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Bold strokes and bright colors win!

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What inspired you most about the last Form 10-K report you read? What great political moderates in history do remember? What bland food do you treat yourself to on special occasions? What brand of soybeans do you think about most?

Some executives think they should "play it safe" when it comes to their marketing communications. They think that imitating others and conforming to perceived public standards will keep the ship on course. They don't want any controversy surrounding their brand, nor do they want to risk offending a single soul in the universe.

Corporate communications and investor relations may be areas to keep the tone businesslike and tempered but in marketing the message needs to shake up and excite its intended audience or it evaporates into faded memory. Differentiation is absolutely vital to branding success. Good differentiation is the singular distinction of your company in a sea of competition. The difference must be relevant to your customers' value perceptions and needs.

The marketing side of the house has a unique set of risks and challenges that require the creative use of words and images. Creativity is often killed off by political correctness. Worrying about a tiny minority who might misinterpret a message should not prevent you from delighting the senses and stirring the imaginations of your target audience.

Why do brands like Harley Davidson, Nike, Apple, and Volkswagon always stand out from their crowded fields? Think about how bold and colorful their advertising is. The messages are not about motorcycles, shoes, computers or cars (yawn!). Note instead the images of freedom, courage, sensational form & function, rule-bending performance these brands convey with amazing consistency. They do it boldly and customers flock to the shine of their offerings, much to the chagrin of Yamaha, Pro-Keds, Microsoft and General Motors.

Earle Nightingale once suggested that to be exceptional in business and in life "look at what everyone else is doing and don't do that!" A related piece of advice comes from Dale Carnegie. Principle number 11 in his most famous book How to Win Friends and Influence People is "Dramatize your ideas." The truly exceptional marketers do it so why don't you?

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