

Strategy Schmategy

Things can get weird when your message misses the mark.

A recent news photo caught my attention. In fact, it didn't just *catch* my attention; it reached out and *grabbed* it. The photo is shown to the right with its original caption.

After reading the caption, I couldn't help but think, "You got my attention, Ahn Sang-kyu, but your communication strategy was just a bit off the mark."

Granted, any political protest needs public attention to be successful, but to gain our support, a protester must also educate us about the injustice he is protesting. And what do 200,000 bees have to do with sovereignty? Are their hives being rezoned? Maybe if I could read Korean, those words at the bottom of the photo would have clarified things a bit, but I'd still be puzzled at the relevance of the bee swarm. After a few days, I'll remember the bees, but I'll have forgotten what the protest was all about.

Luckily, one unintended benefit from Ahn Sang-kyu's escapade is a fundamental marketing lesson we should all take to heart: make sense.

For example, I know I'm not alone among television viewers who find themselves baffled by certain commercials. And it's not just a matter of demographics—some ads make no sense, regardless of the age, gender or income level they are targeting. Broadcast advertising is certainly not the only offender. I've seen plenty of newspaper, magazine, outdoor and direct response advertising that left me scratching my head.

As an advertiser, if you've taken the essential steps of carefully researching your audience and developing a sound advertising strategy to reach them—use them. Now don't get me wrong. I'm not advocating the dull, predictable solutions we see all too often, just because they happen to make sense. To paraphrase David Ogilvy, "You can't bore people into buying your product." But it's essential to remember that simply entertaining people won't make them buy your product either. Especially if your ads leave people wondering what your product is all about.

Explaining product benefits becomes even more important on a limited advertising budget. Brand image-driven creative approaches can work well for advertisers whose product benefits are easily understood and whose media budgets permit them to saturate their audience (e.g. light beer). But for most advertisers, it pays to be clever yet clear with your message. Grab the attention of your audience and explain why your product or service is right for them.

So my thanks go out to Ahn Sang-kyu for providing us with this enlightening example of bad (and painful) marketing communications. If only he'd been promoting calamine lotion...



Sovereignty protest

Ahn Sang-kyu, swarmed with bees, jumps into a Japanese flag in Seoul, South Korea, on Tuesday. Ahn, a local bee farmer, released over 200,000 bees and attracted them to his body to highlight his protest against Japan's sovereignty claims over South Korea's Dokdo islets. (AP photo by Lee Jin-man)

"You can't bore people into buying your product."

DAVID OGILVY

