

4 Types of Advertising Campaigns that Sell

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by James Connor, CEO of The James Group

In the history of the world, there have only been four types of advertising campaigns that both build brands and drive sales. They are:

- 1 [A WORD HOOK](#)
- 2 [A CHARACTER HOOK](#)
- 3 [A REPEATABLE THEME](#)
- 4 [A CONSISTENT BRAND LAYOUT](#)

Without exception, the most popular and most successful advertising campaigns have used one of these techniques or combined several of these techniques, making them well-documented best practices in creating ad campaigns.

Why is this so important?

If your company is not using one or more of these techniques, The James Group already knows—your marketing is underperforming.

Actually, we're being polite. Look at a company's website or a single print ad. If at least one of these techniques is not present, you can be certain of two things: 1) That company isn't getting return on investment on their marketing spend. 2) The CEO and CFO are unhappy about it.

These principals hold true whether you do business-to-business, business-to-consumer, or even business-to-government marketing and regardless of the size of your marketing budget.

Fortunately, it is never too late to fix this problem by creating a new campaign based on time-tested best practices. This article will demonstrate how your company can use these techniques to improve your marketing results using examples from large budget advertising campaigns you will easily recognize and lower budget marketing campaigns that have proved successful for small and mid-sized companies.

To improve your marketing, you need to gain several levels of understanding: 1) Why these types of campaigns are essential. 2) How each campaign type functions. 3) How to isolate the sales moment. 4) When to change your campaign.

Why These Types of Advertising Campaigns are Essential

A brand is a set of visual and verbal images that combine to convey a single mental image. The company name, logo, tagline, and campaignable image all come together in one mental image at key consumer touchpoints.

When a target customer sees your website, print ad, TV ad, brochure, direct mail piece, or hears your radio spot, it may be the first time that person is encountering your brand or product. The average American encounters between 300-3,000 advertising impressions per day, depending on which study you believe and how you define an impression. But one thing is certain, people are bombarded by too much information every day.

So, what will they do? They'll scan it in

a blink, looking for a handle to process the information. Without a handle, they are most likely to reject the marketing piece by simply moving on to something else.

These four types of advertising campaigns first function as handles, or entering points, that allow information to be processed quickly. Because information can be transmitted, a sales proposition can be made. If the proposition is compelling, a sale can be driven. But all this starts with a campaign handle.

The second reason these campaign types are essential is they create powerful mental images. Understanding mental images is the link between branding and sales. Consider how your mind works. What did you have for breakfast this

morning?

Did the information come to you in words or pictures? You saw a picture of your breakfast; for example, a picture of the bowl of cereal or cup of coffee, before your mind said, "cereal, coffee." What did you wear yesterday? Your mind is searching in pictures (even when you can't remember).

The same thing happens when people are making purchasing decisions. Mental images flip by in little movies at blinding speed. What company should I hire? Or what brand should I buy? By using one of these four campaignable ideas, you create a higher probability your company or product will be remembered.

How Each Campaign Type Functions

Campaign Type 1:

THE WORD HOOK

The word hook is a repeatable catch phrase from ad to ad. Great examples of advertising campaigns using the word hook include Verizon's "Can you hear me now?" created by Bozell/New York to convince the world Verizon has the best network.

How effective was it? Consider that in July of 2003, a J.D. Power & Associates survey ranked Verizon at the top of the list for wireless quality, while Alltel was ranked number seven—even though they share the same network through a nationwide roaming agreement. Alltel CEO Scott Ford explained this point to investors at the Smith Barney Citigroup conference in January of 2004, commenting that the ranking difference could only be explained by advertising perception.

Another word hook is Mastercard's "Priceless" campaign created by McCann Erickson. Since 1997, MasterCard has added new U.S. credit cards at more than twice Visa's rate.

Perhaps the longest running word hook with more than 1,500 ads comes from Absolut. Conceived by TBWA in 1980, the well-known ads feature images based on the bottle's distinctive shape with the word hook running at the bottom, like Absolut Manhattan featuring an aerial view of Central Park in the shape of the bottle.

How effective were the ads? In 1999, Absolut commanded an amazing 58% market share for vodka—an alcohol that is defined as colorless, tasteless, and odorless. Wouldn't you like to com-

mand 58% of the market?

The word hook is like the chorus of a good pop song. They are catchy. Maybe, even insidious. Everybody knows how to play along. The triumph of a great marketing catch phrase, is when it becomes so well known, it additionally can serve as a cultural joke.

