



IE New Evidence, no. 18 Letter from Simon Dixon, CEO

There's a quote from Lily Tomlin that says: "I always wanted to *be* somebody, but now I realize I should have been more specific." Funny line. Also reminds me of a problem with many companies and products on the commercial landscape.

I sat in a meeting a few months back as the name for a new promotion was discussed. It's a great name and I'm happy to say it lives intact. But for a while in the meeting various reasons were bandied about as to how the name could be changed to palliate one rough edge or another. Too often this is made actionable and the end result is a name or a campaign that is destined more to be not disliked by all than loved by any.

As I often say to clients: it was the qualities that made your husband or wife *different* than others that made you fall in love with them, not the things about them that were the same as everyone else.

It's the same in business. Don't be afraid to *be* someone. Better to be the favourite of *some* and number 1 on their shopping list than bland to *all* and lost in a sea of also-rans. This is not to say that some wild edgy identity or campaign is the answer to one's marketing challenges but it *is* to say that should one's branding exercise or well thought out campaign strategy lead in a certain direction – have the boldness to see it through. Cowardice gums up the wheels of commerce. And craziness *can* deliver you a home run – but generally it just puts you out of business.

My suggestion however would be to get it right the first time and then have the courage to keep it so. It's a lot more successful and a lot less expensive than repairs later – if that's even an option.

Every year USA Today runs a poll of the most popular ads from the Superbowl. A poll generally won by useless dross. (Make that always. They weren't doing the poll in 1984 which was the last time the ad that got initial buzz was actually good.) This year was no exception. Frankly there was only one truly great ad, the one for Google (see it here – if you want me to opine as to why it's great, call me). The VW ads were good. Most else not so. Attaching your product to a 30-second joke is not being someone. Well, maybe a fool. The first thing I was ever told in advertising was, "the good ad is the one that sells." The idea is to sell the *product* not the creative director's sense of humour. Not that there is anything inherently wrong with a funny advert – it just should be moving the brand down the road positively and actually perhaps even selling something – at least good will. Too often the ads that win such polls are thought of as great in the poll yet people remember the ad but forget what product was being advertised. What could be a more textbook definition of a bad ad?

So like Lily says, *be* someone – just be specific. (And sell something).