

Creative Communication and Sales and Promotion Orientation

In this activity, we will look back at the famous Crocker Bank “We’ve Only Just Begun” campaign from the 1970s. You will examine how an exceptionally creative campaign can capture public imagination through storytelling and music, yet fall short when it does not align with the company’s strategic needs.

Please note that this ad is considered to be a breakthrough ad for its time due to its ability to generate strong consumer emotions. Remembering that this is an ad for a bank, garnering strong emotional connection is often a challenge for such organizations.

The song played in the TV commercial was originally written for the ad itself, but later went on to be a very successful single and is considered to be one of the top 500 songs of all time by Rolling Stone magazine.

Please review the following information and the video on the making of the commercial, then address the student discussion questions at the end.

Campaign Overview

The Crocker Bank campaign launched around 1970, marking a pivotal moment in advertising where creative storytelling took center stage. At a time when marketing largely focused on the promotional mix only, many companies employed advertising teams that **operated independently of overall business strategy**. It is this disconnect between strategy and marketing that is the reason why the campaign was unsuccessful in terms of sales and profits – it was extraordinarily successful in consumer interest and engagement, due to its creativity.

The campaign featured a wedding-themed narrative with the song “We’ve Only Just Begun” playing in the background. Hal Riney, the advertising creative designing the campaign, decided that the song would underpin the messaging. As a result, this innovative approach favored emotional appeal over a direct sales pitch or listing of the bank's products and features.

The ad’s impact on its audience was profound. Consumers, especially young adults, resonated deeply with the wedding imagery and the catchy, inspirational tune. The song quickly transcended its original context, eventually becoming a popular wedding anthem and a hit when recorded by the Carpenters.

However, while the campaign drove remarkable brand recognition and consumer engagement, it attracted a clientele that was not financially ideal for Crocker Bank. The bank needed customers with more substantial financial profiles, and many of those drawn to the campaign lacked the financial means to support the bank’s strategic goals.

Strategic Misalignment and Lessons Learned

Despite its impact and innovative approach, the campaign was ultimately discontinued due to a misalignment between creative elements and strategic business goals.

Hal Riney's approach, though groundbreaking in its storytelling and creative risk-taking, did not attract the type of customers that Crocker Bank needed. This case serves as an example of why every creative initiative must support the overall business strategy. Creative brilliance, as demonstrated by the hit song and emotional narrative, must be balanced with strategic relevance to drive tangible business results.

In today's marketing environment, the lessons from the Crocker Bank campaign are still relevant. As marketers, we need to ensure that creativity and IMC messaging is directly linked to strategic goals. And the challenge for modern marketers is to blend emotional storytelling with a clear, strategic focus that identifies and attracts the right target audience.

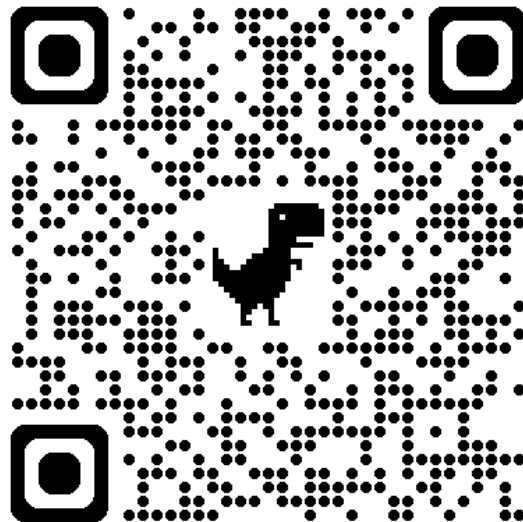
Quick Recap of the Sales and Promotion Era

As a reminder, the sales and promotion era in marketing was characterized by a focus on immediate results and rapid sales increases through **aggressive advertising and promotional tactics**. During this period, companies often relied on creative advertising teams to design campaigns aimed at driving short-term sales, often little regard for long-term brand strategy or customer relationships.

Marketing teams were often referred to as the "Advertising Department" and would only have responsibility for promotional mix elements. They were generally not involved in other elements of the marketing mix, nor development of corporate strategy, nor having a CMO as part of the executive team.

Video Overview of the Crocker Bank “We’ve Only Just Begun” Campaign

Note: it is important to review this video and to pick up on the various comments made by Hal Riney. Please note that it is from a longer documentary called Art and Copy – which highlights and discusses classic and important advertising campaigns.



Student Discussion Questions

1. How did the central creative message for the TV ad come about? That is, what was the initial plan for the creative message? Does this approach surprise you?
2. How did the use of music and images differentiate this campaign from typical ads of the 1970s?
3. Why do you think that the TV ad resonated with young consumers? What elements of the TVC were effective in creating that connection?
4. Why was the campaign ultimately dropped despite its popularity?
5. Therefore, what key lesson/s does this case offer about aligning creative ideas with business strategy?
6. What recommendations would you make if you were tasked with relaunching a similar campaign in today's digital marketing environment?