

HIT OR MISS

HOW WILL 2008 BE REMEMBERED IN MARKETING CIRCLES?

THE WAYS IN WHICH MARKETERS COPE WITH A PLUNGING ECONOMY WILL NO DOUBT COME TO MIND, BUT OTHER MARKETING ACHIEVEMENTS, BOTH GOOD AND BAD, ALSO WILL STAND OUT. *MARKETING NEWS*' EDITORS HAVE ASSEMBLED SOME OF THE MOST NOTABLE EXAMPLES IN THIS LIST OF HITS AND MISSES, FOLLOWING EACH WITH A MARKETING LESSON THAT WE HOPE WILL PROVE USEFUL TO YOU IN THE NEW YEAR AND BEYOND.



GAS CARD PROMOTIONS: TIMELY INCENTIVES THAT FUELED SALES

AS THE PRICE of gas climbed well north of \$3.50 per gallon on average earlier this year, gas card promotions began to seem almost as common as coupons.

Taco Bell this spring offered the chance to win \$50 gas cards to consumers who bought a large or extra-large drink. Callaway Golf offered a free gas card with the purchase of a new club—a driver, of course. Chrysler made waves when it launched a promotion in early May offering new car buyers a gas card locking in the price of a gallon of gas at \$2.99 for three years. Although Chrysler's sales continued to decline, the company reportedly saw a 20-25% bump in showroom visits during May and so extended the promotion into early July. Many others joined the gas card trend as well.

The gas card promotion was "definitely a hit" in 2008, says Tina Manikas, EVP and global retail and promotions officer at Drafftcb in Chicago. Companies using it showed they were tuned in to their customers' needs. A second benefit: "This is a great way for marketers to add value without cutting the [price] of their product," Manikas says.

Lesson: Gas Card promotions can be a relevant and worthwhile incentive, but companies that come late to a marketing ploy such as gas cards will likely see little benefit. Once a category becomes bogged down with innumerable offers, the promotional tactic no longer serves as a point of differentiation.



T. BOONE PICKENS: HUFFING AND PUFFING INTO A WIND-POWER STAR

WIND POWER HAS been mentioned as a possible alternative energy source for years, but backing for the concept reached near gale-force proportions this year thanks to a \$57 million marketing push by former Texas oilman T. Boone Pickens.

Pickens launched TV ads and a Web site (PickensPlan.com), along with personally lobbying power brokers to promote his plan to turn the central part of the country into a massive wind-generating power producer.

"The Pickens plan boiled it down to plain language and easy-to-digest statistics for Americans," notes Ben Grossman, director of green marketing and sustainability for the Grossman Marketing Group in Boston. "When a Texas oilman gets on TV and spends tens of millions of dollars, the social media, blogs and the green communities take notice."

Lesson: "Celebrity" endorsements work, but beware charges that self-interest is motivating your good deeds. Pickens wants the government to foot part of the cost of building transmission lines for his wind farms. The harder he pushes, the more critics may carp that he's promoting wind only to get government handouts.



WARNER BROS.: HOLY MARKETING CHALLENGE, BATMAN

MARKETING FOR THIS year's mega-hit movie *The Dark Knight*, the latest in the Batman series, began with a viral campaign 15 months before the film's July opening. Theater trailers began popping up in December 2007, eight months early, also part of the long-term marketing effort.

When Heath Ledger, who starred as the villainous Joker, died in late January, Warner Bros. and its marketing team were confronted with how to continue marketing efforts in a manner that didn't upset Ledger fans by making it appear the studio was trying to cash in on his untimely death.

Entertainment marketing experts say Warner succeeded in those efforts, and moviegoers apparently agreed, making *The Dark Knight* the second-highest grossing film in U.S. movie history.

Perhaps the smartest marketing move was to continue the planned viral campaign and other efforts after Ledger's death, notes Farrah Louviere, director of film for Davie Brown Entertainment in Los Angeles. "It wasn't like the studio made a left turn or a right turn because of the unfortunate nature and time of his death," Louviere says. The viral campaign, put together by Pasadena, Calif.-based 42 Entertainment, included a Web site with a variety of interactive activities designed to excite hard-core Batman fans and turn them into word-of-mouth ambassadors for the film. The studio also paid tribute to Ledger at the end of the film and held its opening in his native Australia, touches that showed sensitivity about his loss.

