



WHAT ARE 'POWERFUL ANSWERS'? - Ads show robotics allowing a sick child to attend class virtually, or firefighters using 'projective display' technology.

Flipsides: Is Verizon's 'Powerful Answers' campaign genius or a GE knockoff?

Verizon is running a branding campaign for its future

By Gary Stibel

Why is Verizon running a branding campaign for GE?

By Tom Hayes

If "Powerful Answers," from agency McGarryBowen, is Verizon's sole advertising execution for 2013, then, yes, it is a little short on brand-name identification, marketing value proposition, target customer benefit and call to action.

But if this is one execution in a multifaceted campaign, "Powerful Answers" could prove to be very effective.

Either way, one needs to consider the competitive and temporal context in order to judge.

Competitively, Verizon is in a dogfight with AT&T and others for B2B and B2C customers as well as cellphone and retail partners. The field is complex, ever changing and terribly confusing for users.

Temporally, Verizon has gone from a brand no one had ever heard of to the country's No. 1 provider in telephony. It's distanced itself from a 100-plus-year-old brand (AT&T, which nearly three years ago launched its own corporate campaign around the notion of innovation with "Rethink Possible") and dozens of up-and-comers from Sprint to T-Mobile. Verizon can now build on this success in a whole new world of data, content and answers beyond the ringtone.

If Verizon has chosen to lift itself above the fray with a branding campaign that will be complemented by

specific products and services then this could prove to be very effective.

It is a proven strategy that has worked for decades for companies including GE (across categories), J&J (among nurses) and is now being used by the world's largest advertiser, P&G, in its celebration of moms. (It has also worked for a few companies whose names are more than two letters.)

In that context, "Powerful Answers" is highly aspirational, emotionally charged, and like Apple going beyond the computer, it takes Verizon beyond wireless into the realm of technology, innovation and solutions.

Regarding the limited amount of brand-name identification, this can be a plus as well as a minus.

In the case of "Powerful Answers" it is a plus, because Verizon builds such suspense that you want to know who the advertiser is rather than creating such boredom that you don't even care, regardless of how many times the brand is mentioned. ▲



Gary Stibel is founder and principal of the New England Consulting Group.

A lavish branding campaign for Verizon is a throwback to the advertising excesses of the "90s Entertainment" era. Remember the Nissan Infinity "Rocks and Streams" campaign, which never even included a car, much less a selling message?

Verizon appears to have made a conscious decision to attempt to elevate its brand into the stratosphere.

The commercial production is as exquisite as it is expensive, but fails to deliver any call to action. No doubt the production costs alone exceed the GNP of many countries. The firefighting sequence, for example, is magnificent footage, but what does it have to do with Verizon and its products?

And as a branding effort, the Verizon identity is muted. The brand mention-

and I mean "mention"—is withheld until the end. Obviously the agency did not want to contaminate the cinematography with the Verizon brand name until the very end with a P.S.

One could speculate that most consumers and B-to-B customers viewing these commercials would give the brand credit to GE ("Imagination"). Or IBM. Or, perhaps, Apple. But probably not Verizon.

And who is the target of this expensive extravaganza? What does the company want the viewer to do? Where should I use Verizon? When?

Having been a long-term fan of Verizon's consistently superior advertising—from the infamous and gratefully memorable "Can You Hear Me Now?" campaign to the "Network" duel with AT&T—I was disappointed in this entertaining but heavily flawed diversion.

The campaign is called "Powerful Answers."

What is the question? ▲



Tom Hayes is a managing partner and principal at the New England Consulting Group.

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