

CHAPTER 1

BILLIONS AND BILLIONS WASTED . . .

I have the opportunity a few times a year to be a guest speaker at chamber of commerce events across America where local business owners pay a few bucks to enjoy a decent lunch or dinner and listen to me telling them that the size of a business has zero correlation to marketing prowess. In fact, most of the multinational world-class brands waste billions of dollars every year trying to establish a permanent beachhead in consumers' minds with brand promises (taglines) that gain no traction and no home in a single memory cell among the billions that we each possess.

If you don't believe me—and without googling—ask yourself what are Coke's or Pepsi's current taglines. You have no clue despite the zillions of impressions they keep shelling out online and offline every minute of every day. These are pure marketing-driven companies with huge ad budgets that also happen to be mortal business enemies. You would think one of the two would have enough collective marketing brainpower to understand how to create a brand promise that gets consumers to pay attention instead of doing the opposite.

You would assume either of these companies could create just the right few words to provide a memorable tagline that

consumers would enjoy and remember as they did decades ago when Coke and Pepsi knew what they were doing. And you would be totally wrong. My speaking tour confirms that what consumers of all ages remember if asked to recall a Coke or Pepsi tagline are a Coke line from the 1940s and again used in the 1970s and a Pepsi line from the 1960s. For Coke: “It’s the real thing.” For Pepsi: “You’re in the Pepsi generation.” It’s amazing that no one has a clue what their current taglines are. Which just goes to prove what I have been saying for years to companies I consult with: *never change a great line.*

One major reason memorable and effective taglines get discarded is that company brass think consumers get bored with “the same old line.” As I will prove again and again throughout this book, the only folks who get bored are the company’s senior managers. Most of us make the huge mistake of thinking consumers are just like us. We think about our company constantly, often day and night, weekends and holidays, and never really take a mental break from our management chores. Our customers, however, only think about us every so often when they have a specific need we can meet or they happen to notice an ad or open a promotional letter or catalog. The point is that they rarely concern themselves with our brand. And when they do, they don’t

Never Change a Great Line—The Proof: BMW

The facts speak for themselves. Over the past 45 years the one auto manufacturer with the best profitability record is BMW. And BMW is the only company in the industry that has kept the same tagline/brand promise for almost a half century—“The ultimate driving machine.” In recall test after test, this is the only auto tagline that is immediately remembered by consumers. There is no mystery to this recall; the real mystery is why BMW’s competitors do not understand the power of keeping the same brand promise and thus staying top-of-mind in the category literally forever—talk about ultimate marketing.

want to be confused. They want to know that the company they buy from stands for what it has always stood for. That is why I repeat: *never change a great line.*

Oh, the other reason great taglines get discarded is a new chief marketing officer (CMO) wants to prove his worth and launch a new brand promise—beyond stupid, and if you are the chief executive officer (CEO), never allow that to happen.

McDonald's Almost Gets It

The theme of this chapter is billions of dollars wasted on dead-on-arrival brand promises/taglines—and by companies that should know better. A company with billions of product served since its founding (which should know better) is McDonald's. Just like at McDonald's, where billions of burgers have landed in the stomachs of millions of consumers worldwide, billions and billions of impressions assault our brains during our lifetime. What we remember and what we forget is what marketers constantly strive to figure out so their product/service messages wind up in the remembered part of our cortex. The approach most marketers take is to “keep up with the times” and change their brand promise or tagline on a regular basis. (Coke has used over 90 taglines in their 120-year history, or as I like to say—they have used 88 too many). Nothing could be dumber. McDonald's doesn't get it all wrong. They have kept their core customer proposition, which for them is two words generally seen on the large outdoor McDonald's sign at each establishment: “Billions Served.”

In a sense, “Billions Served” is McDonald's motto—a statement of fact and a guiding principle of the franchise. They have gone beyond just having a motto since the 1960s by creating new taglines every few years such as their current line: “I'm lovin' it.” Is this “replace the tagline every so often” a good idea? No.

We can travel all the way back to the last few centuries of the Roman Empire to see that sometimes a single well-chosen word is enough to last for the ages.

Consider the word *sincerely*, which I mentioned briefly in the first edition of this book. It originated around 50 AD from the Latin *in sine cere*, which means “without wax.” During that period, many Roman marble merchants were lax with their wax and went about selling marble as perfect, when they knew the opposite to be true. They would sell cracked marble as void of imperfections by filling in the cracks with wax. Buyers were not amused when after the sale they discovered the ruse. It got so bad the Roman government stepped in and issued an edict that pure marble for sale had to be labeled *sine cere*, meaning there was no wax filling in any cracks. The penalty for ignoring this early brand promise was death to the merchant. We have been using *sincerely* ever since, though not at fear for our lives.

