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Stanley Hurwitz - Thinking inside the box

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A few years ago, a funeral director friend bemoaned the fact that he had to give a keynote speech at a national convention in Texas. I suggested he begin with a bit of humor: a new advertising slogan someone (me!) suggested for his hearses: "We think inside the box."

Upon his return from the convention, he reported on the great reaction that line got from 2,000 other funeral directors. People talked about "his" idea for the next few days. He thanked me.

That reminds me of the story of the General Motors CEO who asked his PR consultant to draft a speech for the annual meeting. It had to be interesting while covering all the key points for shareholders, media and customers. The consultant wrote a great speech, injected with humor.

The CEO delivered that speech. GM shares rose. When the consultant sent a bill for \$10,000, the CEO protested. The consultant noted that within days of the speech, shares soared \$4 each. Multiplied by 10 million shares, GM's book value had grown by \$40 million, and its image had improved. Can you put a price on that?

A few months ago, a client in the medical equipment business showed me a tiny bottle of Tabasco sauce with a customized back label. "Can we do something like this?" he asked his PR consultant (me!).

I arranged to buy actual mini Tabasco bottles with a customized label. We ordered 500 bottles with a label that included the company logo, the words "We're HOT," the website and product line. We attached the bottles to cards proclaiming, "We're HOT on cost-containment and patient compliance." The account reps passed them out, creating a lot more "buzz" than pens or magnets.

Next step: Sending a news release and photo to business and healthcare publications to brag about this clever marketing gimmick. The story was carried in two of the country's top health industry publications. We posted the published articles on the company website. Account reps and clinical staff sent it via email, posted it on FaceBook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc. We made reprints to distribute.

I looked but couldn't find ways that Tabasco sauce can help with sleep or respiratory issues. But if I found the right data, that would have been another angle to pitch.

Just as GM's CEO used a PR professional to boost their shares and image, and just as I devised ideas to boost my client's sales and market share, anyone can do the same with some creative thought.

As it says on the back of a realistic million-dollar bill I carry in my wallet, "One good idea is worth a million dollars." A good idea person can be worth many times that.

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