how* you say it. And that's where creativity comes in. To paraphrase the late Bill Bernbach (the founder of Doyle Dane Bernbach, which produced the wonderful VW ads of the '60s, among other great campaigns): *it's the last legal means you have to gain an unfair advantage over your competition.* Here's a good example:

In 1974, Master Lock did the unthinkable. They bet a huge chunk of their marketing budget on a single television spot on the Super Bowl. This decision flew in the face of conventional media buying wisdom, which naturally would argue for frequency. Making their task even harder, Master Lock's message was a fairly generic one as well: Durability. Price of entry in the category, you say. True. But their commercial delivered it in an unforgettable way: They had a sharpshooter fire at the lock, which stood up to the abuse. A highly memorable and credible product demonstration that made the males of America sit up in their La-Z-Boys and take notice.

In the end, the only currency that matters in our business is ideas. The more creative you make your communications, the harder they work, and the better chance you'll have of realizing your potential. To quote Bernbach again, "*Nobody counts the number of ads you run; they just remember the impressions you make.*"



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