



Selling Cars—and Pulling on our Heartstrings

How We Can Learn Communications Skills from the Best TV Ads

The Monday after Super Bowl Sunday, in office break rooms around the country, people talk about the commercials. A triumph for enterprising advertising execs, this ultimate sporting event has become a showcase of flashy spots designed to sell us more stuff. In fact, many people admit that they “only watched it for the commercials.”

Passionate environmentalists and social justice advocates may envy the millions spent on these commercials and the huge audience that they reach. It is unlikely, however, that we will ever have \$4 million (plus production costs) at our disposal to pay for 30 seconds of Super Bowl airtime.

So, instead of wishing the world was different, savvy environmental communicators can take the opportunity to learn from the commercials and incorporate smart marketing into their efforts.

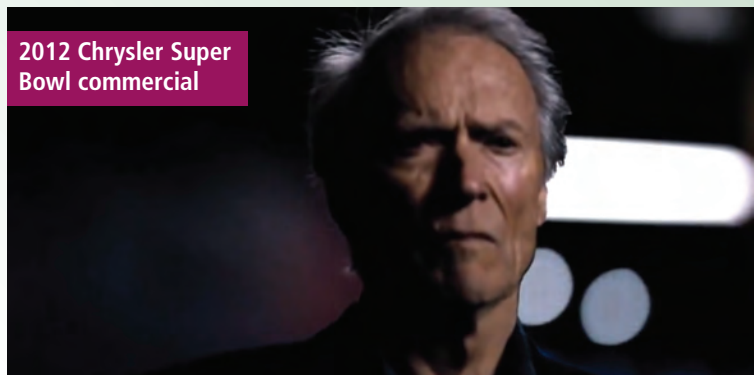
Advertising executives sell products by understanding their audiences and appealing to their values. From Coke to Chrysler, companies appeal to feelings like our sense of nostalgia (Coca-Cola's vintage Santa Claus) and national or regional pride (Chrysler's new tagline is “Imported from Detroit”) to sell products. These values-laden campaigns do not focus on the products as much as they showcase the *buyers*. Their advertising tugs on our heartstrings and connects with our personal identities.

Consider these examples:

“It's half time in America”

This Chrysler Super Bowl commercial from 2012 features Clint Eastwood narrating patriotic text over sentimental photos. While cars are sometimes featured in the background, this commercial is not really about the cars. It is about the American Dream and American pride. It's about pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps, changing the game and winning in the end. It appeals to our love of the fighting underdog and gravely-voiced movie stars.

2012 Chrysler Super Bowl commercial



2013 Guinness commercial



Airing just as the Great Recession turned its corner, lines like: “Because that's what we do. If we can't find our way through the tough times, then we make one appeal directly to American values. The commercial ends with a bang on the line: “This country can't be knocked out with one punch. We get right back up again and when we do the world's going to hear the roar of our engines.”

This commercial was slightly controversial when it aired. Some

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Who You Gonna Call?



What do you do when you've got a newly established department within a state agency, whose mission is to collaborate with all the region's various stakeholders to protect and manage Lake Michigan's water resources?

CALL BLUESTEM.

You need stakeholder input? Got a complex project with multiple partners—including federal, state and local agencies as well as consultants and nonprofit groups? Want to engage the public's feedback on your new policies or programs? No problem.

We've been working on all of the above with the Illinois Coastal Management Program (ICMP). Since being included in a joint grant application to help the newly formed ICMP develop their implementation plan in 2012, Bluestem has been proud to partner with the agency on several projects representing

What's New at Bluestem Communications?

■ Bluestem Communications is offering a three-hour communications workshop on February 20 at the McHenry County Conservation District Lost Valley Visitor Center. This workshop, **"Changing behaviors, not minds"** is designed to increase staff and organizational capacity and make public education and outreach efforts more effective.

From the beginning, the environmental movement has struggled with finding the right words to inspire people to make real changes in their behaviors. Looking through the decades, environmental messages are frequently too scientific ("Working with stakeholders, we use a watershed approach to address nonpoint source pollution.") or too scary ("Climate change is the single greatest threat to our planet and, unless we do something, we

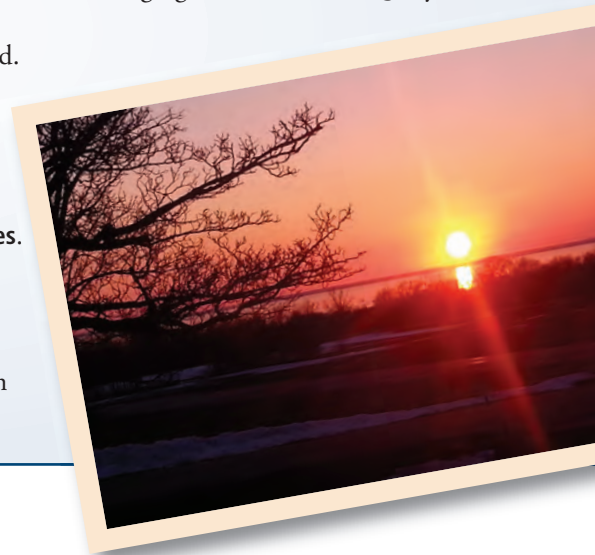
will all suffer.").

Finding the middle ground, language that will appeal to all audiences can be hard. It's only possible when the communicators think outside themselves to consider the values and needs of the audiences.

