

COVERT AND PUBLIC SERVICE ADVERTISING: ITS NEED AND IMPLEMENTATION

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ABSTRACT

Covert advertising is presently a hot trend in promoting products and services. It embeds a product or brand in entertainment and media and uses undercover tactics turning ordinary entertainment into an extended ad. It raises brand or name image making it more recognizable and memorable to the target audience. In the film, "Minority Report," where Tom Cruise's character, John Anderton, owns a Nokia phone and a Bulgari watch with the logos highly visible to the audience. Another is the futuristic film, "I, Robot," where Will Smith's character made mention of his Converse shoes a couple of times calling them classics. Auto makers use films to advertise their models such as "Spaceballs" (Audi and Mercedes-Benz), "James Bond" (Aston Martin, Ford, BMW, Saab, etc.), "The Matrix Reloaded" (Cadillac)

In the film "Bladerunner," the product placement was very obvious where the whole film stops to show a Coca-Cola billboard. This type of advertising is also used in reality shows and television series. Screenwriters and actors, however, find covert advertising not so pleasing partly because, unlike reality TV stars, they are not paid for such endorsement. In addition, covert ads jeopardize the integrity of their craft. Hence, writers and actors are calling for disclosure informing the audience at the start of the program that they will be subject to covert ads.

INTRODUCTION

As evident from the word "covert", **this type of advertising aims to integrate the advertising with the non-promotional mediums.** This practice is most-commonly found in films. For example, billboards of the products may be shown in the film for a prolonged period of time. Or a character in the film may mention the name of the brand again and again. At other times the director may present the product as an integral part of the film. For example, the cars featured in several action flicks. Remember the Cadillac in Matrix Reloaded and BMWs in James Bond movies.

It is a fact that these tactics seem to be high profile and also seem to require a lot of bucks. Only established brand names have used such form of advertising. Not everyone has the financial prowess to use this form of advertising. However, there are ways through which you can also promote your product or service. Maybe contributing an article in local daily will work well for you. You can mention your brand quite subtly there. On the Internet too, covert advertising is a hot trend. You can blog about the product or ask a well-known blogger to write about your product or service. However, this should be done inconspicuously.

DOES COVERT ADVERTISING GET YOUR ATTENTION?

Covert advertising is a type of promotion that uses undercover tactics to raise the image of a brand or name and helps it to become both recognizable and memorable to the target audience. Covert advertising is presently a hot trend in the promotion of goods and services. **The American business world presently pays between \$900-\$1100 per year per person on covert advertising.** As a consumer, your brain is being taught to pay attention to certain messages by brilliant advertising strategists.



COVERT ADVERTISING IN THE REAL WORLD

We see many examples of covert advertising on television. One example that comes to mind is the judges on American Idol. You see Randy, Paula, and Simon all sitting at their large desk drinking out of a large red cup that clearly says Coca-Cola. I know seeing those cups make me want a large glass of Coca-Cola with ice in it. We have no idea what is actually in their cups but the Coca-Cola advertisers have achieved successful covert advertising by making me want to drink that Coca-Cola. Now after watching American Idol, I am more likely to purchase Coca-Cola as I'm strolling down the grocery store aisles.

How about the movie "13 Going on 30", where the main characters eat Razzles throughout the movie. I can only imagine how much the sales of Razzles increased after the release of that movie. I recall that I sent my spouse out to a local convenience store to pick them up. My kids still ask for Razzles to this day. Tell me that wasn't a successful covert advertising technique.

Many companies now pay film producers to have their products featured in films. Believe it or not, covert advertising is an established part of the financing of Hollywood films. There are even certain companies whose sole responsibility is to guarantee product placement in films for particular brands.

WHY BUSINESSES NEED COVERT ADVERTISING

Businesses need covert advertising because it is a tactic that simply works. It puts money in the pockets of businesses. A company can definitely increase its profits using this type of advertising. