

Advertising success internationally – is there a secret formulae or Blueprint?

The Author

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The modern world as it stands has become more flat, transparent and accessible for brands and organisations as technology changes the way we interact and behave. Boundaries, cultures and stereotypes are smashed as brands evolve to leap-frog conventional rules. Trends travel at the speed of a „click“ inspiring changes in attitudes and shifts in behaviour. Messages are carried over the internet reaching every corner of the globe faster than we can commonly comprehend.

What does this mean for marketers, advertisers and researchers? How does one manage brands globally, regionally and locally? And does this make it easier when develop advertising globally?

Working with Ipsos ASI has provided me with a plethora of experience and knowledge, more than 30.000 ads internationally of which 8.500 have been in Europe, thus dealing with advertising efficiency is a daily task and provides invaluable learning's for advertising research and the international researcher. The first thing we have learnt is that there are no rules for success – the best Ads break at least some of them but so do the weakest. However, we do know that in particular instances where ads use specific messages registers or execution elements, they probably would have a higher percentage of success.

Advertising pre-testing research allows marketers and advertisers to understand whether their campaigns will be effective in communicating the desired messages within in several or specific markets. Just in the same way, and for many years, marketers have extended their brands globally with advertising research being used as a vehicle to leverage insight across markets.

Therefore, can marketers successfully maximize investments and manage media budgets while efficiently re-applying copy and do this on a global scale? Or, are there specials rules or guidelines for the marketers to follow when multiple markets are involved in the launch or relaunch of umbrella brands? Naturally a combination of learning's and the creativity from organisations can replicate strong ideas from one country to another translating into enormous savings.

Advertising people who ignore research,“ as David Ogilvy points out, „are as dangerous as generals who ignore decodes of enemy signals.“

From past experience, we can say that the following needs to be considered, should you be thinking about re-application strategy for your advertising:

- ◆ **Similarities:** How similar are the consumer needs between countries?
- ◆ **Usage occasions:** Is your product used in a similar manner in these countries?
- ◆ **Market factors:** How does the marketing context differ? Competitors, local regulations, brand history?
- ◆ **Cultural differences:** Can you be sure that a strong advertising idea from one country will work in another country? Do symbols and images work in the same way?
- ◆ **Consumer behaviour:** Does the product fit into consumers' lives in the same way? (For a simple durable product like shaving razors maybe, but for food, like salsa, perhaps a closer look is required).

Notably by making creative travel across markets could mean fine-tuning your global offering to the local market, meaning research partners need to be flexible and have experience in supporting both your global and local efforts. If this is your situation you will require research that fits not only your local needs (plus budgets) but also will need to have comparability across markets.

Again, there are no definite rules for success, although there are many companies that have learnt successful methods in managing re-application of copy across the globe. Expanding on David Ogilvy's quote shed's light on what marketing research (and specifically advertising pre-testing research) is vital for the success of international campaigns. An example from a successful global

company within the OTC category illustrates the need for checking copy first with consumers prior to investing in media effort by avoiding the assumption that similarities within regions or markets should be strong enough to utilize the same Ad without any complications (even if your product category is not complex).

The brand, a multivitamin and mineral supplement product, was being launched into two South American markets, fairly similar in behaviour, consumption habits and cultural differences. Given this company is experienced in re-application strategies for a number of key markets already (South Africa, Australia and parts of Europe) and had a successful track record to boot, it was natural that this approach would be used for Argentina and Brazil. The hypothesis of course was that the Ad would be a success in both countries with slight adjustments in language to name a few. A perfect fit in terms of communication support for the brand in South America.

In fact, the creative idea was certainly the most powerful ad developed for the brand to date and had previously shown excellent pre-testing results that correlated strongly against in-market performance. Thus, naturally expectations were high not only from the brand team but procurement too, as investments required to produce the copy were extremely low (finished format TV Ad) and naturally expectations were high in terms of delivery in-market.

