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“The adult-Internet industry generated over \$900 billion in 2001, making it account for 13% of all revenue generated on the Internet.”

—Industry Facts

Wednesday Morning

Fax

from

The Castle Press

It's not a joke, son!

Though David Ogilvy and other astute advertising observers warn strongly against it, some companies continue to try humor in their advertising. They rarely if ever succeed, according to a recent article by Beth Negus Viveiros in Direct.

- Humor “gets attention, so it’s good for an opening, but it’s not good for selling,” noted copywriter Herschell Gordon Lewis told her.

“How would you react to a salesman who made every sales point a joke?” Lewis asks. “In direct marketing, there is no need to use humor.” The offer counts for far more than rhetorical bells and whistles, he noted.

“Injecting humor...is a dangerous ploy,” he cautions.

- Maryland copywriter Ken Scheck agrees with Lewis.

There is a lot of humor in today’s consumer advertising, he admits—but what may work in general media can be the kiss of death for a direct marketer. We are trying to get a sale...whereas people doing beer ads are just trying to create a good feeling about the product, he adds.

“Humor is very subjective,” Scheck notes. And, he warns, if people do not get your joke, or if it annoys or offends them, you’ve done yourself a lot of damage. You have made “a hard task even more difficult.”

- You might expect that Joe Kolman of New York’s Corporate Comics, which creates promotional comic books, would favor humorous advertising. Not so. Most advertisers, he says, “don’t really care about making something funny. They care about making something that sells.”

Fear is a more effective motivator than laughs, Kolman says. People can perceive humor as distracting from the seriousness of the customer’s problem.

Case History

Despite such advice—and even their own experience—many advertisers continue efforts to make humor work.

One such advertiser is THE NATION—a left-of-center political-opinion magazine.

THE NATION has tested several humorous mailers, says Circulation Director Art Stupar.

One of them recently offered as a premium a poster depicting President George W. Bush as MAD magazine’s Alfred E. Neuman. The envelope of another showed President Bush wearing a crown. “Don’t you just love this guy? If your answer is yes, don’t open this envelope,” the copy said.

Yet THE NATION’s long-time control package is serious and issue-driven, Stupar admits.

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