

10,000,000 Flies

If you missed our last episode in the *HUB*, we demonstrated that the rules which used to guarantee great branding have been buried like the Dead Sea Scrolls, that the souls of the Brand Titans who invented them are haunting old mansions in Greenwich, CT, 06830, because their spirits cannot be at peace, and that the deadly brand flu seems to have jumped from the Aflac ducks at the agencies into the corporate population.

Then, in the second sentence, we introduced a stunning ray of hope—that the wonder-drug that can cure the whole thing is instantly available to *anyone* who takes the simple step of activating a few powerful, yet simple, principles that reside right under the noses of each and every person who is reading this.

So, in this installment, we were going to lay out the complete deluxe set of “great rules,” replete with pithy examples that guarantee your brand can get on the road to Valhalla—toward the Breakfast of Champions, the Quicker Picker Upper or the Marlboro Man—that’s hidden in all of us. The kind of brands that have proven they can last for about 75 years as number one, like an Escalade on cruise control.

But...then we got sidetracked.

We snuck a peak at this year’s SuperBowl embarrassment emporium. For two brand gurus, attempting to craft a cogent, dispassionate second installment for the *HUB*, this was a mistake. Like us, you had to have seen the hype about the ads leading up to the game. Then the ads themselves. Then, unless you live in a tree stump, you got the aftershow ad “reviews” by Donny Deutsch, the bloggers, Katie Couric, some college professors and Kelly Ripa. They touted them as the products of the brightest minds in advertising, with the biggest budgets, at the world’s greatest agencies. They rated them as entertaining, original, creative, edgy, risqué and therefore, *effective*.

Here’s a descriptive little adverb that Diane Sawyer and Soledad O’Brien prob-

ably forgot. How about *ridiculous*? How about *freakin’ nonsense*? How about we’re amazed that, in these ads that you spent \$10 million to shoot, after all your decades in this business, that *we have no idea what you’re talking about, who you are, why we should care, what you’ll do for us, what makes you better than your competitors, what you promise for our money or even what the hell is the name of your product. The products have become incidental placements in their own \$5 million dollar spots!*

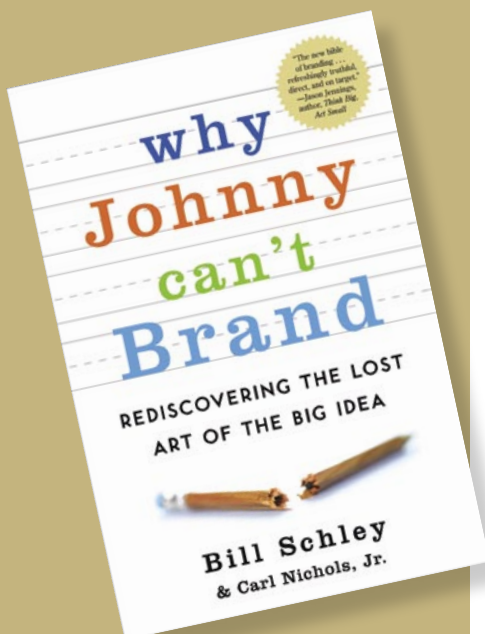
Watching the SuperBowl has to make you wonder: Is it possible that 90 percent of a whole industry, the crème-de-la-marketing-crème who work in New York and make two-comma incomes—along with the clients they sell to—is it possible they don’t have a clue about what they’re doing? Could everyone be wrong? Before we answer “yes,” we’ll prime you with two other instances of what we call, the “this 747 is too big to crash rule,” otherwise known as the principle of “10,000,000 flies can’t be wrong.”

In the 1980’s, there was the real estate boom. From Boston to Seattle, huge glass skyscrapers were going up by the hundreds, financed by bankers who were falling all over themselves like squealing pigs going for the slop. No one dared to ask, “don’t we need tenants?” One day, the whole thing flew into a mountain. It took Texas a decade to recover. *It turned out...* everyone was wrong.

In the 1990’s, we had the dot-coms. Warren Buffet was vilified by the financial establishment for refusing to invest. They

Can 10 million flies really be wrong? Yes—and they are circling around your television ads.

by **Bill Schley & Carl Nichols**
Principals
david ID



said he “didn’t get it” that companies no longer needed revenues, good products or satisfied customers to succeed. Then, the entire bubble popped like a balloon at a four-year-old’s birthday party. *Again...everyone was wrong.*

Why? Because everybody forgot that business has to make sense. There has to be supply and demand. If you have a product you want to sell, somebody has to want to buy it. To want to buy it they have to know they need it, be able to afford it, and — this is key — believe that you’re the best supplier of this product versus all your competitors.

