

Social Media? The medium is not the bloody message.

I take a break from my dry old JWT lecture series to talk to you about Social Media. The most buggered-up element in contemptuous marketing (*Contemporary, surely? Ed*).

I mentioned some time ago that I attended a University BA show in media and advertising where many of the students were producing 30" TV spots for their brand assignments.

Baffled and bemused I asked them some simple questions. "You are young and savvy Gen Z, Gen X, Gen DD kids, when was the last time you watched anything longer than 10" before you took out your phone and began tweeting, emailing, sexting or doing something similar?" All hands went up. I asked how many imbibers of YouTube ignored the 'skip' option to watch a whole advert. Same response.

Aha, said I. So why create anything that's longer than your truncated attention span? Silence.

So, to try and set the cracked and scratched record straight, let me begin here. (*Lecturing again? Ed*).

First, Social Media is exactly that, it's a medium, like print, or TV or the radio it is not a substitute for the message (Marshal McLuhan's nifty sound-bite RIP). You don't write a 3 second radio commercial so why do a 30" spot on social media when no-one will sit through it? I just saw a Mother's day spot in either Hokien or Hakka for Mother's Day. It went on forever, it was jolly nice and a bit sad but I can't for the life of me remember what it was advertising, I went into a coma after 10". So what fucking good is that?

But I do have to indulge in a little whinging (No change there then. Ed). I note two approaches to the social media ads. First, it's all singing all dancing youngsters acting like idiots. Clearly thinking the way to appeal to young vacuous teens is to exhibit young vacuous teens. Fag companies used to show cowboys to young vacuous teens to lure them into smoking; and it worked gangbusters. That's why it was banned.

The second route is to list a catalogue of a few dozen useless benefits in the vain hope that the viewer will be bowled over by sheer volume, as if they care about or can absorb all this valuable info in a few seconds. Certainly, one assumes the current wisdom is, who cares if it's rubbish, at least it didn't cost much. Like so many products, advertising is now disposable.

But is there a solution? (*Finally. Ed*).

Yes, there is a brilliant parallel to the problem. Imagine you are sitting at a traffic light in your car. You may have as little as 10" before the white van driver behind you goes into an apoplectic horning fit, because his wife has got the noodles on, or he is dying for a poo. Now imagine there is a very expensive billboard at the junction. Now what this poster has to say might be very important, but it has to be swift otherwise your viewer has pissed off before he got the message.

That's right, this problem bears a very close similarity to the 10" social media cutoff. What can I do to make a strong brand message as a car whizzes past in 10" or less? Well, in my time, in the UK, the answer was to reduce the message down to just a picture and a few words – that's it, and sometimes just a picture. 'Out of the box' thinking at its very best.

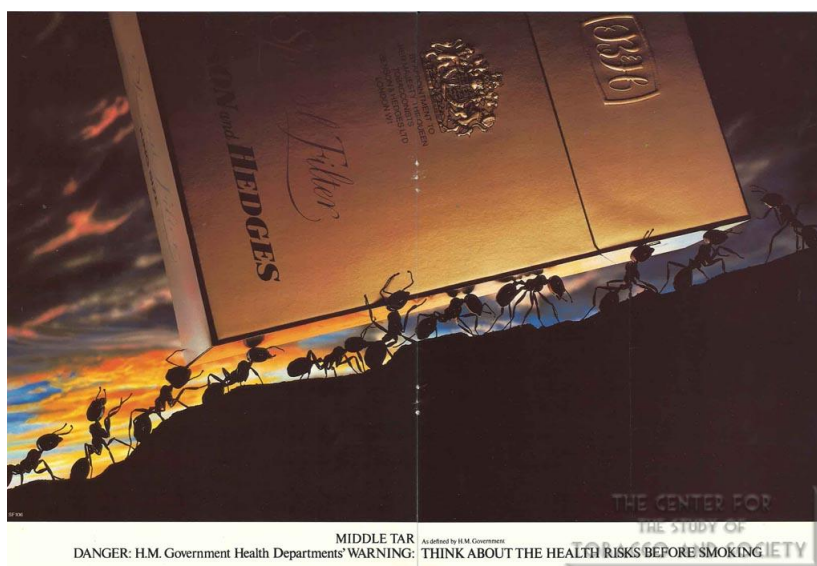
Here's a few examples. The picture: is a Fiat car in a cage. The only words are a 'GRRRRR!' coming from under the hood. I won't try to tell you what it communicates about the car, that's up to the viewer (another valuable lesson) but suffice it to say it does it almost instantly.



To swiftly illustrate the refreshing power of Heineken beer the pointy ears of Mr Spock (yes, he from 'Star Trek') have gone all floppy, a sip of beer and they become erect. Apart from the theme line, the only words are 'illogical' in a speech ballon.



In another, a colony of ants carry a pack of Benson and Hedges cigarettes. What it says is anybody's guess, but it did it instantaneously without any words. There was a full campaign of similarly surreal posters. They were a great success and a superb example of client bravery. If you're interested, go here to see a fairly good selection. <https://davedye.com/2016/05/02/that-funny-looking-king-size-brand-pt-2-the-surreal-years/comment-page-1/amp/> An interesting footnote. Due to their being no words, the government health warning got the highest readership of any cigarette advertising.



But I need to finish with my favourite. A poster for 'Wonderbra'. A suitably busty lady with the caption 'Hello Boys'. It caused traffic incidents!



So, can you imagine Social Media videos executed something like these kind of posters? You could be on to a winner - animate the growl, animate the ants, animate the boobs (*Naughty. Ed*). Anyway, you get the picture. It could make advertising challenging (both for creators and viewers alike) stimulating, exciting, engaging, successful and real fun again.

And that's coming from a Gen OF*.

Paul J Loosley is an English person who has been in Asia 47 years, 12 as executive creative director and regional planner for JWT and 26 making TVCs. Retired some seven years ago yet still, for some strange reason, he can't shut- up about advertising. Any feedback: mail p.loosley@gmail.com (please keep it quick).

*The first word is old. The second rhymes with cart.