Explorative Research and Praxis

DISRUPTION IN ADVERTISING

Disruption as a legitimate approach in contemporary advertising

In the 21st century the advertising landscape is cluttered. Digital screens, posters, TV, online platforms and social media are inundated with sponsored messages.

So how can you make sure your message reaches your target audience?

Disruptive advertising is any creative campaign that breaks out of the typical industry approach in a way that transcends traditional advertising.

Disruption is not just an idea or principle applied to solely to advertising.

Historically the telephone, printing, transcontinental railways, economic booms and busts, the automobile, electrification, satellite communications, air travel, the internet, smartphones, space travel and computers have all played a role in disrupting the behaviour of people and businesses.

The advertising disruption concept was introduced in 1992 by *TBWA's* chairman Jean-Marie Dru. It is a radical change in the marketplace brought about by the overturning of existing conventions. The term 'creative disruption' has both marketing and business applications.

On 1st May 1992 he launched the *Disruption* concept, as a marketing tool, by simultaneously publishing a full-page ad headlined ‘Disruption’ in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* and *Le Figaro*. It explained *BDDP’s* (now *TBWA*) disruptive methodology.

BDDP full page advertisement

Wall Street Journal, 1992.

Disruption

Who's Leading the Ad Industry?

The world's leading agencies are no longer shaping the advertising business. Little by little, they have become simply suppliers to their clients. The symptoms are clear.

Too many agencies define advertising in conventional terms, perform its conventional tasks, and turn out the conventional product. They don't train their people, build on their knowledge base, or have any vision of where the industry should be headed.

Meanwhile, clients have changed. Many are in zero-growth markets were every gain is a rival's loss. Others are under attack from numerous nimble, niche players. Some are at odds with their own distributors. And these are just some of the challenges.

Today, companies either manage their markets or their markets manage them. We have all seen entire sections of industry disappear from one day to the next, from one continent to another.

Successful companies now know that it is not enough to adapt, to follow customer needs. Rather, the challenge for companies today is to lead their customers, to create change in the markets and manage that change to their own advantage.

Such companies are often more visionary than their agencies, and they move faster. This is a disturbing reversal of roles.

The Role of Advertising in the 90s

As companies write new rules for competition, the nature of change itself shifts from linear to discontinuous. Minor adjustments are little help when the need is for new approaches.

Agencies can play a vital role in creating such approaches. The management of brands as assets is certainly more complex and more powerful today, and no one is better equipped to help in this area than agencies. But we, too, must give up our conventions.

We need more than intuition and imagination. We need and have developed a new discipline. We call it Disruption.

Disruption is discontinuous thinking applied to the task of advertising. It means we are no longer in the business of simply making commercials. Rather, our job is to create new visions for our clients' brands that will disrupt the marketplace in their favor.

Disruption: Overturning Conventions

Disruption is not a pretty word. But it clearly states what we want to do for our clients: destabilize the conventions of their competitive environments.

Specifically, Disruption means identifying, questioning, and overturning the conventions that define an existing marketing situation. Such conventions exist everywhere—no matter the brand, category or marketplace—but they are usually hidden. Conventions are the unquestioned assumptions, the common sense wisdom, the current rules of the game that comprise the status quo in one's marketplace.

The job of Disruption is to uncover these conventions, question their validity, and displace them to the client's advantage. For example it's conventional thinking to target pet food advertising to adults, not kids. Quaker has questioned this in Holland by building its strategy on the relationship between pets and kids. It's conventional thinking to say that aging is inevitable. Oil of Olay has challenged this in the USA by saying that no one should *grow old gracefully*. It's conventional thinking that retail advertising should be based only on tangible things: breadth of product range, size of store, price. Virgin Megastore, the largest record store in Paris, has challenged this convention by giving itself a cultural role, which is to champion popular arts in France. Virgin has been the fastest-growing retail brand for the last five years.

Disruption: Stretching the Corporate Imagination

By challenging established conventions, Disruption is the springboard to "vision." In "Corporate Imagination and Expeditionary Marketing" in *Harvard Business Review* (July/August 1991), Gary Hamel and C.K. Prahalad wrote of "having the imagination to envision markets that do not yet exist and the ability to stake them out ahead of the competition." Tom Peters is more blunt: "If you try to redefine an industry, you'll probably fail. If you don't try, you will fail."

At Wells Rich Greene BDDP, we define vision as a leap from where the brand is now to where the brand can be over time. The role of a vision is to expand the brand's possibilities, clarify its strategic direction, unify the brand's franchise, define the largest possible target, prescribe new products; in short, to create a larger, grander and more ambitious picture.

If the brand vision is disruptive, it redefines the brand and, just as important, the brand's environment. Unchaining music lovers from their stereos, Sony envisioned an entire new world of Walkman entertainment. Embodying health better than any other food product in France, Danone transcends all its flavors and their uses with an umbrella vision embraced by all consumers.

