

CONSUMER TRENDS AND HYDROGEN MESSAGING

The essence of communications is matching what you want to say to what the audience wants to hear. Often, marketing and communications get caught up in the important things we want the customer to learn and know, and we lose touch with the factors motivating people to listen.

Remember the Aqua Teen Hunger Force campaign that was a disaster in Boston in 2007? Cartoon Network planted nine blinking electronic devices at bridges and other spots in Boston. It fit perfectly with the cartoon show, but caused a Homeland Security panic in Boston. The campaign didn't pay attention to motivation.

Overall consumer trends must influence the way that we deliver our messages. It doesn't mean that we change the message based on what's hot, nor that we tie a message closely to a trend. No one wants to be a Beanie Baby or New Coke. It does mean that the words we use and the way we deliver the message has to reflect what the audience wants to hear. Without that change, the message falls on deaf ears.

Three changes within the consumer market have guided CaFCP in our message delivery. While we certainly talk about technology and benefits, we do so in a way that pays attention to these trends.



People are angry with the status quo

Consumer Trend: LifeRage

Consumer trends guru, Faith Popcorn, describes LifeRage as “a passionate, yet undirected and uncontrollable anger with the status quo.” A survey about worries and fears included “environmental ingenuity:” 59% of those surveyed agree that, “In the end, some combination of science, technology and human ingenuity will solve our environmental challenges.” But, the “human” in question will be someone else: Only 27% indicated that they are actively changing their personal behavior. “Doing what I can from time to time” was much more popular (58%).

Where we see this:

“We need cleaner cars with better efficiency, and we need them now. I, however, am not willing to change my habits, drive less, carpool, or take the bus. I want exactly what I have now, but it needs to be cleaner, greener and cheaper.”

“Plug-in hybrids are the answer. They are closer to market and the infrastructure is already built.”

CaFCP’s message:

People want vehicles that fit their lifestyles, and happen to be green. “FCVs are family-friendly, full-function vehicles that can replace those that people drive today, with zero tailpipe pollution and greenhouse gas. They are a long-term solution that will help us reach our state’s goals without asking customers to sacrifice for less.”

“All changes are difficult and take time, but we have to act now. Hoping something will happen doesn’t make it happen. Fuel cell vehicles are already on the road today, proving that technology that works in a lab will work in a real car that drives on a real road for 10 years.”



Enforcers versus Enlighteners

Consumer Trend: Enlightened Brands

The best example is recorded music. In the beginning, the music industry disciplined Napster and others for allowing music to be downloaded. The record companies became an “enforcer brand.” Apple came along with iTunes and charged for downloading, and iTunes became the “enlightened brand.” Enforcers punish new business models, such as Viacom pulling 100,000 clips off YouTube, and alienate consumers who see the value in the new model. Enlightened brands look to the way that consumers want to interact and change the business model to fit.

Where we see this:

General comments about start-up companies understanding the consumers want green cars, that people should be able to fuel at home and that solar is “free energy.”

CaFCP’s message:

Focus on diversity of hydrogen stations, and ability to fuel at home. Discussing options and choice positions hydrogen as enlightened.



Companies don't control the message

Consumer Trend: Web 2.0

A recent Booz Allen Hamilton study shows that 50% of all Internet users frequent social media sites, and consumers are sharing their opinions about products, services, and the behavior of companies. Companies are no longer solely in control of their messages. Web 2.0—the concept that users contribute content to the web—has turbocharged the whole notion of “word-of-mouth,” circumventing traditional marketing by letting individuals talk directly to each other about their passions, their buying preferences and their pet peeves.

Where we see this:

Blogs, comments to news articles, the same misinformation repeated from one person to another. An excellent example is the number of people who ask about hydrogen using more energy than it yields.

CaFCP's message:

Portable messages—short, pointed statements that people can remember and use with others.