In a televised debate before the 1984 New York and Pennsylvania presidential primaries, Walter Mondale dismissed Gary Hart by saying "When I hear your new ideas I'm reminded of that ad, 'Where's the beef?'" The line drew a great audience response. The point is, over twenty years later, you are more likely to remember "Where's the beef?" than Gary Hart or Walter Mondale.

WORD HOOK EXAMPLES by The James Group:



Anatomy of a Business-to-Business Campaign WQIS "Strange Things Happen"

Purpose: To remind the marine community why it was so essential to not jump ship to lower priced, less experienced insurers.

Campaign Type: *Word Hook*, "Strange things happen" *Consistent Layout*, using blue duotone and repeatable theme of incidents that happen every day on the water.

Result: Reversed sales slide and WQIS outdistanced its competition. Five years later, WQIS is 10 times larger than its closest competitor.



Anatomy of a Business-to-Consumer Campaign GarageTek, "Find Yourself in the World's Cleanest Garage"

Purpose: To position remodeling the garage as a home improvement decision appealing to women.

Campaign Type: *Word Hook*, "Find your ___ in the world's cleanest garage." *Repeatable Theme*, things happening in the garage. *Consistent Layout*, featuring handwritten copy, garage panorama in the upper third, close-up shots of product at bottom and the signature GarageTek yellow line.

Result: GarageTek became the undisputed market leader in garage organizing systems and grew sales three-fold in three years.

Campaign Type 2:

THE CHARACTER HOOK

A **character hook** uses a **hero, villain, or victim to embody a key attribute of a brand**. Great heroic character hooks include Ronald McDonald, a hero of happiness created in 1963. Ronald helped McDonald's to own family fast food. How effective was this character? Consider that 96% of school children in the United States can identify Ronald McDonald. Only Santa Claus is more commonly recognized.

A villain, savvy customers find appealing, is Joe Isuzu, the sneaky car salesman created by Della Femina, Travisano and Partners in 1985. Joe was later brought back into action in 2001.

The Maytag Repairman is a victim of

great product dependability, created by the Leo Burnett Agency in 1967. The campaign helped build the company into the juggernaut sold to Maytag's rival, the Whirlpool Corporation in 2006 for \$1.6 Billion.

Characters are tremendous for breaking through advertising clutter and establishing emotional connections with customers. They are vivid, intriguing, and cause us to care about them. If you care about a character, then you care about the brand.

Ever wonder, what Snoopy has to do with life insurance? Only emotional transference. Buying life insurance is something people would rather not

think about. Few people, enjoy facing the fact that they could die at any time. So buying life insurance is not a feel good experience. However, people like Snoopy. By using Snoopy, people like Metlife, making the company more approachable than other insurers.

How well did it work? Today, MetLife is the largest U.S. life insurer, by a wide margin. It is also the number-one provider of property and casualty insurance (P&C) products in the workplace. Meaning, the character hook worked for both their business-to-consumer and business-to-business side.

CHARACTER HOOK EXAMPLES by The James Group:

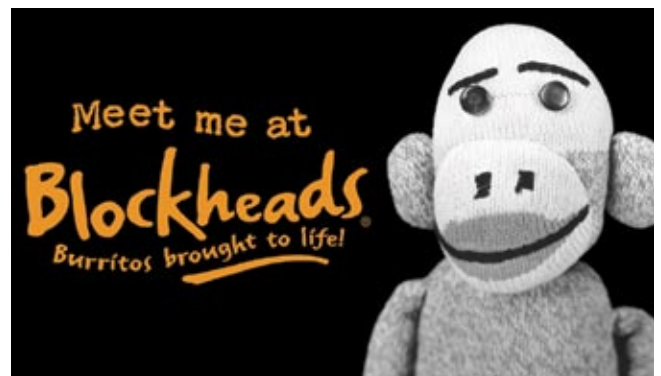


Anatomy of a Business-to-Consumer Campaign Transparent Value

Purpose: To personalize how the first fundamental database works to assist smart investment decisions.

Campaign Type: *Word Hook*, "We know how many _____ has to sell to justify it's stock price." *Character Hook*, following a single analyst (the character) through his day as he gets these answers. *Consistent Layout*, featuring the Transparent Value logo as the window to look through for answers.

Result: Launching 3rd quarter, 2006.



Anatomy of a Business-to-Consumer Campaign Blockheads

Purpose: To differentiate Blockheads Burritos from other Mexican places as the fun place to go with friends.

Campaign Type: *Character Hook*, using sock monkeys with adult life stories, resembling friends you know. *Repeatable Theme*, different sock monkeys with different stories.

Result: On rebranding alone, after 12-years of business, without external advertising, systemwide sales jumped 20% on existing stores. Also sold new franchises and opened new company stores.