The interactive workshop provides a learning experience tailored to program and communications staff who work in the environmental and conservation field. The workshop is designed to help people overcome the most common communications pitfalls with hands-on lessons in **understanding an audience, uncovering barriers** and **writing messages**.

Contact Laura Brown (lbrown@bluestemcommunications.org) for questions about this workshop or about how we might host similar workshops in your area.

■ We are pleased to continue our work with the **Lake County Forest Preserve District** as they prepare a 100-year Vision for Lake County and a comprehensive strategic plan to reach those goals. Bluestem is also once again partnering with a coalition of organizations in Wisconsin who are working cooperatively on a multi-jurisdictional approach to managing the **Lake Winnebago** system.



our full suite of available services. We have helped them not only speak with a consistent message, but also to manage some of the ambitious collaborations underway.

For the Illinois Lake Michigan Implementation Plan (ILMIP), we developed a message for the agency to use when recruiting other agencies and interested groups in the coastal region to give input and feedback using web-based tools, including a wiki and an online engagement tool called MindMixer. We also coordinated the group of partners tasked with producing the content in the implementation plan.

Since then, we've recently signed on with ICMP to develop and facilitate an Advisory Panel of regional experts and agency partners that will help guide the development of the agency's Nonpoint Source Pollution Prevention Program. This program is required in all states with a Coastal Management Program and managed jointly by EPA and NOAA. Here, our efforts are to work with and expand upon existing nonpoint source pollution management activities to:

- strengthen the links between federal and state water quality programs
- enhance efforts to manage land use activities that degrade coastal waters and habitats
- reflect the shared responsibility between federal, state, local and regional entities regarding coastal

We will work with the partners, who include Calumet County, Winnebago County, Fond du Lac County, Washara County, Outagamie County, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, East Central Regional Planning Commission and the University of Wisconsin—Extension, to engage stakeholders and members of the public in these efforts.

nonpoint source pollution issues within the coastal zone

Bluestem excels at assisting public agencies working with multiple partners and the public by delivering a clear, consistent message and providing project management services that allow for projects to not only be successful, but to embrace the principles of democratic, transparent process.



Diane Schauer

Read more about ICMP's programs and grant opportunities at: www.dnr.illinois.gov/CMP.



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

■ The **Mississippi River Network** education and outreach campaign, *1 Mississippi*, is hiring summer Outreach Assistants to implement the campaign at the local level throughout the River region.

The campaign's main goal is to educate people face-to-face at festivals and events about the importance of protecting and restoring the Mississippi River. Outreach Assistants will encourage people to join the campaign by becoming River Citizens—people who pledge to help protect the River by taking simple actions. Each regional Outreach Assistant will aim to recruit 1,000 River Citizens during 2014. For more information about *1 Mississippi* campaign opportunities, contact Annette Anderson (aanderson@bluestemcommunications.org).

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people thought it was too political—a sneaky endorsement of President Obama’s economic policies. Others thought it was too heavy-handed and sappy. But, the values-based messages are unavoidable and extra publicity around a commercial probably made Chrysler pretty happy. (Watch the full commercial at: <http://youtube/8iXdsvgpwc8>.)

“Wheelchair Basketball”

For the first 30 seconds of this minute-long commercial, there is no narration and you have no idea what they are selling. With soaring music in the background, it has the feel of a montage from a sports movie. Friends playing together, sharing laughs, working hard and competing. The first words—“Dedication. Loyalty. Friendship.”—

are values themselves. As the friends leave the gym and head to a bar we finally learn that the commercial is for Guinness and that “The choices we make reveal the true nature of our character.” Clearly this commercial appeals to the values of

friendship, loyalty, nostalgia and American pride, even though it is for an Irish beer. We all want to be the kinds of friends who would play wheelchair basketball with our wounded buddy. (Watch the full commercial at: <http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Au8Y98Rgxbk>.)

Above all else, successful (and memorable) ad campaigns connect to us as emotional, nostalgic, sentimental and concerned *people*—not just buyers. They appeal to the values that we already hold deep in our hearts.

And that’s what Bluestem Communications does for environmental groups and causes. We use unique, values-based messages to encourage targeted groups to take actions or change behaviors.

Both public opinion research and decades of anecdotal examples show that we cannot teach, threaten or scare adults into adopting lasting behaviors that are better for the environment. Instead, we must show them how the desired behavior fits into the life they’ve imagined for themselves by appealing to their personal values.

While we should always conduct audience research for every new campaign, research has revealed some common values that Americans often hold that can be applied to environmental causes:

- Responsibility to care for future generations
- Responsibility to family
- Personal spirituality and sacredness of nature
- Personal fulfillment—activities and aesthetics
- Love of country, region or culture
- Personal liberty and fairness

By appealing to these values, audiences may feel a personal connection to the behavior change that you seek.

Bluestem Communications works on the simple premise that we can persuade audiences to take action to protect the environment by speaking to them with compelling, values-based language, just like advertising agencies do to sell us cars and beer. Ads from the Super Bowl and even the local news offer learning opportunities for all communicators.

This article is for educational purposes only. The owners of these copy righted images have not endorsed Bluestem Communications, but we still think their commercials are pretty great.



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1 Mississippi is a public campaign of the Mississippi River Network, a coalition working together to protect the land, water and people of the Mississippi River region. Bluestem Communications manages the coalition and coordinates the campaign.