

The Art of Conversion

BY PAUL KRAMER

CATAPULTRPM

Today's creative process is both an art and a science. The art is designed to build irrevocable bonds between consumers and brands, while the science is about precisely understanding the shopper's conversion into a buyer. This is not a new tension, but one that is steeped in history and the confluence of great thinkers of marketing's recent past.

In the earliest days of “pre-modern” marketing, the idea was simple: Identify the brand proposition; get the word out through a limited number of channels and mass publications; and let the monolithic public beat a path to the brand.

This was the basic formula for success until the early 1960s when two competing schools of thought began to grapple for the mantle of communication leadership. Rosser Reeves, who with Ted Bates

**Rosser Reeves,
Bill Bernbach,
and the future of
creative success.**

founded Ted Bates Advertising, introduced the notion of the “unique selling proposition.” This ushered in the idea of promoting scientific, claim-based, demonstrable brand benefits. The strategy held that communication should showcase the tangible value of a product—the one clear reason that a product should be purchased—not the cleverness of a copywriter.

The “unique selling proposition” led to great

advertising such as M&M's “Melts in your mouth, not in your hand” and Anacin's “Fast, Fast, Fast Relief!” It paid off the great era of product differentiation.

It wasn't long before Bill Bernbach, one of the founders of DDB and a pioneer of the creative revolution of the '60s and '70s, posited that communication was the art of persuasion, not a science. The creative revolution ushered in a wave of image advertising based on the creative idea, and swung the pendulum strongly away from product differentiation and towards emotional connections.

Bill Bernbach's creative approach lent itself to great advertising, such as Volkswagen's “Think Small,” and Avis Car Rental's “We Try Harder.”

NEW WAYS TO ENGAGE

Today, we live in an environment where product differentiation, attention, and emotional connections are both in-the-moment and fleeting. If we are to be successful as marketers, we need to embrace a different kind of model that integrates all of our past learning with today's reality.

This brings us to today and the “art of conversion,” the blending of the art and the science of creative. Consumers and shoppers, empowered by the new communications technologies of digital, social and mobile, have access to more product information than ever before. They're empowered by

Building the Platform

Four main components build an effective “art of conversion” platform, and are pivotal for success:

Identify your customer. Call it micro-segmentation, one-to-one marketing, psychographic segmentation, value- or price-based segmentation. The point is that we can now zero in on increasingly specific targets for customers and prospects. Tools are available to pinpoint your customer target down to the individual, and identify prospects through propensity modeling. Use these tools to make real choices about the types of customers on whom you will focus your resources.

Listen, watch and learn. Consumers, and their shopper alter-egos, will tell you what they want—they may even show you. There are many useful channels through which to monitor consumer and shopper needs, behaviors, and attitudes. You will be at a serious disadvantage if you do not tap into the rich vein of old and new research techniques to keep a close watch on what your consumers say they want, how they behave, and how they talk about the brand to others.

These techniques include web-based research, as the intersection of marketing and technology offers a wealth of data efficiently. Ethnographic research provides the opportunity to observe how consumers actually use your products...but be prepared to cover your eyes!

Social media—Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr—meanwhile allow us to monitor discussions and information exchanges between our consumers

and shoppers and learn about opinions, behavior, attitude and usage. Finally, there’s point-of-sale data. There is no more telling information about shoppers than what they actually elect to buy. Detailed point-of-sale data is a determining measure of behavior and insight into lifestyle habits.

Know your customer. Incorporate what they told you, your learning. Capture data and build institutional memory and a database of content—for individuals or at least for people who look like them, including transactional history (if possible) and engagement characteristics such as their needs; likes/dislikes; lifestyle/self-descriptors; and communication preferences.

Engage your customer. Go beyond just listening, and try to figure out what they mean and what they might like next. Leverage analytics, including:

- *Segmentation.* Not the basic segmentation referenced above or the ubiquitous use of personas that don’t connect to shopping behavior, but rather the new breed of multivariate analysis that identifies and links needs, attitudes, and behaviors with performance objectives.
- *Predictive modeling.* What are they likely to do? What product will they buy next? What products are likely to be bought in bundles or used together for different types of customers?
- *Response models.* How did we actually do? Set up test and control “experiments” and measure the difference or lift in performance.

technology that enables them to go instantly from passively receiving messages to actively shopping for exactly what is right for them. This fluidity and power is unprecedented. It calls for a new way to engage the consumer and the shopper. Therefore, brand communications needs to be crafted such that it is always engaging, offering a sense of urgency and value to inspire action. Brand communication

needs to blend and balance equity and call-to-action messaging to align with the new “shopper is always on” mindset.

Because the shopper is always on, creative solutions must deliver on the art of conversion. Equity and call-to-action messaging are necessary to establish shopper trial and consumer loyalty; the blend of art and science is required to break through

the creative clutter and allow a brand to stand out with distinction.

The driving force behind the “art of conversion” is that today’s consumers and shoppers demand it! Customers in both their consumer and shopper mindsets want companies and brands to speak to them in a way that makes sense to them... personally.

Consciously or sub-consciously customers want three things from marketers:

- **Recognize me** and talk to me, either directly or through wider-scale marketing, in a consistent way across all channels of communications.
- **Address my needs** by appealing to my situation, my emotional wants and my functional requirements providing a personal benefit.
- **Back it up** by providing me with superior product experience and superior engagement. In short, communicate with me like you mean it!

It sounds simple, and yet consumers obviously have a great variety of needs and attitudes, as well as behaviors and communication preferences. Again, they are also vastly more educated in the process of product information gathering and evaluation. So, the key to success is relevance and response, not just reach.

The premise behind the “art of conversion” is to assure that all communications combine the art of image-building creative with the science of compelling and engaging consumer offers. And, with today’s technology, it is becoming easier to bridge the art and the science.

For example, Dodge Truck is effectively combining image advertising with compelling engagement via interactive television. Recently, I was watching a brand-image commercial for Dodge Ram pick-up trucks.

The spot features the iconic voice of Sam Elliott and the headline “Guts Glory Ram” that is designed to build brand equity and engage the viewer (the art).

Included in the commercial was a call out to turn to another channel to learn more and schedule a test drive. On the “other” channel was more product performance oriented messaging touting torque, load capacity and HEMI engine benefits, and an opportunity to schedule a test drive (the science). This is one example of combining image and activation to drive the art of conversion. To further elevate this approach, we need to identify, learn about, know and address current and prospective consumers and shoppers.

THE ESSENCE OF THE ART

The “art of conversion” is not just about the brand; it is about the consumer and shopper and focuses on content, curation and customized communications that personally address the target.

Infusing creative platforms with insight into consumer and shopper opinions, attitudes, behavior, and brand interaction creates a “scientifically” based and targeted communication. Balancing these insights with the art of creativity—the engagement that attracts consumer and shopper interest—is its essence.

The creative world has grown more complex and competitive, demanding that communications must work twice as hard to create and reinforce the brand’s reason-for-being while driving brand sales.

Effective creative development is no longer found just in Rosser Reeves’ “unique selling proposition” or in Bill Bernbach’s “art of persuasion.” It is in the careful blending of these two schools of thought, and the balance of the art and the science of consumer and shopper marketing. It is a creative balance that will effectively build brand bonds with consumers while motivating shoppers to buy.

If you are looking for the compelling brand idea in a world where the creative is both an art and a science, look to the “art of conversion” for creative inspiration. ■



PAUL KRAMER is CEO of **CatapultRPM** and president of **Hyper Marketing Inc.**, the largest independent marketing-services network in North America. He can be reached at pkramer@hypermarketinginc.com.