

ENOUGH IS

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BY BOB KODZIS

There's nothing like the rich, sweet aroma of fresh, hot ideas. The scent can draw you in from miles away. It gets your creative juices flowing and makes you hungry for innovation. It's captivating ... even intoxicating.

But woven into that alluring scent of originality is something that doesn't quite smell right. In fact, it stinks. Nestled among a billion popping fresh concepts are a gaggle of ideas so old, so stale and so over done that they are beginning to taint the essence of what attracted many of us to the creative arts in the first place.

It's the stench of bad habits, laziness and ideas that have been recycled so often that they have simply ceased to be creative.

In this Quest we are going to embark on a little creative housecleaning. To do this, I have enlisted the help of a few inventive friends. Together we are the creative equivalent of a torch-lit mob on the hunt for "zombie concepts," undead ideas that need to be laid to rest once and for all ... before they stink up the planet.

"There's a better way ..."

The person who sparked the idea for this Quest is John Matejczyk, a gifted creative director in Oakland, CA. I interviewed John in 2005 when he was a national ADDY Award judge. At the time he was riding the crest of high praise for his creative leadership of a cutting edge Hewlett-Packard (HP) campaign. During our conversation, Matejczyk launched into a compelling rant about a very overused approach to advertising.

"When I see the same gag over and over it pisses me off," says Matejczyk. "I think there should be a rule that nobody can use the line: 'There's a better way to ...' It has been done way too many times." It didn't take long for me to relate to John's ire. During the time since I spoke with him, I've noticed *dozens* of ads touting the "better way" concept.

You know the basic idea. A silly-looking man wants a glass of coconut milk so he flies to Honolulu, struggles to climb a palm tree and falls from the top. A fresh coconut falls from the tree and hits him on the head. Then he tries, without success, to crack open the coconut's impossibly hard shell. Meanwhile the soothing voice of the announcer from the "Waikiki Coconut Milk" company intones: "There's a better way to get fresh Hawaiian coconut milk ..." Voila! The film cuts to the same man chugging down an ice-cold glass of Waikiki Coconut Milk. Problem solved ... idea reheated.

This basic framework — absurd and difficult struggle versus alternative simple solution — has been done to death. I've seen it used to hock everything from life insurance to condoms to frozen waffles. Come on creative directors, enough is enough. There's a better way to sell your clients' products.

The Predictable, The Conventional & The Obvious

Fred Terral, of Rightbrainterrain.com, is a creative director, a designer and the creator of a series of very cool alternative motivational posters. When I asked Fred for his take on ideas that need to die, he sent me an eloquent tirade that captures the essence of what's wrong with the conventional approach. I loved Fred's contribution so much that I present it here, in its entirety, for your reading enjoyment. His points are solid, his presentation is a stitch.

"It's time to bury the predictable, the conventional and the obvious. If I see another campaign for a new residential/retail/entertainment community featuring a host of smiling couples carefully selected to connect with a target consumer group, I will painstakingly injure myself with paper cuts inflicted by their print collateral.

"You know the couples. You have the middle-aged, white affluent couple holding shopping bags — overflowing with tissue paper — smiling while holding hands. Next up is the gorgeous, affluent African-American couple enjoying a glass of white wine (red doesn't shoot as well) in a posh setting. We wrap up with the older white

Who decided that the new look was pediatric concentration camp? What's next, showcasing our latest fashions on fetal skeletons? Look at the people around you. How many of them look like these wafer-thin waifs?

The assumption is that people will buy certain products because they want to look like the models who promote them. Nice theory, but how about a little reality injected into the formula ... just for fun.

If there's any value to the phrase "truth in advertising," maybe Abercrombie and Fitch should have thrown in a free personal trainer with the pants I bought from them last year. Every shirtless male model in their ads has abs of steel. I shelled out \$75 for the pants. I wear them every week. It's been a year. Still no six-pack.

Enough is enough ... show me real people I can relate to. Show me the truth, and I'll consider buying your clients' products.

"Talk to your doctor ..."

