

Reviews role of marketing and communications in advancing product innovation. Published in AdNews and www.Adnewsonline.com
Peter L. Klinge, Jr.

Big Idea Series...introductory article

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What's the big idea... finding the way to tap consumer desire

By Peter L. Klinge, Jr.

The essence of marketing is tapping consumer desire to sell a product. In developed economies product marketing is not 'need based' but desire driven.

For example, purchasers of soap want to know if it does more than just clean, they also want to know that it deodorizes, scents, etc.

Basis for Desire:

Desire creates the opportunity for innovation and evolution of products and services. Today's desires become tomorrow's needs as the basic standard of living improves. The 19th century introduction of the telephone as a luxury invention became a basic household necessity in the 20th century.

At the automobile's conception it was never foreseen that it would stimulate the growth of suburbs and redefine transportation.

Often times the big idea is apparent only in hindsight...

In the latter decades of the 20th century the personal computer evolved as a must have for literacy in the advancement of the information age. At its introduction in the 1970's, the PC was not regarded as a major tool for business or education. Today

great arguments abound in public policy debate for computing and Internet technology access for everyone. This is similar to how the opening of Carnegie libraries of books exemplified an access need at the start of the 20th century.

Origins of the Big Idea:

As desire for a product evolves to the need state there's an implicit improvement in the standard of living as the newest version of the product is adopted by more people. In marketing, the big idea becomes the catalyst for pushing and transforming the psychology of desire to a need state. "This is good for me so I should have it to fulfill my needs." This pattern of product consumption and desire is the trigger of purchase behavior that sparks each new level of innovation.

Creating the Big Idea:

Striving to find the next big idea requires a marketing team that really does work as a team. But this is not enough. Vision, pragmatism, and leadership are also required.

Vision is an effort to define the relative merits and possibilities of the offer to the target consumer. How does the product project itself to the person who buys it? What are the elements of the product that tap into the personality of the consumer, and motivate consumption? These are points that branding and positioning address in an examination of the product or service offer.

In arriving at the big idea the vision offered needs to be clear. It must

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resonate first with the team that will create the marketing campaign if it's to communicate clearly to the consumer. Vision in marketing is not realizable if it's not balanced with pragmatism.

Pragmatism is the grounding in simplicity and rationalism so that the product makes sense to the consumer. While vision is the broad view of some future realization, pragmatism helps to define the product for the consumer in the here and now. If a consumer can be forward thinking in adopting a new product while avoiding the 'bleeding edge' moniker of experimentation and possible recklessness, then there's a big idea.

In the automotive industry of the late 1950's and early 60's the introduction of exaggerated car body types featuring tail fins, and front ends that made the cars appear to be some form of rocket land ship suggested that the then exciting era of space adventure could be had in the vehicle you drive.

This was years before the moon landings and the realization of space transportation. On a rational level the appeal was the aerodynamic lines of the car to improve performance based on current science and technology. In reality the practical aspects of the cars performance were secondary to the aesthetic appeal that tapped into the excitement of the period.

Leadership in a marketing organization is critical if the big idea is to ever get off the ground. If the big idea is to rise above the banal and uninspired, leadership needs to maintain the focus on the vision as the team develops their marketing concepts. Communication of what is possible is essential to create the buy-in among the team members so that their energies and creative talents

will produce the big idea that consumers will care about.

Teamwork is where the combination of vision, pragmatism, and leadership executes the big idea. It's in the team that the idea is given life and possibilities. The members are the sounding board for each other. They evaluate the original vision against their ideas to determine the difference between consumer aspiration and meaningless selling.

The team is where multi-disciplined talents are combined to produce the marketing concept and campaign that sells the product to consumers.

The results of such efforts can be extremely motivating and inspiring. In the early '90's, as diet colas worked to move into the mainstream of the U.S. soft drink industry, the Diet Pepsi team seized on an inspirational idea. The vision was to evolve Diet Pepsi from decades of the "one-calorie cola for attractive model-like women" to something more exciting, fun and consistent with the Pepsi philosophy, "for the young at heart," that the entire American population could embrace.

Ray Charles, the 60 something entertainer whose career dated back to the 1950's, was an unlikely candidate to modernize a brand among diverse demographic groups, and especially among younger people who did not know Mr. Charles.

Earlier, Pepsi used Ray Charles as part of a cavalcade of celebrities to create comparative ads with the leading competitor. In Ray's case it was to take the 'blind' taste test to determine the "The Right One" for a great tasting diet cola.

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The vision was expanded to include the possibility of using Ray Charles' considerable musical gifts to entertain America with Diet Pepsi as the center of excitement. The practical challenge to the team was how to do this. How could the team project charisma from an aging entertainer with musical talent who wasn't seen as a contemporary artist such as Michael Jackson—a previous Pepsi star. The leadership and team argued the merit of how talent is ageless if appropriately packaged.

It was agreed that the charge was to arrive at a musical concept with lyrics that identified Diet Pepsi as the Right One; a concept that could become ubiquitous and memorable in the American vernacular as projected by Ray Charles.

The campaign vehicle became the widely popular and imitated "You Got the Right One Baby...Uh Huh!" The addition of the young female Uh Huh singers/dancers helped cinch the youth appeal.

For three years Ray and Diet Pepsi entertained consumers with song and dance that excited consumers about having the Diet Pepsi brand as their soft drink choice. Much of the music and performance was rooted in a musical style decades old but whose talent and spirit was ageless.

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The author, Peter Klinge, Jr. was the VP, Account Supervisor at BBDO for the aforementioned Diet Pepsi campaign in the early '90's. Peter is a marketer of 20 years experience in film production, and advertising and communications with a background in the packaged goods, soft drink, and technology industries.

Diet Pepsi's market share and volume increased, the campaign was widely imitated in the media, more than 10,000 video audition Right One tapes were sent by consumers as part of a contest, and hundreds of thousands of people bought custom designed T-shirts at upscale retail stores. Ray's performance career rocketed as demand for his talents reached an all time high, and college students started to learn and inquire about his musical legacy.

In marketing there's an element of risk-taking to achieve a big idea. In a vision the marketer is asked to define something that inherently hasn't been done before. The challenge in expressing a vision is to create something that is novel yet accessible *now* to all consumers. The vision needs the pragmatic element and courageous leadership to guide the team to succeed with an idea that on the surface seems dubious.

A good marketer needs to project the vision to the team with a sense of confidence. If he/she fails at this then the idea will die.

A good marketer, as a leader, needs to be willing to expose him or herself to failure and rejection. Without such risk-taking leadership there really is no opportunity for innovation and product development.

Peter is currently President of Klinge & Associates Idea Marketing Consultants ©. His organization's mission is to help companies to grow sales and strengthen customer relationships through the development and implementation of Breakout Ideas™. From 1997 to 2003 Peter held various senior posts with Euro RSCG Worldwide, most recently

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