A 20th-century example of one word commanding great respect and burned in our collective memory came from Franklin Roosevelt’s declaration of war on Japan on December 8, 1941. His speech was originally going to begin: “December 7, 1941, a day that will live in world history. . . .” Then, at the last minute before going on live radio to the nation and the world, FDR scribbled out world history and wrote in the word *infamy*. This change transformed an ordinary sentence into an extraordinary one that will be remembered for all time.

In the first decade of the 21st century, we have all but forgotten how powerful a few well-chosen words can be and how critical for businesses of any size to have a chance at breaking through promotional clutter amounting in U.S. dollars to \$60 billion monthly spent worldwide on advertising and related activities.

Few companies today have a clue about how to create and maintain a brand promise with just the right words to propel them to the top of their category and then stay at the top indefinitely.

New Challenges We Face and Five Rules to Live By

Several trends have emerged that are radically changing the way we interact with one another and are making the job of successfully promoting one's company ever harder by the minute. Three of these trends are:

1. The more we use the Internet, the more advertising loses the emotional appeal it needs to close a sale (the net effect of a small screen and often poor sound quality).
2. The breakup of the traditional family unit means millions of people crave one-on-one companionship and seek it through using digital dating services that provide an endless stream of possible matchups.
3. Belonging to something with potential celebrity status, no matter how fleeting, has never been more important and sought after. Think of the millions of participants on Facebook and Twitter as two examples. Plus, there is the attraction of such shows as *American Idol*, which is routinely the top-rated TV program in America.

What these trends tell us is that consumers moving at digital speed to communicate with each other do not have the time or the interest in having brands they have come to rely on keep changing their brand promise. Additionally, it has never been more important to create an emotional connection through a unique way of describing your offering that appeals to consumers who are otherwise bombarded with endless streams of text, e-mail, mobile, and other messaging that delivers information but little if any personality.

Widely forgotten are a few simple rules (five) that can help you create a powerful tagline that can serve as your singular brand promise and launching pad for top-of-mind consumer awareness. And looking out through the next decade

ahead, I see no change to these rules other than it will be even more critical to follow them as closely as possible.

Rule 1: Creating a Tagline Is an Art, Not a Science

Take your pick: “You deserve a break today” (McDonald’s); “the ultimate driving machine” (BMW); “M’m m’m good” (Campbell Soup); “come to Marlboro country” (Marlboro cigarettes); “when you care enough to send the very best” (Hallmark); “it takes a tough man to make a tender chicken” (Purdue); “The few. The proud. The Marines” (Marine Corps). These memorable lines and many more throughout the past 100 years were created by individual writers on assignment to pen just the right combination of words for a product or service to rise above and beyond the competition.

Companies today have no clue, and instead of hiring a gifted wordsmith, they engage at great expense in endless committee brainstorming (a total oxymoron) and consumer focus groups, which result in committee-created taglines—all “dead on arrival.” These lines are unfocused and so general in meaning they could apply to any business and thus to none specifically. A few examples launched recently (company names excluded): “reach higher”; “moving ahead”; “the power of possibilities”; “the power to be better”; “the power of you”; “High performance. Delivered”; “your world delivered”; “this is what we do”; “the future is yours.”

Amazing how low the bar has fallen. You can avoid the platitude trap by hiring a talented writer and allowing him to give you his best effort. Your job is to provide him with a concise description of the three core benefits or features of your company, product, or service.

Rule 2: Your Company Is Different—Say So

Every company has a distinct selling proposition waiting to be brought to light. Think of your business as a personality. What is it that is special, genuine, timeless, and even fun

and wildly different? Then just say it or get a great writer to. Also use word play when possible. A few examples I particularly like that cross the spectrum of groups large to small are: Hebrew National Hotdogs, “we answer to a higher authority”; Compari, “the first time is never the best”; Gonzer Electrical Contractors, “let us check your shorts”; Volkswagen UK, “relieves gas pains”; Fresh Direct Food Delivery, “Our food is fresh. Our customers are spoiled”; the town of Summit, New Jersey, “Summit. Everything else is downhill.”

Rule 3: We Buy from People or Characters Who Entertain Us

Humans are most fascinated with each other—a good thing for the continuation of the species. We look for guidance to religious leaders and have great interest, often too much, in celebrities. We pay rapt attention to political front runners, business icons, sports figures, particularly nasty swindlers and criminals, media spokespeople, and occasionally even authors.