Disruption: It's Not New. It's Better Than New.

One could argue that Disruption itself is not new. For Braniff, Volkswagen and Alka-Seltzer among others, Disruption has been the key to highly successful marketing programs. In fact, Disruption is not an invention but a discovery—the recognition of a pattern in previous successes.

What is new is our decision to focus on Disruption as a method which is appropriate, perhaps even necessary, today.

What is new is our understanding that what we and others have done in the past in ad hoc and intuitive ways must now be done on a systematic basis.

Our Proprietary Tools of Disruption

Luck, inspiration, and talent—each has a part in developing disruptive approaches, but experience plays the leading role. One must understand the conventions before having the right to and the ability to challenge them.

In order to make Disruption a reliable and repeatable method, however, we need tools to tap that experience as well as processes to store and retrieve that experience—in fact, the experience of the entire industry—for our clients.

Our "What If" process is one such tool. This is a proprietary series of questions about the conventions that are typical of a wide variety of marketing situations. Precisely because these are questions about conventions, they have a high probability of revealing opportunities for Disruption.

"Multicultural Analysis" is another process we use. We regularly conduct multinational analyses of same-category advertising in order to uncover conventions embedded in national cultures and to suggest disruptions that can be driven by cultural conventions.

To help institutionalize Disruption, we have created a database format for applying the "What If" process, a formally organized stock of "Multicultural Analyses," and a continually expanding "Disruption Bank" of disruptive strategies and selling ideas collected from around the world.

The process of creating these tools gives us the opportunity and the means to harness the experience not only of each person at Wells Rich Greene BDDP, but also of thousands of advertising people around the world over the last twenty years, and use that experience as the catalyst for our own work. New ideas are nothing but new associations of ideas.

Sources for Disruption

This cumulative knowledge has revealed three sources of Disruption at the level of the advertising proposition.

The first source is tangible business ideas that help create disruptive advertising. Painting aircraft in different colors allowed Braniff's "end of the plain plane" campaign. Labelling its 35mm film "High Definition" preempted the high-tech position for Polaroid. Advertising same-day brake repair service at Midas has impact because it means much more to customers than speed. It means Midas is committed to their well-being.

The second source is consumer insights—a particular way of thinking, feeling or behaving not yet exploited by the competition. Here are three examples from our client Procter & Gamble that were developed at other agencies. Folger's identified what, arguably, is the one and only "best part of waking up" and seized it. Head & Shoulders reminded consumers there's "never a second chance to make a first impression." Secret revealed that women do perspire and need a product "strong enough for a man but PH-balanced for a woman." Untapped consumer insights are a rich source for inspiring Disruption.

The third source of inspiration aims at modifying the focus of the advertising proposition. This focus can be one of the following: reinforce top-of-mind awareness, highlight a product attribute, emphasize a consumer benefit, establish a territory, reflect a value, or claim a role. When Ford announced that "Quality is Job 1," it preempted a territory that no American car manufacturer had dared enter; when Pepsi laid claim to the new-generation territory, when Nike incorporated the value of personal achievement, they changed their advertising focus and, in doing so, disrupted their markets.

Disruption: A Creative Act Before the Creative Process

No creative brief is written at Wells Rich Greene BDDP without having applied one or more of these processes. This way, conventions are uncovered, disruptions are identified, and visions are created.

Disruption should therefore precede the creative development for one simple reason: the more disruptive the vision, the more creative the advertising is likely to be.

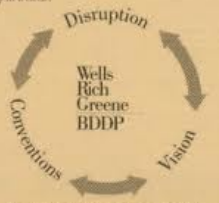
For 50 years advertisers and agencies have known that the critical moment in a campaign's development is the delivery of the brief to the creative team. We go a little further. We see the creative brief as a creative act in itself. This is the moment when the most promising breakthroughs—true marketplace disruptions—will be developed and concentrated.

The Disruption Method in Real Life

To describe how the Disruption method works, we have presented a logical sequence: from analysis of conventions to the discovery of Disruption, from Disruption to the establishment of a vision. But logic does not always apply in practice: visions can inspire disruptions, and other intersections are possible.

As a discipline, Disruption must question advertising's work process—the step-by-step linear order of development: overall company objectives, marketing strategy, advertising strategy, creative idea, executional format, etc. This process may help to order one's thoughts but can also rob us of some of the most profound sources of inspiration that arise during the final stages of our thinking. A purely executional idea which is usually relegated to the end of the process can itself be the source of a new strategy or a new vision.

In actual practice, then, we cannot allow linear logic to preclude the interplay of these concepts and so we illustrate their relationship in a circle.