Campaign Type 3:

A REPEATABLE THEME

A repeatable theme is a situation that plays out again and again calling out the need for a company's product.

Examples of a repeatable theme include the Got Milk ads created by Lowe Worldwide and the York Peppermint

Patty ads created by Cliff Freeman.

Consumers know the punch line that is coming. They love to see the set-up played out in different situations. It is satisfying to be in on the joke, before it comes.

Repeatable themes make the target customer feel like they have the inside track. They know how to play along and thus feel connected to your brand.

REPEATABLE THEME EXAMPLES by The James Group:

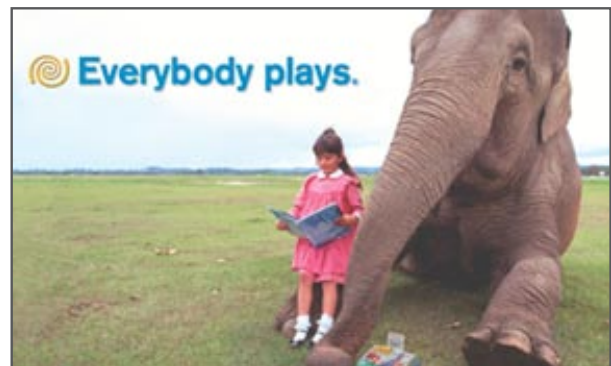


Anatomy of a Business-to-Business Campaign Corbis Insurance Services

Purpose: To differentiate and draw attention to a minority-owned insurance broker and demonstrate they are more creative with the coverages they provide.

Campaign Type: *Repeatable Theme*, making images out of Corbis Business Cards.

Result: Won major Fortune 1000 business, including Nike and Harmon International, and government business including the St. Louis Airport. In 6 months, company merged with Aon.



Anatomy of a Business-to-Consumer Campaign ThinkFun

Purpose: To show that everyone plays mind challenging games, and not focus on a particular age group.

Campaign Type: *Repeatable Theme*. The games are so interesting, even animals are interested in them.

Result: Increased sales 15% in the first year, and proved key in helping client win a tremendous retail partner. In 2004, Barnes and Noble put a Thinkfun Center in over 360 stores throughout the United States.

Campaign Type 4:

A CONSISTENT LAYOUT

A consistent layout uses a unique, design look and repeats these elements at each touchpoint. This allows customers to easily identify your company in a blink. The more distinct these elements are from your competitors, the easier it is to stand out from the clutter.

Great examples of consistent layout include the Continental ads, with the blue globe, yellow trim, and white all caps headline. NW Ayer put that design on everything from print ads to bag tags to cocktail napkins and helped Continental become the number one airline in the world, as well as the most profitable.

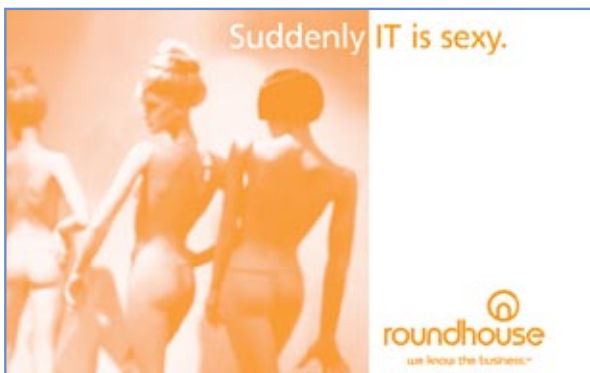
Consistent layouts include Apple's iPod ads with silhouetted dancers people on bright backgrounds. Created by TBWA Chiat Day, the iconic ads helped make the iPod the number one MP3 player in the world and helped Apple extend its brand from a computer company to a consumer electronics company.

One of the keys to the consistent layout is to zig where everyone else is zagging. If everyone else is corporate blue, you want to be another color. If everyone else is playful design, you want to go serious. Consistent design is about consciously standing out from

the crowd and keeping your trademark design going on everything.

But more importantly, consistent layout serves a deeper purpose. Consistency instills trust. When a company plants its flag around one design look and feel, customers feel comfortable with that brand faster and longer. In an uncertain world, the consumer's deep desire for something they can consistently count on, is soothed by a consistent layout.

CONSISTENT LAYOUT EXAMPLES by The James Group:



Anatomy of a Business-to-Business Campaign Roundhouse

Purpose: To position Roundhouse as the fashionable warehouse technology partner for fashion companies.

Campaign Type: *Consistent Layout*, orange duo-tones that are highly differentiated from competitors. *Repeatable Theme*, showing images of shopping (the retail business) and explaining the way Roundhouse could improve the business.