Lesson: "If a studio finds itself in a similar situation and stays honest to the performer's contribution in the film and respects the actor's family, there should be little to worry about," says Martin Cribbs, director of representation at GreenLight, a Los Angeles licensing and property rights company.



THE OBAMA CAMPAIGN: A CASE STUDY IN SAVVY MARKETING

THE VOTES ARE IN: Barack Obama's presidential campaign was one of the best marketing campaigns of 2008. With an integrated marketing strategy that incorporated digital marketing; social media tools; viral marketing; database marketing; direct marketing; event marketing; segmentation; in-game advertising; targeted television, print and online advertising; and consistent branding, the Obama campaign team pulled off one of the savviest, best-organized presidential campaigns in political history.

The team was "willing to act on the marketing concept that you need to be relevant to your audiences," and did so by "reaching out, reaching broadly, appealing broadly," says Clarke Caywood, professor of integrated marketing communications at Northwestern University and a political marketing expert.

Obama and his team created a bold brand and a slogan focused on one word: Change. They worked with designers to create a modern, clean style and applied it to all of their marketing efforts. They employed Chicago-based brand consultancy Sender LLC to create the now-ubiquitous “O” logo.

The team’s social media efforts were unprecedented. Online organizing guru Chris Hughes, one of four co-founders of Facebook, worked on the campaign’s digital team, which created My.BarackObama.com, an online community that provided members with voter organization tools, a Facebook page, which now has more than 3 million supporters, a MySpace page, a Twitter page and, of course, a well-coordinated online fundraising campaign that helped raise more than \$600 million in individual donations.

Marketing a political candidate is very similar to marketing toothpaste, Caywood says, and Obama is “one heck of a tube of toothpaste.”

Lesson: Cohesive branding, message consistency and marketing integration works, even for so massive an undertaking as getting someone elected president.

MISS!
X THE FEDERAL FINANCIAL BAILOUT: LOSING CONTROL OF THE MESSAGE

DO YOU KNOW TARP? It stands for “troubled asset relief plan,” yet it is so much more recognizable when it is called by its common name—the bailout.

The term TARP made its debut Sept. 19 as the Bush administration unveiled its proposal to save the country’s banks and brokerage firms and, in the

process, stabilize a swooning stock market. But few adopted TARP. Instead, the Department of the Treasury, other government agencies and even President Bush repeatedly used the negative term “bailout” to describe the \$700 billion plan.

They all could have learned something by taking Marketing 101. By not delivering a consistent message across all fronts, the pols lost control of the issue quickly and the public image of the plan solidified in negative territory.

“So many agencies needed a coordinated [communications] effort, but things came out scattershot. It confused the public,” says Mary Jane Rosenbaum, director of research at Oakton, Va.-based LeapFrog Solutions, an integrated marketing agency that markets various municipal programs, including government programs.

TARP was renamed the Emergency Economic Stimulus Act of 2008 when it was passed by Congress on Sept. 29.

Then, when the Treasury decided to expand the reach of the relief plan, it added more hard-to-remember and hard-to-adopt terms for parts of the plan, such as the “Money Market Investor Funding Facility” or MMIFF and the “Asset Backed Commercial Paper Money Market Mutual Fund Liquidity Facility” or ABCPMMMLF. Catchy. We’ll stick with bailout.

Lesson: Plan and coordinate your marketing before you unveil a product. A good marketing person could have pulled together key talking points and coordinated a unified effort to get the initial TARP message out and rally public support. **m**

Hits and Misses compiled by *Marketing News* staff.

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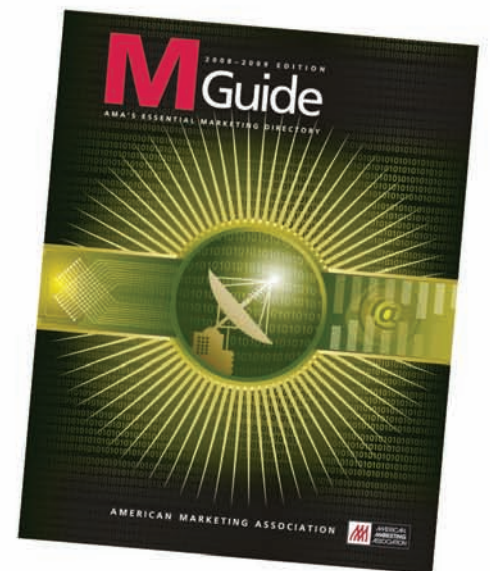
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