Disruption: From Intuition to Discipline

We all know that advertising today tends to be less effective than it once was. As a discipline, Disruption will help change this trend. If success comes to those who change the rules of the game, we want to use Disruption to change the rules of advertising.

Successful marketers and advertisers have been applying "Disruption" intuitively for years. What is new is not the concept of Disruption itself, but the creation of a disciplined method for enabling Disruption to be applied systematically.

We are in an economic environment forcing growth through gain of market share rather than market growth. At Wells Rich Greene BDDP, we believe that advertisers who use the Disruption method for creating new visions for their brands will win. That is why we have invited and challenged every individual at Wells Rich Greene BDDP to embrace this definition and bring it to reality:

Disruption is our way of thinking that encourages us to challenge conventional wisdom and in doing so, create new visions for our clients that will enable them to grow their brands faster.

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In the 1990's the term *disruption*, was defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'disturbance or problems which interrupt an event, activity or process' and the word had a negative connotation.

The term can also be traced in French back to 1749 within the *Encyclopedia of Buffon*, connecting it to the Latin 'disrumpere', meaning 'break in pieces'.

However, Dru identified ‘disruption’ to be a creative opportunity.

His Disruption concept refers to the process of breaking conventions to accelerate movement to the future, without cutting off from the past.

As a methodology, it is a progressive technique to accelerate change.

For Jean-Marie Dru, Disruption, as a practical concept, is about bringing radical change, as opposed to incremental, linear change.

Disruption signals a departure from the usual.

Disruptive messaging interrupts the mediocrity in the deluge of advertising an audience is likely to encounter.

Creative disruption helps disturb the normal flow of marketing messages whereby the target audience pauses to consider the message they have received.

This is done because audiences have a lower attention span than ever and are unlikely to invest time in things they consider unworthwhile or unremarkable.

Disruptive advertising can create an initial impact that traditional methods fall short of achieving. It ensures greater exposure to advertising through various channels and devices.

Disruptive business models are already all around us:

Uber, Airbnb, Facebook, Netflix, Apple, Dove, Nike, Red Bull, etc.

Consumers are clever and appreciate creativity and innovation. Today it is a matter of leveraging technologies and channels to reach them.

Techniques to create disruption in advertising are as boundless as creativity, but they can include:

- **Contrasting messages**
- **Unusual or out of place presentation or placement**
- **Exaggerated presentation**
- **Intensely targeted messaging**

‘Brands that are perceived to be creative and disruptive perform best, generating an average brand value growth of 154%’ (*Marketing Week)*

There are risks

While the potential is huge, disruptive advertising is not without risk. It is harder to predict results than with traditional or digital advertising. A particularly big risk is that it is impossible to predict the social or economic conditions you will release the new advertising into. A news story, the political climate, or social media can mean your campaign fails.

Patagonia

Outdoor and sustainable clothing company *Patagonia* applied reverse psychology with their ‘Don’t Buy This Jacket’ campaign in 2011.

They weren’t trying to compound people, rather communicate the meaningful message of: ‘don’t buy something you don’t need.’

Patagonia full page advertisement

Wall Street Journal, 2011.

DON'T BUY THIS JACKET



It's Black Friday, the day in the year retail turns from red to black and starts to make real money. But Black Friday, and the culture of consumption it reflects, puts the economy of natural systems that support all life firmly in the red. We're now using the resources of one-and-a-half planets on our one and only planet.

Because Patagonia wants to be in business for a good long time – and leave a world inhabitable for our kids – we want to do the opposite of every other business today. We ask you to buy less and to reflect before you spend a dime on this jacket or anything else.

Environmental bankruptcy, as with corporate bankruptcy, can happen very slowly, then all of a sudden. This is what we face unless we slow down, then reverse the damage. We're running short on fresh water, topsoil, fisheries, wetlands – all our planet's natural systems and resources that support business, and life, including our own.

The environmental cost of everything we make is astonishing. Consider the R2® Jacket shown, one of our best sellers. To make it required 135 liters of water, enough to meet the daily needs (three glasses a day) of 45 people. Its journey from its origin as 60% recycled polyester to our Reno warehouse generated nearly 20 pounds of carbon dioxide, 24 times the weight of the finished product. This jacket left behind, on its way to Reno, two-thirds its weight in waste.

And this is a 60% recycled polyester jacket, knit and sewn to a high standard; it is exceptionally durable, so you won't have to replace it as often. And when it comes to the end of its useful life we'll take it back to recycle into a product of equal value. But, as is true of all the things we can make and you can buy, this jacket comes with an environmental cost higher than its price.

There is much to be done and plenty for us all to do. Don't buy what you don't need. Think twice before you buy anything. Go to patagonia.com/CommonThreads or scan the QR code below. Take the Common Threads Initiative pledge, and join us in the fifth "R," to reimagine a world where we take only what nature can replace.

