Representation of Information for a Visual World

Lane Tubyfill

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Introduction

In a high speed world, information’s importance is weighed not only how much it relates to a topic, but also in how affect it is at being accepted. Today’s ad campaigns are limited, television ads reduced to thirty second sound bites, magazine ads limited to a one page spread with the possibility of cover mention, and online ads that are limited to a small area of the internet with limited methods of discovering them. But reading information is no longer practical, because if the person has to think about what they are looking at, often the purpose is lost or is not fulfilled when the reader is unable to absorb the information before it is gone. So, to prevent any possible loss of audience or misconceptions, the fastest method of sharing must be utilized; that is, visual representation.

Television

Everyone who has watched television has seen commercials; they are a built in part of broadcasting used to benefit both the advertisers and the channel that is advertising. But very few people stop to think about the ads they watch on television, but if they are asked about a certain commercial, they almost automatically remember it. Or if they are shown the item that was being advertised, they link it to the commercial and are more apt to purchase it if they approved of the ad. But why do they remember if they do not consciously think about the information they are being presented? Subconsciously, they are thinking, but they more important thing is subconsciously they are
joining the idea of the product with the visualization. For a product to be linked to a common place object, or a person who is seen quite often, the people will be more likely to remember that item when they are out shopping and purchase it.

Perhaps one of the most well known ad campaigns on television is the Apple 1984 Macintosh campaign. The advertisement joins the idea of limited freedom and loss of the freedom of speech and links it to the Macintosh. Apple portrays computer users before the Macintosh as drones, following one central command that is removed from the people. Macintosh is represented as an outlaw, running into the established system, wielding a giant sledge hammer, wearing bright orange shorts and a white tank top with a drawing of the actual computer on it. Not only is the Mac the only female in the ad, she is the only person wearing any color at all and does not have a shaven head. These contrasts set the Mac apart, as the Apple company hoped to do with the system itself. Apple and Microsoft had been warring over the computer market since the two began, and Apple has always projected its products as the more lively, more colorful, and with less limitations that their Microsoft counterparts. This ad continues this tradition, and adds to it the social context, the fear of communism and the loss of the great American dream, freedom and independence. Apple used these fears to project Microsoft as a big corporation that did not care about their consumers and sought to simply keep them in line to buy the next wave of products, and show that Apple would never follow suit.

Magazines

The same frame of thought can be applied to magazine articles. But magazine articles, being in print and unable to change once published, focus more on either a single image or a large number of images. Some of the most powerful recent magazine ads have just been one image on a page with captions under it. But which is causing the success, the image or the words? As a whole, both of the items are, since without one the other would lose meaning. But it is the image that captures the reader
and causes them to remember the text. The image or combination of images is what draws attention to the advertisement.

Apple also worked with magazines to promote new products as they were being developed. One of the most popular magazines Apple worked with is Time Magazine, which is read not only by those involved with computers and other technologies, but also by educators, business professionals, and others with influence over markets. Apple once again tried to focus on several key features in these articles, starting with the issue covers. There are several covers of Time that feature Apple, most of which have the face of Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple, displayed along with the new technology. The January issue from 2002 has Jobs’ face layered on the screen of the new flat screen iMac, Apple’s latest addition to their line of Macintoshes. This innovation began the new focus on flat screens, both in computers and televisions. Another memorable cover was the issue from February 1982. From a different age, the ad is still recognizably Apple; the main focus is Steve Jobs’ head with an apple sitting atop it with the latest of the Apple computers behind. From the computer’s screen emerges a beam that crosses the cover to eventually spear through the apple, linking Jobs to the old story of shooting an apple off a person’s head. The title similarly portrays Jobs as such: “America’s Risk Takers.” What more could a consumer want than a company that was willing to take risks to help buyers?

Internet

With the mainstreaming of the Internet, now there is a new venue for advertisement; online advertisements combine both the movement of television and the focus on stationary images of magazines. The most affective ads are often images that have interactive sections, such as tails that follow the cursor when it is passed over the ad, or are visually attractive and eye catching, such as those that use bright colored fonts and large images. Other online ads are videos centered on sharing a large amount of information in a small amount of time, similar to that of the television ads. These ads can be
used within other technology, such as YouTube and Hulu including commercials within user and company produced videos.

Once again at the forefront, Apple has actively pursued online advertisement. Their most successful advancement has been both a step forward and recognition of the past; Apple has transitioned their successful television campaign, conversations between PC and Mac, into an online campaign as well. Every television ad in this series is viewable on their website, from the most recent all the way back to 2006. These commercials entail short conversations between the character PC, who represents all other computer companies other than Apple and who is constantly dressed in business suits, and the free spirited Mac, a young and up to date movie actor who is married to a famous actress. The most recent addition to this series discusses the release of Microsoft’s newest operating system, Windows 7. The ad shows how, with every new release of a Microsoft operating system, Microsoft says the same thing, encouraging their investors that all the problems of the last edition have been solved. Apple is targeting people who have begun to doubt Microsoft and the belief that the rival company has stopped releasing new editions in order to help, but instead of bring in more revenue, harkening back to the 1984 commercial.

**Final Thoughts**

With all these different facets to advertisements and the constraints on them, such as air time, page cost, and placement, what makes them successful? The key is the link developed between the product and a memorable trait of the commercial. These traits include jingles, songs, images, phrases, and many others. Nike’s success with their slogan of “Just do it,” combined with a memorable logo, their check symbol, help people related the brand to the company so quickly they hardly even have to think about the connection. Apple’s choice was to use the apple, a normal everyday object, and create their trademark, a multicolored apple with a bite taken out of it. Since the first line of Apples, the mark
has been present of every item, from their desktop and laptop computers to their iPhone and iPod and, the newest addition, the iPad product lines.

But there is more to success that a symbol or tune, something that affirms that the consumer needs to own products. Apple uses their individuality to aid their products in the market, maintaining the leading edge of technology by diverging from the mainstream developments. The newest addition, the iPad, is Apple’s venture into the E-reader marker, attempting to prevent the establishment of the Kindle as the main tool for this niche market. Apple presents the stats about the iPad as being new and innovative, with the high quality screen and clear representation of data as the focus. The desktops and laptops from Apple have also targeted specific markets, often being advertised as using the highest quality graphics, shown in the relationship between Apple and computer generated movies such as “Toy Story.” And Apple advertises all of these as advantages over Microsoft or other companies’ computer systems. They include these facts into magazine covers and commercials.