

Drayton Bird

What Makes A Good Slogan?



Here's a little personal history for you.

In 1977 I went into business with two talented partners. One, John Watson, went on to build Europe's biggest direct marketing agency - WWAV.

The other, Glenmore Trenear-Harvey, became an intelligence expert. (A bit of a stretch for somebody in direct marketing - but every now and then I see him on TV talking about Iraq or the Russians and such things with impressive authority.)

The three of us had one or two minor problems - like no clients, no money and no office - but we survived. Eventually the other two had had enough of me and left, and I went on to build an agency that I sold to O & M - but that's another subject.

Glenmore knew an amazing number of people, which was one reason I went into business with him. He was (and still is) great fun, too - which was another.

One day he and I had lunch with the head of advertising for British Rail who told us he had just chosen a new agency. He didn't reveal much save to tell us the slogan - "This is the age of the train" - which he loved.

Since at that time (and pretty much ever since) this has been the

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age of the car and airplane I thought that a pretty silly line, and I guess the public agreed, for after a while they tried another: "We're getting there".

This was if anything even more unwise, as most of the time, people weren't. They were sitting in dirty carriages wondering if they would ever get anywhere. (Nothing changes).

The moral is, don't boast and don't lie. So if you're selling a very ordinary Peugeot, don't talk about The Drive of Your Life. I guess if you're selling a Ferrari you might get away with it - unless people think that Lamborghini or Bentley are better.

I don't know why marketers are so obsessed with slogans, but they are. Multi-million pound advertising accounts move on the basis of little more than a few snappy words. So before you make any dodgy decisions I want to warn you here about some of the pitfalls.

The most important thing to remember is suggested by the quotation below.

"This, above all: to thine own self be true." - Advice from Polonius to his son Laertes in "Hamlet".

I'm now going to quote from yet another friend, Timothy, who, alas, died some years ago - and who unquestionably knew more

about this subject than anyone else in the world. But before doing so let me state THE great sloganeering sin, and warn you against it.

My next helpful idea is never put the slogan before the thinking.

If you want to have a slogan (and plenty of firms have done perfectly well without) let it derive from the truth - reality - rather than what you would like to be the truth.

You must ponder deeply what you really offer that makes you better; and if the answer is "nothing" it may have the happy result of making you improve what you offer till you do have something.

Too many slogans reflect what makes those who run them - the creative people and the client - feel good rather than what will sell.

Our friend at British Rail was a good example. He would have loved it to be the Age of the Train. He wanted to believe they were getting there.

The purpose of the strapline - slogan, claim, endline, signature, etc. is to leave the key brand message in the mind of the target. It is the sign-off that accompanies the logo. It says "If you get nothing else from this ad, get this..!"

Timothy pointed out that slogans are called different things in different countries, ending with a witty and relevant comment. In the UK, they are...end lines, endlines or straplines.

In the USA, they are...tags, tag lines or taglines.

In Germany, they are...claims.

In Belgium, they are...baselines.

In France, they are...signatures.

In the Netherlands and Italy, they are...pay-offs or payoffs.

To the unimaginative, they are...rip-offs or ripoffs. The bland leading the bland.

He gives the 25 things a slogan should and should not do. They are all relevant, but some matter more than others, especially that they should:

- **Be original** (For example, don't tell me you're going to give me "more" - everyone else does)
- **Differentiate the brand** (For example, It's Independent. Are you?)
- **Include a key benefit** (For example, Visa. It's everywhere you want to be)

There are a few things they shouldn't be - corporate waffle, pretentious, or meaningless - but I won't bore you with too many examples, as you see them every day.

However, I can't resist Deutsche Bank who suffer from "a passion to perform" - maybe they should go into the music business - and AXA who want me to "be life confident", the silly sods. And I can't ignore the inane American Airlines line, "We know why you fly".

This gets two reactions from me every time I fly with them, "I should bloody well hope so - and it certainly isn't the food or the service."

But don't run away with the idea that a good slogan can't be important. One of my clients ran some TV commercials over 40 years ago that ended with the words, "Fit the best". They have never run since, but people remember them.

And in every piece of creative we work on for them we go to very considerable lengths to prove that it is true - because *nothing* sells better than the truth.

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About the Author

In 2003, the Chartered Institute of Marketing named Drayton Bird one of 50 living individuals who have shaped today's marketing. He has spoken in 53 countries for many organisations, and much of what he discusses derive from his work with many of the world's greatest brands. These include American Express, Audi, Bentley, British Airways, Cisco, Deutsche Post, Ford, IBM, McKinsey, Mercedes, Microsoft, Nestle, Philips, Procter & Gamble, Toyota, Unilever, Visa and Volkswagen. In various capacities – mostly as a writer – Drayton has helped sell everything from Airbus planes to Peppa Pig. His book, *Commonsense Direct and Digital Marketing*, out in 17 languages, has been the UK's best seller on the subject every year since 1982.

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