

The case for creativity in B2B marketing

 By Warren Moss

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There's a perception that B2B marketing is quite boring - and definitely not as sexy as B2C marketing. Where are the massive TVC's? What about the glamorous Cannes or Loeries-type awards ceremonies? When people think about business buyers, they think of pragmatism - procurement processes, decision-making units and an approach to comparisons that's driven more by spreadsheets than emotion.



Screengrab from State Street Global Advisors - Fearless Girl [Youtube video](#).

Epic Split

The truth is, people are not robots and emotion does play a role in purchasing decisions, even if they're tempered by pragmatism. There's a case, then, for creating initial interest in a B2B brand with an emotive B2B marketing campaign – like Volvo Trucks did in the 'Epic Split' TVC they created with Jean-Claude van Damme doing the splits between two trucks. If you think about the buying process for purchasing a fleet of trucks, it's a very organised and comparative process. All their competitor trucks offer a similar cost/km operating cost, they're all safe and reliable – if you had to compare them on a spreadsheet, wins for one brand in a particular column could be outweighed by another, against a different metric, so there's little to differentiate them.

Now if people believe that B2B decision-makers make their purchasing decisions purely on the basis of this type of spreadsheet comparison, you can make an argument for any of the brands they consider. That campaign, however, catapulted Volvo into a position as the global leader in the truck manufacturing space, simply because it got people talking. The company's growth illustrates its impact in the B2B space, while it also garnered significant international consumer interest because, at its heart, it was an innovative and interesting campaign. It was a really beautiful, creative – and wonderfully cheesy – way of illustrating one particular selling point of that particular line of trucks. In a lot of ways, that campaign – which is nearly 7 years old now – reignited the debate around the case for creativity in B2B marketing.

Fearless Girl

Another example is State Street's 'Fearless Girl' campaign, which was a B2B campaign launching of a fund which focussed investment on companies where the boards were majority controlled by women. It saw them put up a statue of a young girl, facing up to the famous statue of the Charging Bull on Wall Street.

Confronting that symbol of a male-dominated industry – and to many, a symbol of everything that's wrong with the business world – sparked not just global interest in their fund, but also a movement around equality and representation in the corridors of power. The campaign ticked all the B2B boxes in terms of the scale of the launch of the fund and its subsequent success, but the fact that the statue of the young girl still stands on Bowling Green is also a measure of the enduring success of the campaign beyond the B2B space.

These two campaigns ticked off every hard metric in a B2B campaign. Volvo Trucks weren't the market leaders at that point and Statestreet was not the first investment firm to launch a women-focused fund – but those campaigns delivered massive success largely because their deep creative execution captured the hearts and minds of the world.

B2B creativity

Those examples give plenty of room for putting forward the case for B2B creativity in the South African market. Our B2C marketers are globally-renowned and regularly win international recognition for campaigns – so why don't B2B marketers, also? I would argue that there's no shortage of world-class B2B marketing talent here at home – the problem is actually that they and their work are often forced to work within a defensive-minded decision-making ecosystem. B2B CMO's tend to make decisions that are most easily-justified – which means that they are often the 'safe' option which can be backed up by the numbers.

If they green-light a defensive campaign which works, they get the plaudits. If it doesn't work, they can point to a set of stats that indicate why it should have worked, and they're safe, too. It's hard to justify a brave decision because there's no set of stats that illustrates how a video of Jean-Claude van Damme doing the splits between two trucks is going to take your company to the number one spot, globally. There's no data there, other than great creativity – and commissioning fantastically creative work takes a gut feeling about the impact its going to have.

Many CMO's and decision-making units are making safe decisions in a recession because they want to keep their jobs, and preserve the jobs of their teams. You tend to see more risks being taken in a thriving economy because there's more opportunity. The problem is that putting your head above the parapet with the right bold idea, during a tough time, has proven time and time again to be eye-catching and effective. People need creativity when everything else is weighing them down. Even B2B people.

ABOUT WARREN MOSS

Warren Moss is the founder & CEO of Demographica, a full-service specialist agency focusing on Business to Business (B2B) and niche consumer markets. What makes Demographica unique is the fact that anthropology (the study of human societies and cultures and their development) is at the heart of all of their strategies. Warren and Demographica have been recognised by winning some major business and marketing awards. Warren is also currently the Chairman of the Direct Marketing Association of South Africa.

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