Personality is all-consuming; while asleep, we even dream about people real and imagined. It is therefore quite perplexing that marketers think they can sell without the aid of a spokesperson or endearing human-like character. Is it essential? I believe it is because it dramatically boosts your chances of gaining consumer attention over your competition. The one caveat is that you must select a spokesperson or character that fits your selling premise and does not appear false or forced. Major past successes include Mr. Whipple, Karl Malden for American Express, Morris the Cat, Charlie Tuna, Ronald McDonald, Frank Purdue, the Jolly Green Giant, and the Pillsbury Doughboy. (More on this topic in a later chapter).

Rule 4: Sound Becomes Memory Like No Other Sense

Through hundreds of millions of years of evolution the animal and human mind is wired to accept and remember

sound much more so than the other dominant sense, sight. If you have any doubt, think of your all-time favorite movie and then think of watching it without sound. It would have no impact at all. Although smell, taste, and touch are powerful, they are not part of the media mix from TV to radio to Internet and are of limited use in print. Taglines become firmly embedded in our memories if they are delivered with a unique sound signature—a special rhythm and inflection that has never been used before. Radio actually trumps TV in remembering sound because there are no visual distractions. The Internet is sound challenged a bit for two reasons: (1) the sound is often hard to hear, and (2) the screen of a computer or handheld device is too small to give the impact of a large TV screen.

Bottom line—make sure your tagline is spoken at every opportunity and with a unique inflection. Without a special sound signature, your chances of successful top-of-mind awareness decrease dramatically.

Rule 5: Never, Ever Change a Great Tagline

Companies continue to change their taglines at great expense and to no effect, from American Express to Coke to McDonald's, Federal Express, GE, and Ford, to name a few. What consumers remember are taglines each of these global brands used decades ago. Every new line they have tried since has achieved near zero recognition despite billions spent on launching them. I bet not a single reader knows what Coke's new tagline is that launched with great hype on the 2010 Super Bowl or, for that matter, Pepsi's on the same Super Bowl. It is shocking that these rivals for world cola domination who are marketing driven to the nth degree have no ability today to deliver a tagline that will be as iconic as the brand itself.

Coke should have never given up "It's the real thing." And Pepsi should have kept for all time "You're in the Pepsi generation."

Taglines that are distinctive, spot-on genuine, and compelling are timeless. They do not need tinkering or refreshing. What should be updated are the promotions done year after year that the tagline is headlining. That is the secret formula to effective marketing.

What about Political Slogans?

The word *slogan* comes from the Scottish Gaelic word *sluagh-ghairm*, pronounced “slogorm,” and means “battle cry.” How appropriate for politics!

As I state in my book *Powerlines*, there hasn’t been a decent presidential campaign slogan since Ronald Reagan’s campaigns in 1980 and 1984. John McCain’s approach was a total disaster, with his team using over seven different slogans, which confused everyone and left the impression he was not an effective leader—hmm. . . .

It should not be that hard to create a powerful campaign slogan, and, as history shows, the right slogan can do a lot to help ensure a victory. Slogans work in one of two ways only: (1) they focus on a singular issue that Americans can rally around, or (2) they positively reinforce the personality of the candidate in a way that has tremendous appeal. Reagan used both approaches. In 1980, against Jimmy Carter he rode to victory using the theme: “Are you better off than you were four years ago?” Carter had presided over a horrible recession, and clearly the voters agreed that they were not better off. Then, in 1984, against Fritz Mondale the Reagan team focused on how better off Americans were after Reagan’s first term with the slogan: “It’s morning again in America.” This slogan was the focal point and major theme of every campaign speech, every TV ad, and every press release, and perfectly reflected Reagan’s eternal optimism about life in general and the future of America under his leadership for four more years.

Reagan beat Mondale with the greatest electoral landslide in American history. Mondale just barely (by 3,000 votes) won his home state of Minnesota.

Remember

About 98 percent of all taglines today have no staying power and are a complete and utter waste of money. They have no personality or attitude and no unique claim or promise. Many are created by committee—always a dead-wrong approach. Powerful taglines define brands for all time and are immune to changes in technology and the basic living patterns of present and future generations. “A diamond is forever” (written by a 27-year-old copywriter in 1948) will always define that gem as long as people inhabit Mother Earth. Taglines like this one are inspiring phrases created by gifted writers who see a clear and compelling brand promise and make it come to life to inspire, entertain, and enlighten the rest of us.