Hey drug peddlers, get off my TV screen! I am tired of pharmaceutical giants force-feeding me their products for everything from acid reflux to restless leg syndrome. They make me paranoid, they confuse me and they embarrass me. It goes well beyond the discomfort of having to explain erectile dysfunction to my kids in the middle of "Jeopardy."

One would think, with the billions of dollars they spend each year, they could come up with an original way to package their messages. Instead, with very few exceptions, the formula for most of these commercials is so consistent that most of the sponsors are virtually indistinguishable from each other.

They start with a fake doctor or a patient who has just been freed from the agony of a specific diagnosis. They have logo-limited color schemes and blindingly expensive CGI effects. The names of these products are all very contrived, vowel-heavy, faux Latin words like Procardia, Exubera and Lunestra. My favorite part of these one-trick ponies is the essential long-winded monotone legal disclaimer about side effects. Most of the side effects sound worse than the maladies for which you need the medicine. And they end every ad by encouraging us to "talk to your doctor." All of this should act to remind us that we have no business, legally or philosophically, meddling in the world of pharmaceuticals without our doctor's guidance.

It's time for the pharmaceutical companies to stop bombarding us with their billions of dollars worth of boring, formulaic ads and instead: "talk to our doctors"

Got Ideas?

Remember those clever "Got Milk?" ads? They were created by advertising agency Goodby Silverstein & Partners for the California Milk Processor Board in 1993 and later licensed for use by a number of milk processors and dairy farmers.

For the last 14 years, it seems that everybody and their mother has been ripping off this simple and effective slogan. This lactose larceny was pointed out by David Brotherton, a friend and design guru who has done some breathtaking work for the Hard Rock Café and former art director for *Create Magazine* until 2006.

"One thing that continues to bother me," Brotherton says, "is the 'two-word question to the consumer' approach started by 'Got Milk?'"

When I read, hear or see an ad that asks 'Got this?' or 'Need that?' I can't help but think somewhere there is a poorly informed client who is somewhat aware of advertising, who knows the milk campaign was inventive, and who thinks borrowing that style will work great for their product.

"Or even worse," Brotherton adds, "there is an agency somewhere, so uncreative that they regurgitate the same milk campaign but change the verb or the product from milk to furniture or cars or flooring or some other mundane non-dairy product."

Another creative friend, Mark Freid, creative director and principal at Think Creative Inc., broadens the indictment of shameless mimics beyond the boundaries of "Got Milk?" Freid says, "As an industry, we have a tendency to latch onto an idea and do it to death. Great ideas usually start out as attention-getting techniques in one industry and then trickle down to others." He offers a number of examples throughout history including morphing, Claymation, use of distressed type and licensed popular music. "These were all great elements of great advertising, design or entertainment — the first time," Freid says. "After that, they're just, well ... boring. Yes, being a copycat is boring. Same could be said for celebrity spokespersons. Same could be said for green screens. Same could be said for celebrity spokes-animals in most cases." (Take that, Geico gecko!) If you wish to thrive in the creative world, Freid offers this advice:

"Either be the first to do something or tell a great story. Pick one of those two and you can't go wrong."

For those who would choose to take the lazy, boring and ethically questionable path of swiping the essence of someone else's successful work, I offer a final question posed by Brotherton: "Got Creativity?"

Thanks to all the creative professionals who contributed their thoughts to this discourse on Don'ts. While there are too many negative examples for the space of this column, there are a million good examples out there that have the power to take our breath away. It felt good to rant for a little while and clean out the cobwebs. But rest assured that I will return in the next issue with an eye for catching creative professionals at their inspirational best. ■

Until next time...stay inspired.

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Bob Kodzis is an award-winning artist, keynote speaker and performer. He has been contributing ideas and articles to *Create Magazine* for five years. Kodzis is also a facilitator and founder of the wildly creative thinktank Flight of Ideas, Inc. — a company whose mission it is to unleash a new level of fun and creativity throughout the world. His clients range from the United Way to Kennedy Space Center to Vekoma, the largest rollercoaster manufacturer in the world. You can contact Kodzis directly online at Bob@flightofideas.net, or check out his cool Web site at www.flightofideas.net.



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