Think about the great, great campaigns of yesteryear: The bullet fired through the MasterLock. The Timex Watch, M&Ms, Join the Navy and See the World. The Maytag Repairman, Get a Piece of the Rock. Good to the Last Drop. Let Your Fingers do the Walking. Many of these are half a century old and we still can’t — and don’t — want to turn them off in our heads

Now look at what you saw on the SuperBowl. Crowds of morons racing through the streets to catch a beverage truck for one of those “thunderbolt” caffeine-type drinks (actual brand of no consequence). This one had the tagline: *Let Your Manhood Out*. Did they mean: After you drink a case and need to take a leak behind the dumpster? If you’re a woman, what are they telling you? Drink this and they’ll cast you as a character in *The Crying Game*?

Come on, everybody. These are “executions.” Not branding. All of it is masking the reality that the adolescents creating these ads appear to have no real belief or passion and no understanding of the products they sell, or they wouldn’t be purposely obscuring them for 28 seconds out of every 30 in distracting, self-indulgent passels of drivel, punctuated at the end with a contrived connection that tells us why what we just witnessed has actually made a point about the product whose company just paid for the commercial.

Are we right not to want to give these creative geniuses rewards, but to give them spankings and send them to bed without supper? And most importantly of all: If you’re reading this and you control a budget for marketing commu-

nications, *are you obligated* to drink this crowd’s Kool-Aid, and go along with the phony pronouncements of people in authority in marketing firms who have never actually sold anything in their lives?

Or, instead...can you blow the doors off the competition, set yourself apart, thrill your customers and prospects, beat your projections, get promoted, inspire employees, feel the power of doing the right thing, build a mountain of a brand that can last a lifetime? Can you be the one in your industry who gets it right, just by changing your focus a little bit, and pointing at something, *one thing*, without let-up?

Yes! As a matter of fact, you can step out of the lemming herd, and start *for free* this moment. That is, if you’re the eighth caller who contacts us right now because we’ll send you a free, autographed, copy of our book, *Why Johnny Can’t Brand*. Otherwise, the book’s \$19.95 at Amazon.com (but after that it’s free).

Here’s all you need to admit, embrace and adhere to daily for the rest of your life: The “One Item of ‘Carry-On’” Rule. Look at it. Remember it. When seeking to differentiate your brand, no matter how much information you offer, when you’ve finished pitching: *People only remember one thing.*

When you give people long lists of features and benefits, they walk away, morphing it down to that one-piece of mental “carry-on.” And once successfully carried through security and placed in the space above their seat, it preempts all other impressions and will stubbornly remain in place, virtually forever, until another, more compelling idea physically dislodges it. *The simple message always wins.* The “dominant selling idea” that’s *superlative* (we’re best at something); *important* (it’s something I want); and *believable* (I trust that you can deliver) is what you must find, own and *point to* relentlessly in your

messaging. And if you do, you too can be Superman, the Marlboro Man or the Man from Glad and dominate for 50 years.

Four words — “*We’ll Pick You Up*” — will always beat a riotous comedy commercial about the pitfalls of renting a car from Jabba the Hutt on planet Jupiter.

“*Made from Sugar So It Tastes like Sugar*” will *always* beat a thousand ads where thin couples enjoy cups of coffee on the beach — and can turn a low-calorie sweetener into the number-one selling brand in about three years.

“*Fifteen Minutes Saves You 15%*” *always* beats a slapstick chain of accidents culminating in the gratuitous little insult, “*Life Comes at You Fast.*”

“*Melts in Your Mouth, Not in Your Hand*” *always* beats 28 seconds of an idiot putting six packs of Snickers on his head and an announcer who declares: “it only satisfies if you eat it.”

What this is all about — whether in business, politics or communicating with your teenager — is the magic of focus.

Break on through to the one idea that matters most because that’s the point where the problem gets solved, where the idea transfers from one head to another, where inertia breaks and movement becomes possible.

Putting audiences into an amused state is a kick for some. But putting masses of people *into motion*, moving them with the irresistible power of a great selling idea is the most creative and thrilling thing that can ever be experienced by any practitioner in this business. As Rosser Reeves reminded us: “In ancient times when Cicero spoke, the people clapped their hands. But when Demosthenes spoke, the people marched.”

In the next issue of the *HUB*, we *promise* to deliver the rules themselves, which are known to those in the elite club of the informed, as the Granite Pages. ■

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