A key element taken into consideration assisted the organisation in managing their international advertising campaign. Identical pre-tests were conducted in each market using a standard advertising research approach where Ipsos ASI was the partner for this global company. The advantage was a comparable system of results across markets in terms of output and deliverables. The picture painted in the results of the research, however, was far from one of synergy:

- ◆ The commercial in Argentina was successful; scoring exceptionally positively on all key measures imperative for in-market success. Strong memorability potential (Reach - cut through and credit for the brand) while the ad had all the signs to contribute to a shift in behaviour and leverage the brand's equity in the short-term. Strong in-market results post-launch of the campaign complimented the pre-testing results with a more than above average start for the brand.
- ◆ On the contrary, the copy was unsuccessful in Brazil and illustrated completely unexpected result for the brand team across all key measures. As one could imagine after having such a positive experience in other developing markets, this was not easy information to digest.

The key learning's from the findings of the research illustrated that locally the creative idea failed to embrace this market with the energy conjured up already in so many countries and in particular Argentina.

Abstract

Brands are built in consumers' minds and hearts. Every time a brand is experienced, used, seen, listened to, it creates associations that build their persona. Events leave emotional markers that build that and enrich brand construction in long-term memory. The more the experience is repeated, the stronger the markers and the brand building. Naturally, advertising is a key part of this process! More so than ever successful advertising has a key role in today's global village. Brands are built with the intention of being moved across the global and prosper within a complexity and variety of markets. The challenge is whether the best ideas bring the chance of a global blockbuster that can be fine-tuned for local perspectives. Management of the power of your campaign through advertising pre-testing research can yield profitable returns on investments for your brand.

From a marketing researcher's point of view – this is where the challenge really begins. Not only is the commercial's objective a „good story well-told“ but the internationally one needs to take learning's gained from the brand into consideration not forgetting the important local considerations. This is really where research becomes excitingly interesting by playing an integral role in communicating the learning's, however, for the Global Brand Team, a new creative path needed to be explored for the brand in this market.

Some subtle learning's from the above example highlight common themes or learning's for reapplication strategy across more than one market:

- ◆ **Differentiation:** In Brazil, a similar copy had been used for an energy drink creating a lower point of impact for the brand, for example, scenes used to create surprise and drama were not particularly unique.
- ◆ **Clarity:** The colour of the characters shirt was a key colour for the energy drink brand (and the characters clothing within this ad!) only leading to confusion.
- ◆ **Relevance:** Due to the incorrect association, a lack of relevance for consumers was attributed to the new brand, hence, potentially an even lower chance of the ad creating the necessary communication support to push a shift in behaviour (or induce trial) for the brand.

Hence, by considering advertising pre-testing research as a global standard prior to going on air – even when the re-application of copy is envisaged to be strong – this assists Global Brand Teams in managing the risk within their key markets.

So, what is the learning for international advertising and how does the marketing research help?

Do not always believe that one copy that works in a similar region will necessarily provide the in-market results required locally. A key strategic learning is not only local understanding of the market and research suited accordingly (and budgets) but imperative is the ability to compare the results across countries. This is of paramount importance for creating effective advertising that ultimately contributes to successful brand building.

Sounds easy; however, key is harmonization between the research partner and the client.

A common understanding of the client's organizational needs and providing the necessary support when needed can only assist in the creative development cycle. Ipsos ASI's Charlie Ballard, Global Account Director, highlights important factors for both the global clients and research partners to push synergies in Global Advertising Research:

- ◆ **Partnering:** Seek a partner that understands your needs and can adapt its organization to fulfil your requirements. No two companies are organized quite the same, so your service needs certainly have unique dimensions.
- ◆ **Experience:** Look for the kind of experience necessary to ensure that your partner will help you understand results as a coherent story that incorporates the key insights from the study.
- ◆ **Insights:** Find a firm that can efficiently share knowledge within its organization and yours in support of your strategic needs. How good are they at conveying information and ideas to the key teams or people that need it?
- ◆ **Systems:** Seek a partner with a demonstrated ability to execute a uniform approach to your studies and maintain quality in your key markets so that results can be examined across countries with total quantifiable confidence.

