

Were ads really that good in the 1980s?

How centrally developed advertising campaigns can work in local markets and taking tips from motor industry campaigns can help increase brand engagement

Twenty-five years ago, the role of a pharmaceutical advertising agency was relatively simple. There were no PCs, emails, teleconferences or voicemails to distract us from the important job of thinking up great ideas to sell the brands we worked on. More importantly, perhaps, there were no branding guidelines, global message platforms or core concepts to take into account when developing new campaigns. Even for blockbuster brands from major worldwide companies, we simply hopped in our gleaming BMW 316i, took the brief from the product manager on the way to lunch, got back to the agency and started working up original concepts on a proverbial white sheet of paper.

How times have changed. Nowadays pharmaceutical brands have gone as global as their owners with a 'one brand, one message' approach that is designed to work effectively in all markets with the aid of minimum adaptation to take into account local market regulations and competition.

Recently, the focus has shifted slightly with recognition of the need to address local and regional differences as well as communicate the global message. This blend is seen as the way forward, with agency networks offering pharmaceutical companies local insight to help deliver sophisticated, effective campaigns across different markets.

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While good in theory, can this model really work? Is it possible to deliver something that resonates globally while piquing local interest at the same time?

There are a number of common factors which support a solely global approach to advertising in our industry, not least that, in an ever-shrinking world where key opinion leaders and specialists are exposed to global communications, it is vital from a branding perspective to maximise the synergy and consistency of communications through all channels and markets.

Weakness of one campaign

In cost-conscious times, the benefits of producing one campaign which can be rolled out across all nations is undoubtedly seen by global procurement to be an efficient and cost-effective alternative to the huge duplication that occurs through a series of locally driven activities.

However, the downside of a global approach can be that these 'one size fits all' campaigns are unable to take into account local

market culture, values, competitive situations and regulatory differences. As a result, the final campaign can metaphorically, and sometimes literally, be 'vanilla', which nobody dislikes, but equally nobody would actually choose as their preference.

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From a cost point of view, too, any initial savings might be quickly eradicated by using multiple local agencies to adapt global campaigns to fine-tune positioning and messaging.

At the other end of the scale, allowing local autonomy can lead to huge diversity in design and presentation and the global brand presence can disappear completely.

An example of this approach was the launch campaign for Pfizer's Viagra which used different images and messages around the world. This was for good reason, because never had there been a need to address the audience in a more sensitive and culturally empathetic way.

Neither extreme, whether a blanket global advertisement translated for country use or local advertisements designed with only the local market in mind, is wrong; but for companies that want to maximise the impact of campaigns in different markets while maintaining the integrity of the brand, there is a middle way.

Using an experienced network of creative agencies, pharma companies can reach their target markets effectively and efficiently with strong creative content, which, while appealing to each of the local markets, can also share a brand loyalty.

Practically, this can be done with consistent use of global hallmarks, using one 'hub' agency to develop set building blocks for the campaign materials, such as colour palette, design templates and photography style.

Creative team workshops

In order to bring fresh thinking and creative flair to the global campaign development process, some networks are now encouraging global clients to invest early on in innovative approaches to idea generation. For example, instead of the hub agency developing concepts in isolation, creative teams (and product managers) are invited from a number of key markets to take part in the initial creative strategy and concept development. These workshops can result in true global alignment, with differences in culture, language, and local regulations taken into consideration, while providing the global client team with local buy-in from the outset. ➔

➔ It is also important to use innovative creative research to support the global brand development. It may well be that the aim of research is not to produce a winning concept, but rather to refine and validate the global brand platform and then to inform flexible creative guidelines. These are then used to inspire the development of locally relevant yet globally identifiable brand campaigns that provide engaging interactions with customers in each market.

There is no reason why the hub agency should not supply example creative executions for print and digital which can be used directly if required. This is often particularly useful for smaller markets that do not have the marketing/agency infrastructure or budgetary resources to create their own bespoke materials. Elsewhere, these ideas do not have to be mandatory but can provide a useful benchmark for local creation.

Fundamentally, creative guidelines are used to aid development of compelling and impactful brand campaigns that, while being wholly individual, are instantly recognisable anywhere in the world as being communication from that particular brand.

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Local marketers should not see guidelines such as this as a creative straightjacket preventing them from producing their own original and locally relevant materials. They should understand that they are designed to be the DNA that will help them build their own inspiring campaigns.

This is all very good in theory, but what are good examples of this working in practice? When it comes to creative advertising and strong brand awareness, the motor industry is a good sector from which to learn.

An example of an engaging and innovative global approach from a major consumer brand was the launch of the new BMW1 series with its strapline ‘One origin. Two originals’. The central communication objective of this campaign was to demonstrate the difference between the two car options: urban versus sport.

The search for twins

To front the campaign, BMW launched a worldwide search for siblings with similar looks but totally different personalities. They launched a social media campaign with

Facebook and YouTube pages to encourage siblings to put themselves forward to star in the launch campaign.

The focus was on the individuality and authenticity of the applicants. The competition was open to brothers, sisters, half-siblings and step-siblings, the only stipulation was that the siblings had to be of the same gender.

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As the new faces of the international BMW advertising campaign, the winners of the casting competition were also the lead characters in print advertisements, a TV spot and short episode clips for the web. The photo-shoots and film recordings were carried out in a number of exciting locations across the globe.

The winning brothers can be seen on the YouTube website at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oZmDOloduY

What is interesting about this campaign from a creative point of view is the totally participative approach of the whole launch. By targeting customer involvement from early pre-launch, BMW successfully created anticipation for their new car from potential purchasers.

The casting process was effectively the global market research and generated huge social media traffic and the result was that truly ‘global’ brothers were chosen.

BMW’s have come a long way from the boxy 3-series of the mid-1980s, as has the approach of modern pharma companies. For forward-thinking global organisations, the advertising choice does not have to be a straightforward decision between global and local. There is a way of combining the two, which can be not only cost-efficient but also make the best of the creative talent from across the agency network.

The key, as shown by BMW, is to communicate effectively with the target audience in a relevant and attention-grabbing manner which then maximises its engagement with the brand.

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