



*”Does a Falling Tree Make a Sound if  
There’s No One Around to Hear it?”*

Ever wonder about that little philosophical exercise? It’s probably easier to figure out how many seed ticks there are in a Virginia field after a mild winter. The point of all this is to get a better understanding of your advertising, especially its impact.

Too often a marketer places ads or runs commercials that are about as common and pedestrian as a blue uniform in a Yankee army (and some are about as tasteless). These advertisements fall into the category of “clutter” because that’s what they do: clutter the pages of newspapers and magazine, clutter the airwaves, and generally serve as “filler”. These are the ads that no one sees or hears. They are the trees falling in the forest.

How do you step away from the thundering herd? Creativity, of course. But there is a fine line between creativity that works and creativity for the sake of being creative. One separates you from the crowd, identifies why you and your products are right for the people your trying to sell to, and produces a positive return on investment; the other may well separate you from the crowd but rarely accommodates the other requirements.

Ever sit in on an advertising agency presentation? Most will identify their point of differentiation as their creative product and, in so doing, indicate the number of awards their advertising has received. Bully! Kind of like McClellan - looks good on parade but can’t fight worth a darn. And most of those awards are received for “pro bona” accounts that get the work for free, or out-of-pocket expense, in exchange for creative latitude. Unfortunate too, many of the pieces that win awards do so without regard to actual budget, actual cost, marketing objectives, media schedule, or results.

- Now, let’s jump this fence and attack the problem head-on. To put some creativity into your advertising program really requires that you do some very basic things:
- step away from your business and look at it objectively;
- look at your business from the eyes of your customers;
- look at competition and really understand what they are doing;
- “talk” to your customer in their own language;
- give your customer the benefit of the doubt -
- that they are intelligent ... discriminating ... not prone to hyperbole, pressure or misdirected pathos;



- remember that your customers are sensitive to product quality, value received for dollars spent, and complementary, supportive service;
- that you value their business and you recognize that they are responsible for your success;
- think a little harder, stop and ask yourself if your ads or commercials would get you to buy your own product or shop in your store - and answer honestly.

Now all you have to do is incorporate these elements into your advertising. Results-oriented creativity is difficult to do consistently. It is like Lincoln trying to find a general who could fight Lee and win. A tough job to fill.

In the final analysis it's all quite simple. It comes down to having a real understanding of the people you are doing business with, or those you want to do business with. It boils down to understanding your market and talking to them in their own language. Not yours.

Let me add that as we enter the 90's we are starting to see some interesting shifts in the marketplace. Marketers who miss some of these signals are going to be left in the dust.

Consumer perceptions and attitudes are more cautious, pensive and practical. With the operative word being "practical". Quality, value and service will serve as the watchwords and the guidelines for the next decade - and perhaps beyond.

---