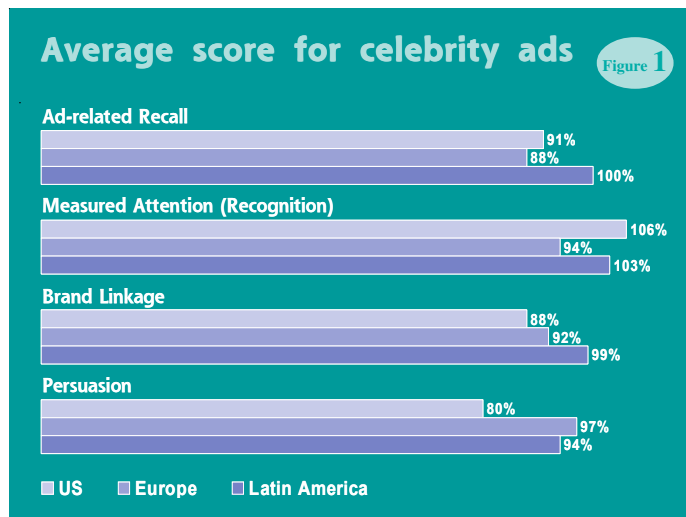
Celebrities in Global Terms – do they really help cross borders in advertising and support the brand in the long-term?

The use of celebrity ads certainly has proved to be a popular mechanism in order to push sales. In Germany, there are a couple of icons being used consistently within television – however, what is the impact internationally? And can celebrities travel across the globe to leverage brands?

The question is – do celebrity ads really work? According to past experience, sometimes they do and sometimes they don't. Some of the world's most prominent advertising executives have the belief that testimonials by celebrities are below average in their ability to leverage brand building. However, it is common knowledge that more often the celebrity is remembered and not the brand!

Our past experience supports this belief. Pre-test scores from North America, Latin America, and Europe show that, on average celebrity ads score below the norm on key measures of shifting behaviour and branded communication (Related Recall). Attention gaining is certainly impressionable but this is not always necessarily healthy for the brand (see figure1).

Paradoxically there are guidelines to ensuring one has success by using a celebrity to ensure the ad does a great job for your brand. For example, even when the celebrity is well-known by identification in both audio and on the



screen demonstrate better performing ads on key performance indicators. Fewer questions remain unanswered for consumers („Who is that“ Is that really ...? etc.“).

Ensuring credibility and relevance are critical. The message becomes more powerful when the celebrity endorsement carries „expert“ authority or relevance for the brand. For international campaigns and research this becomes more complex as each market should be assessed regarding the familiarity, popularity, image and fit of the brand to the personality. By default celebrities are well known among the public but for multiple markets each celebrity used may have a different projection for a certain audience – according to image and associations. The importance of conducting pre-testing advertising research again becomes critical in ensuring the success of your campaign and at the end longevity of your brand.

Has the lack of boundaries and borders in the European Union made Advertisers tasks simple within the region?

As a South African living in Europe, I have been amazed at how the region has transformed into a large village with similarities across many of the markets certainly socio-economically a significant part of Western Europe. I guess coming from a country that is a cultural melting pot mixed with an immense amount of diversity on so many different dimensions, Western Europe seems very similar in dynamics (besides the languages of course) – so how difficult is it really to be successful across the region.

Inhindsight, advertising pre-testing research in the confectionery market for a young and innovative umbrella brand illustrated just how incredibly different only two countries are within the region. Furthermore, this was far from being a complex decision-making process – simply an impulse product. How foolish of me to fathom the thought that Europe is simple enough to understand and for advertisers to build campaigns by rolling-out the creative through a network of markets.

The goal in this example was a base campaign or umbrella brand campaign to support the brand in each key market across Europe, lowering the production investments

accordingly. A smart idea indeed. Germany and the UK being the two key markets selected, to run pre-testing on two creative ideas in the form of Animatic commercials.

