

What is benetton shock advertising?



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Advertising is a means to communicate a product, service, or idea to a target audience. Companies use a variety of advertising forms: television, radio, newspapers, magazines, internet webpage's, and word of mouth to send their message to the consumer. Companies use advertising to try to convince the target audience their product is what the consumer needs or is better than what is currently in use or is invaluable for everyday life. The focal point of most advertisements is the product that the company is trying to sell to the consumer.

Advertising in the case of the Benetton Group change the way the world viewed advertising. The Benetton Group used shock advertising to promote their products. Benetton did not use their products in the advertisement, instead; they used graphic photos to grab the audience's attention. The company place their slogan and firm name " United Colors of Benetton" on the advertisements. The concept that Benetton was going for was to shock the audience with vivid photo's that would capture the attention, good or bad. However, the company used this technique to insure that the audience remembers their name. This advertising worked.

Benetton's most known advertisement campaigns were: a dying AIDS patient, priest kissing nun T-shirt, a Bosnian soldier, enemies, military cemetery with Star of David, ship with refugees, HIV positive patient, gunman with bone, oil-polluted duck, and child labor. Benetton claim the campaigns derived from well-known causes that are of political or social in nature. The campaigns sparked a worldwide debate. Should a clothing manufacturer use such graphic advertising campaigns? Would there be legal ramifications? Would a profit result?

The first company to employ shock advertising, The Benetton group truly shock the world with the intent to increase name recognition. The company's risk was astronomical. Would consumers, either disgusted or enthused, venture to see what Benetton was or just dismiss the advertising play?

The Benetton group was counting on the shock advertising to boost their name recognition with consumers. The shock campaigns indeed created controversy throughout the world. The controversy was so great as evidenced in news articles, news television and on the internet.

The Benetton group received free publicity, sparked by the debates on whether the company had the right legally or morally to use such graphic images and not the traditional advertising promoting the product that they sold. Lawsuits were filed claiming Benetton violated laws in Germany “section one of the Law Against Unfair competition” (Brandstaetter, ND, ¶28) along with violating human dignity. The German judge ruled that legally the advertising did not violate the law because competition can be classified by product or brand name. The German courts ruled that Benetton did not violate human dignity because “photographs and pictures are one form of the expression of one's opinion” (Brandstaetter, ND, ¶36).

The Benetton group gained worldwide name recognition. The internet is key to many worldwide “hatters” of Benetton. One such blogger entitled their page “Benetton – A DISGRACE TO US ALL” (Grimsbygal, 2001,). The blogger felt the need to voice disapproval and encourage boycotting Benetton's products when shopping. Grimsbygal (the blogger) expresses that Benetton

is insulting people and causing widespread offence with their shock campaign.

Benetton brought wide controversy with repeating the shock campaign repeatedly. David Croth, a Brand Manager for a competing clothing brand, wanted to know what dose shock advertising has to do with clothing. Clothing products are “ the tamest product on the face of the planet. Do activists wear cute little tennis sets?” (Brandchannel, 2003, ¶2) Davide Giliati a graphic design student said, “ A company can only do so much shocking in a period of time, without boring the audience.” (Brandchannel, 2003, ¶5) Shock can bring attention to a company. “ However, over time the brand looks hollow if the product lacks edge, and shock is then seen as marketing puff without substance.” (Brandchannel, 2003,¶16)

The Benetton Group claimed they were using social activism to base the shock campaigns. However, the risk of Benetton using activism in their campaign was alienating a large group of their target audience. Sears, Roebuck & Co. stopped selling Benetton products in February 2000 because of threats of boycotts by victims’ rights groups. (Marketing New, 2000)

Shock campaigns can bring huge public debate and brand recognition. Benetton became advertising pioneers because their social concerns were sincere and true to their core values. The question remained if such advertising could bring repeat customers. “ Unfortunately Benetton did not seem to take the opportunity its reputation brought to match cutting edge campaigns with cutting edge designs and so inevitably sales dropped.” (Brandchannel, 2003, ¶12) The bottom line for Benetton was that because of

the controversial campaigns, their company joined “ the top five recognized trademarks of the world.” (Brandstaetter, 1997, ¶41) Dale Lee, President of Smack Inc has stated that “ Benetton wasn’t about ‘cause marketing’; it was about passion. Of course, you want to buy from a company with passion. That is what Toscani brought Benetton, and that’s what’s missing without him.” (Brandchannel, 2003 ¶26)

The Benetton group, in the sixties, developed a unique way to manipulate how they dye their sweaters giving them a competitive advantage. Benetton could dye their finished products to meet the changing fashion trends. Prior to this period of time, the company had to dye the unwoven fibers, taking longer to keep up with the ever changing fashion trends. “ The united colors concept spread from encompassing the different races to the ideas of tolerance, peace and respect for diversity.” (UCB advertising presentation, nd, ¶5)

Olivero Toscani the creative mind behind Benetton’s shock campaigns brought to light that behind every great idea was a controversy and the world is better off because of this awareness. “ Art represents the edge and of course the edge can make people feel uncomfortable. But it’s also a matter of the person you are talking to: personally, I think the rain is uncomfortable. But try making that argument to a fish. Toscani” (AdAge Global, 2001, ¶12) Toscani states that “ sometimes advertising is art, but art is always advertising.” (AdAge Global, 2001, ¶16)

Toscani comments that “ agencies get huge budgets, but the money is wasted because the strategies are decided upon by managers, economists,

accountants, and focus groups – not the artists. In the past, patrons had the sense to tell Michelangelo what they wanted and they left it to him to decide how to do it. But it doesn't work that way anymore. Everyone thinks he can be an artist or at least tell the artist what he should do.” (AdAge Global, 2001, ¶21)

I could agree and disagree with the way Benetton chose to advertise, however, my opinion is irrelevant because there will always be someone who will chose the opposite. Art, journalism, and advertising can in one form or another cross each other's realm and should not make any one right or wrong. Art, journalism, and advertising are all born from a creative notion and expressed differently to meet the individual need. If an artist sees two women, kissing the artist might be inspired to paint a picture of the romantic act. If a journalist had seen the two same women kissing, would they be inspired to write about the women, maybe in the sixties when two women kissing had been taboo. Lastly, if an advertiser had seen the same two women kissing could the images inspire an advertising rationale of sex sells.

