



Marketing Messages

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Selling ethics and advertising can build better communities

We in the marketing industry spend our days advising clients how to persuade consumers to buy things, part with their money and make our cash register sing. Although many advertising campaigns are sincere and clever, there are ones that tap insecurities, reinforce oppressive stereotypes, and create needs out of a wants. It can make for some pretty shallow stuff if left to ponder the relevance amid political turmoil, war and destruction.

Enter ethical advertising. At first glance it may appear an oxymoron, but there is a growing desire to make the world a better place. And it's starting to make inroads in the field of advertising. Maybe it's a backlash response to the lack of control over world affairs. Maybe it's pent up idealism and guilt shared by boomers now emerging from their blind consumer driven youthful years. Maybe it's the emergence of a new generation of demanding, knowledgeable, ethically focused youth. Whatever is driving it, the conscious consumer is on the rise. And with them comes the emergence of advertising that uses its power to persuade and help stimulate not only sales, but provoke healthy discussion and social change.

Vancity's Change Everything campaign: Launched this summer, the campaign will run in waves all year. "You can change everything if you change your bank" is the theme of the new ad campaign. It challenges people to make banking choices that will positively impact their communities in addition to their wallets. The ads highlight Vancity's community and environmental focus. Highlighted are programs such as Shared Success in which Vancity gives 30% of its profits back to the community and its members; the Clean Air Auto Loan, featuring discounted financing for hybrid cars; and the Envirofund Visa, which donates a percentage of profits to environmental issues chosen by the cardholder. Street marketing efforts will see teams with video cameras film people talking about what they would like to see changed in the city or their lives. The filmed clips will be broadcast on a blog and invite customer feedback. "Change everything invites people to change the way their money works. It's about how people can effect large change by making a small change like switching their credit card," says Sloan Dinning, Vancity's Director of Marketing Communications.

Diane Lund is President and Creative Director for Creative Wonders, a local advertising agency specializing in communications for businesses interested in balanced, enlightened living. She notes, "Creativity guided by conscience is a healthy and sustainable way to approach marketing." The Vancity campaign is a great illustration of that.

The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty: This global multiplatform campaign set out a lofty goal to change the definition of beauty. Now in its 3rd year the campaign taps into the need for women to be considered attractive no matter what their perceived flaws, and challenges the narrow stereotypes about what is beautiful. It takes aim at the status quo and works to change perceptions. The real beauty of the campaign is that it has gone beyond the core target group - anyone can identify with its honesty. The brave step this campaign took has set the stage for others. **Addition Elle,** a clothing store for women size 14+ recently featured a new campaign "Curves make the woman." Full figured women are shown in scantily clad self-confident poses. Again recognizing that women have long been subject of stereotypes, it challenges the lack of self confidence women may feel when their body doesn't live up to societal pressures.

Mountain Equipment Coop: As a retail cooperative, MEC serves the needs of its members and is a force for positive social and environmental change. What little advertising they do positions them in this light. Their products are built with purpose, people and the planet in mind. They pioneered green buildings, a recent growing to improve the communities in which we live. When locally based MEC expanded to the Toronto market, they constructed a "green building". Composed of 70% reused materials, the design also required less energy to operate.

So amid the shallowness of the pure pushing of product there are some shining lights which show how clever marketing can blend with social responsibility. Not only can it contribute to a better society, it can also produce bottom line results. That's the kind of profit we can all live with.

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