Expectations were that the two ideas in this early stage of the creative development cycle would allow for a lower investment prior to production, in addition, two ideas would cater for differences in the markets accordingly or at least provide the team with fall-back ad, should it be successful. This was the idea.

The results of the pre-tests, however, showed key weaknesses in the creative selected for this European campaign. As a base campaign the creative ideas failed to communicate the strategic objectives sought-after for the markets but even more surprising, was the difference in appeal between both markets.

One idea attempted to create a common platform by using humour to convey part of the physiological benefit of the brand, however, this failed dismally. British and German humour is distinctively different – not a chance that my European Union view was going to succeed here. Consumers in the UK appreciated the humour but there European brothers and sisters across the water completely missed the point of the joke, the benefit for the product, thus results in a complete lack of clarity and credibility for the brand. Thank goodness for the marketing research!

The remaining Animatic was too weak for an impulse product in the confectionery market and lacked sufficient power to invigorate and support the brand across these two key markets for Europe.

The key learnings in this example can be summarized accordingly:

- ◆ **Humour** may not always be understood regionally or globally and can detract from your strategic objectives and even lead to confusion or irritation – decreasing the probability of success.
- ◆ **Campaigns** that stretch over various markets (even if these are within Europe) need to be clear, credible, relevant and sufficiently different (not too unique or clever that the Ad is misunderstood).

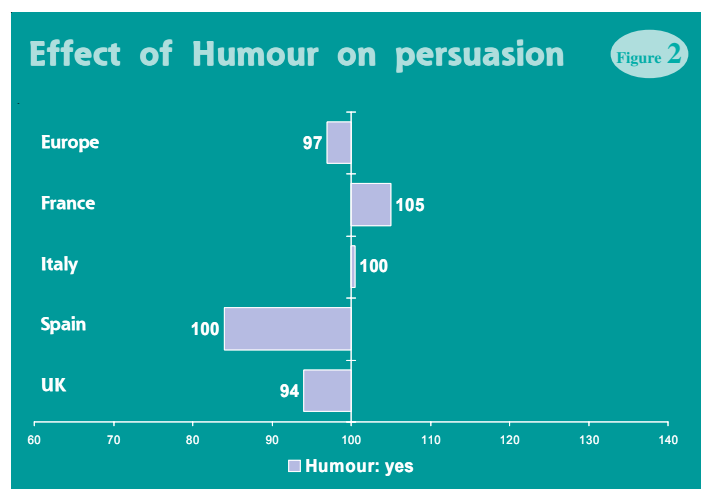
Earlier on in the article I mentioned how Advertising can be successful with consumers in Europe and that there are particular instances where ads use specific message registers or execution elements – they probably would have a higher chance of achieving success.

Staying within the food market certain learning's from recent projects involving a representative selection can assist in order to identify and analyse what seems to lead to advertising effectiveness.

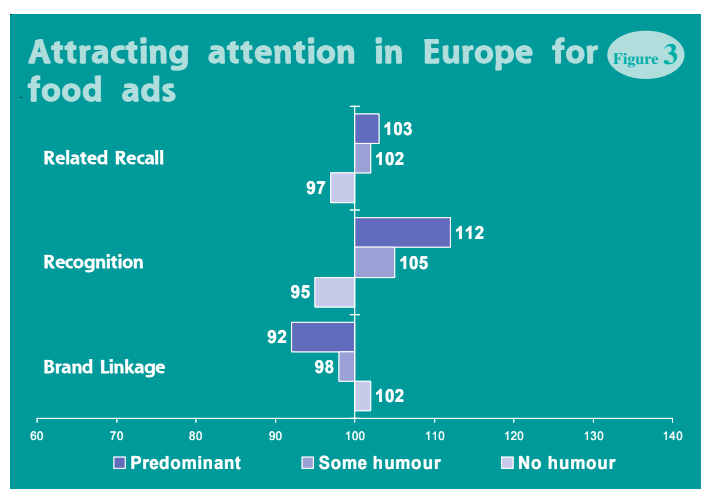
Food is different. Consumers are well aware of food brands, advertising pressure is high in the sector plus high involvement in terms of purchase cycle as food matters – *eat better, live better*. A question of taking care of your family, for example, is an important decision.