Toscani makes two powerful points about logo's “ the Renaissance was just advertising for the Vatican, and the cross is the most effective logo of its time and even the swastika was a logo, a powerful logo.” (AdAge Global, 2001, ¶17) Who has the right to chose what is right or wrong with Benetton's advertising choices? No one, everyone has the right to agree or disagree with campaign tactics. “ The one thing nobody can deny is that the ads worked. When Toscani left Benetton, annual sales were more than twenty times greater than when they were when he arrived.” (AdAge Global, 2001, ¶14)

The success of shock advertising for the Benetton group opened the doorway for other companies to use similar types of advertising campaigns. Nonprofit organizations have adopted versions of shock advertising, because nonprofit organizations have to compete with corporations that typically have larger advertising budgets to work with. “ Nonprofit organizations stand to benefit more from the viral effect these ads create.” (Shock Advertising, 2009, ¶1)

The anti-smoking campaigns use strong but to the point methods like a photo on the back of a bus with a person’s face with the mouth over the exhaust pipe representing exhaling a cigarette with the simple phrase that says “ Ready to quit?” (Shock Advertising, 2009, ¶2) Anti-smoking advertisements do not stop there they also have two different commercial, one where they are cutting a brain open to show an aneurism and the second where they have an artery and someone is squeezing buildup out of it. These advertisements may be considered “ gross” but the ads communicate their point that smoking has many health risks.

The campaign to stop drinking and driving uses shock advertising, they show a picture of a mangled car with a tarp covering a body beside the mangled car on a blood stained road, to point out the fact that drinking and driving can kill. During prom season many chapters of the stop DWI chapter will employ the assistance of high schools to allow them to put a mangled car in front of the school with a sign that says drink plus driving equals, implying the mangled car.

“ Shock advertising pushes ethical and societal boundaries by publicizing images and ideas that are often culturally taboo or inappropriate.” (Shock Advertising, 2009, ¶5) In the case of two similar advertisements the first is a

man and women in bed about to have unprotected sex, one asks the other how many partner have you had. The reply is only a couple and you only a couple. The bedroom then fills up with men and women with the caption unprotected sex means you are sleeping with everyone your partner has. Such nonprofit advertisement helps stop the spread of aids and other sexually transmitted diseases that requires the use of protection. The second was similar but contained two men with a similar outcome with the caption “without a condom, this, along with AIDS, is who you make love with. Protect yourself.” (Shock Advertising, 2009, ¶18)

Major corporations use Shock advertising in their training videos. McDonald's in the late eighties showed a training video of a young person losing a ring in to the deep fryer and reaching in to the fryer to retrieve the jewelry. Mead Westvaco has used videos with real people, one person reached in to a running machine and losing fingers, another was changing a battery on a reach truck without safety equipment and having a battery explode covering the person in acid.

Automobile manufacturers have used forms of shock advertising, taking an automobile and simulating a crash with crash test dummies crashing through the windshield, stating do not be a dummy buckle up, seatbelts save lives.

Victoria Secret had controversy with their television advertisements. Most women found that in a women's magazine the advertisements were fine. However, when the first Victoria Secret advertisement aired on the television many married women were appalled that their husbands could see sexy models in slinky lingerie creating controversy. However, like with all

shock advertisements the shock fades and the controversy either becomes part of everyday normality or goes away.

Greenpeace has used a fun form of shock advertising in their stores. With every purchase made the customer receives a bag with an endangered animal on it with a hand reaching up to the handle holes so when the bag is carried the appearance is that the endangered animal is holding their hand. The caption on the bag says, “ Give me your hand, Greenpeace.” (Shock Advertising, 2009)

Advertisers strive to meet the demand of their customers with shock advertising like the anti-smoking advertisements and Greenpeace, and traditional advertising. However, advertisers will never meet the demand of every demographic, the best they can do is hope they send the message through to a specific target audience.

The creation of shock advertising by the Benetton group created by Olivero Toscani lasted eighteen years when Benetton and Toscani parted ways. The reason for the separation is not clear, because neither Benetton nor would Toscani comment. The speculation was because of the controversy surrounding Toscani’s Death Row campaign. “ The state of Missouri sued Toscani and Benetton for misrepresenting themselves while interviewing four death row inmates in that state.” (AdAge Global, 2001, ¶4) Toscani wife commented “ after so many years, the decision was mutual she also said it had nothing to do with the death penalty campaign.” (Marketing New, 2000, ¶2)

Benetton's choice to drop shock advertising has caused a decline in sales. However, there really is no way to tell if the decrease in sales is because of the change in choice of advertising. Benetton could never replace Toscani and if they had continued the shock campaigns, the company still would not be the same. Benetton's choice might be beneficial for them in the long- run as long as they invest in their products.