Result: After 10-years of business, the campaign doubled the business in eight weeks. Became the preferred EDI supplier for JC Penny and Sears.



Anatomy of a Business-to-Consumer Campaign Clearlight Mortgage

Purpose: To take the fear out of the complicated mortgage process.

Campaign Type: *Repeatable Theme*, happy people once the mortgage puzzle has been solved for them. *Consistent layout*, showing headlines emerging from code, demonstrating how Clearlight mortgage solves the mortgage process.

Result: Successfully transitioned company from original brand facing trademark conflict. Uncovered niche in first time mortgages to grow business.

How to Isolate the Sales Moment

Without question, every company needs to have one of these campaign types. Even when not doing major advertising, these techniques are necessary on the website, brochure, or direct mail piece, due to how people intake and remember information. Remember, these campaigns provide a handle for your company. But what campaign to use and what should it be based on?

Build the campaign out of the “sales



moment.” There are dozens of things you can say about a company or a product, but only the sales moment truly makes the sale. The sales moment is the single mental image that satisfies the customer’s unmet need. When your company or product matches up with a little movie of an unmet need that is playing in the target customer’s mind, a sale is quickly made.

Consider GarageTek’s key to success. The husband comes to wife and says, “I want to remodel the garage, so we can have a cool garage to work on the car and do our projects in.” Exciting to him, but no sale.

If the husband comes to the wife and says, “I want to remodel the garage, to get the stuff off the floor and hanging on the wall, so we can have the world’s cleanest garage.” She hears: clean, garage. It matches a little movie of an unmet need in her mind and she wants the world’s cleanest garage.

Great marketers, like great meditators, see how the human mind works. Before every decision you have ever made, especially purchasing decisions, a little movie in your mind played of what you wanted to gain from this decision. If the marketing signals matched your little movie of an unmet need, you went for it. If not, you passed. So how do you isolate the sales moment? To develop a single brand position that tilts sales in

your favor, you triangulate the list of customer desires, with your strategic advantages, and the exploitable weaknesses of the competition. This helps you to identify the unique sales moment that you can own. The ownable sales moment is one your competitors can’t easily steal, and one that your customers want, and one you can deliver. This is what you want to build your ad campaign on. From there, you investigate which campaign type most clearly and most memorably tells that story. Then investigate which design best gets people’s attention while conveying the brand’s attributes.

The James Group founded its brand positioning and full-service advertising agency on these well-documented principles in 1996 and has produced an enviable 95% success rate in providing ROI on marketing spend for clients. Each campaign The James Group creates goes through a detailed process to correctly identify the sales moment. This process includes identifying customer desires through one-on-one customer interviews, identifying strategic advantages through interviews with management, and determining the exploitable weaknesses of the competition by studying their marketing. This way the sales moment is properly identified before expensive marketing mistakes occur.

When To Change Your Campaign

You change your advertising campaign only when the current one isn’t growing sales to achieve established goals. If your advertising is not working, change it. If your sales are no longer growing, change it.

However, don’t keep throwing things against the wall, waiting for something to stick. Be strategic. Advertising campaigns most often fail simply because

the ownable sales moment hasn’t been correctly identified. Then because one of the four campaign techniques haven’t been used. Meaning, if you are using one of these techniques and you’re still not experiencing great results, then you haven’t correctly identified your sales moment. And of course, quality of design execution is always a factor.

Another reason sales stop growing is

because the ownable sales moment has shifted due to changes in the marketplace. When necessity dictates, companies must change their message.

The key is to let sales be the sole indicator if a campaign is working or not. This means don’t change your advertising campaign because you are bored. One of the saddest things in marketing is to watch successful companies change

their ad campaigns because they are bored, want something new, or they think their customers want something new. Let sales determine this.

Absolut wisely ran 26 years before changing their campaign when their market share started to diminish in 2005. Nike has run variations of the Just Do It campaigns since 1982. Continental has been running the blue globe ads for over a decade. They are probably all very bored. Laugh all the way to

the bank and find a hobby other than your marketing for entertainment.

It is also interesting to note, from 1987 to 1997, MasterCard tried five advertising campaigns—and failed to narrow the gap with Visa. When McCann created the “Priceless” campaign another spot actually tested better. But they knew they had correctly identified the sales moment in “Priceless” and that they were using best practices in advertising with the word hook. The

rest is history.

Bottom line. Identify an ownable sales moment, use one of these four types of advertising campaigns and you will have the greatest chance of marketing success.



ABOUT JAMES CONNOR

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