For the Advertiser – this means an audience that is more awake in terms of retaining messages – creating impact is above the average versus other categories. However, given this is a competitive market in addition to the difficulty of communicating a unique, new or relevant message, shifting behaviour is far more difficult.

So, put quiet simply, it is what you say (the message) and how you say it (story) that attributes to copy success, particularly across Europe. Take for example my previous example of humour. The total absence of humour seems to be an issue for food, but its presence is not a strong driver in itself for creating success across the markets. The net effect of humour on a change in behaviour is not constant across countries, in other words, it is probably not a sufficient condition, or it is difficult to make humour travel – particularly for multi-national companies (*see figure 2*).



While humour does attract attention, it does sometimes distract from the product, causing issues with brand linkage – and also sometimes with persuasion (*see figure 3*).



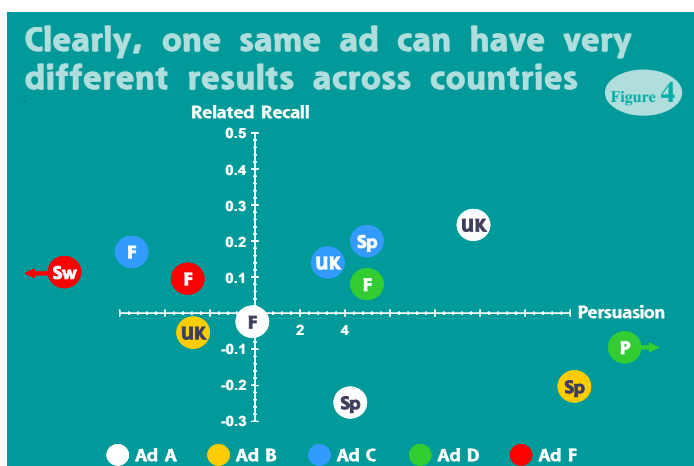
What about likeability and entertainment – surely if Ads are likeable and entertaining in your markets your multi-country campaign should prosper? Neither illustrate strong effects on behavioural change for this analysis conducted by Ipsos ASI within the key European markets.

In summary, styles can be controlled during advertising development by using advertising pre-testing research - execution style in each individual ad is a very important decision to make, we see that many styles can drive persuasion. The risks, however, are evident, for example, humour can help with establishing impact in-market (gaining attention) but can also overwhelm the message. Similarly by being too unique or „weird“ can present problems in interpretation.

Above and beyond the style of the story, the message is key! It is the ability of the message to say something new, differentiating, relevant (from other ads and brands) and credible that is the main factor resulting in an in-market response to your ad or campaign. In the case of food ads, relevance is often derived from appetite appeal. And quality of the message can lead strong retention in-market over the long term. If you have something worth saying, consumers will remember it and be motivated by it.

What does this mean for the Global Advertiser? Or, for the marketing researcher working in partnership with his or her client?

One same ad as mentioned earlier can have very different results across countries (see figure 4).



Can one ad then be successful or effective across countries?

Based on previous learning's (including earlier mention of guidelines for re-application strategies) in order to make a successful multi-country ad, some pointers could be applied:

Start with a message that is different, believable and relevant in all countries – a challenge given local differences in food tastes, symbolism and competitive environment.

Make sure the ad's branding will be perceived and understood in all countries – risk of competitors having built-up similar territories for their brand. Strong brand integration is safer.

Check the acceptability of the story (execution) in all markets taking cognisance of local advertising culture. *Is this acceptable for food.*

Finally check cultural differences, for example, the use of children versus adults in more southern cultures is rejected.

Therefore, a global advertising campaign can probably be successful and effective should the necessary pitfalls be taken into consideration avoiding the taboo of the smallest common denominator. By gaining this information early enough in the Advertising Development Process, one can avoid huge losses in investments making advertising pre-testing research an integral part of providing guidance for global representatives.

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