COMMON THREADS INITIATIVE

REDUCE
WE make useful gear that lasts a long time
YOU don't buy what you don't need

REPAIR
WE help you repair your Patagonia gear
YOU pledge to fix what's broken

REUSE
WE help find a home for Patagonia gear you no longer need
YOU sell or pass it on*

RECYCLE
WE will take back your Patagonia gear that is worn out
YOU pledge to keep your stuff out of the landfill and incinerator

REIMAGINE
TOGETHER we reimagine a world where we take only what nature can replace

patagonia
patagonia.com

TAKE THE PLEDGE

*If you sell your used Patagonia product on eBay® and take the Common Threads Initiative pledge, we will co-list your product on patagonia.com for no additional charge.

DON'T BUY THIS JACKET



THIS SEASON, SHARE SOME VALUES

Learn more about our Common Threads Initiative,
and take the pledge to reduce consumption

TAKE THE PLEDGE

By doing so the company drew attention to its brand ethos of crafting outdoor gear that was hard-wearing and kind to the environment, and their other offering – a clothing repair service that allows customers to extend the usefulness of their Patagonia clothing. It reinforced their brand values and increased customer desire.

Dove

Dove's 'Real Beauty' campaigns were extremely successful. Seeing a rise in discourse about unrealistic beauty standards in cosmetics advertising, *Dove* created a campaign based around the fuller-figured women alienated by this marketing. They then developed the campaign to challenge many other traditional notions of beauty. It changed their brand perception because it showed women happy, healthy versions of themselves.

Dove done this by questioning gender representations.



Dove done this by questioning beauty ideals.



Dove done this by questioning body image.



Dove done this by questioning photographic retouching.



Dove's figures soar as 'real women' give beauty a new face

MELISSA KENT

An advertising campaign which stars curvy women instead of stick-thin models has pushed sales of Dove beauty products up 30 per cent in just a few weeks.

The revolutionary "real women" commercials featuring women with ample thighs, bottoms and breasts are behind a sharp rise in sales of skin firming products, the company claims. Dove's share of the $50 million moisturiser market has grown by a third to 10.9 per cent nationally since the campaign was launched in late August.

Dove brand manager Brian Taylor said women were sick of images of airbrushed perfection in beauty advertising and wanted to see natural women with real curves.

"People were quite sceptical about launching a range of products using girls who were a little bit bigger but we have been overwhelmed by the consumer support for the campaign," she said.

In Britain, a 600 per cent growth in sales has been attributed to the campaign, which sparked new debate about the portrayal of women in advertising when launched last year.

It stemmed from a survey which found only 2 per cent of women around the world described themselves as beautiful and only 13 per cent were satisfied with their body weight and shape.

In Australia, the skin-care company is also launching a national competition to find curvaceous women aged 18 to 35 for a calendar.

Professor Ken Ramsenthaler, head of Curtin University's school of marketing, said a campaign featuring naturally beautiful women was a clever marketing strategy which instilled confidence in the brand.

"Consumers are quite savvy and realise they are not going to look like a supermodel just because they use a product, so a campaign like this feels true," he said.

Melissa Fyn, founder of marketing consultancy W Communications Group, said brands which used airbrushed images of models and actresses lacked credibility. "Women are smart enough . . . to realise Halle Berry or Sarah Jessica Parker are just paid models and of course they don't really dye their own hair or use Revlon make-up," she said.



Big success: Dove's sales have soared as a result of its 'real women' commercials, which use models with curvaceous bodies instead of airbrushed, stick-thin figures.

“‘Authenticity’ is the new ‘storytelling’ of advertising. The beauty of this campaign is that it’s using the power of its brand to reflect and celebrate the authenticity of its audience - women - by showcasing real people. In the digital age of radical transparency, brands can’t hide behind their own stories anymore.”
(Rei Inamoto, chief creative officer, *AKQA*)

Burger King

In 2020 the fast food brand *Burger King* created a stir with a global campaign that showcased its prized ***Whopper*** burger decaying over a 34-day period.

The international brand *McDonalds* is their direct competition aznd have a much larger budget so Burger King use disruptive creative ideas to get ahead.

The Whopper DAY 28

BURGER KING

THE BEAUTY

OF NO ARTIFICIAL

PRESERVATIVES




The Whopper DAY 28
BURGER KING
THE BEAUTY OF NO ARTIFICIAL PRESERVATIVES


The Whopper DAY 32
BURGER KING
THE BEAUTY OF NO ARTIFICIAL PRESERVATIVES

The future for disruption

As global businesses, brands institutions and organisations embrace digital transformation, and as the radical reappraisal of business models continues, it is likely that the Disruption concept will be leveraged by more and more brands in order to seek new opportunities and gain advantage over their business competitors.

Any questions?

Next lecture:

Storytelling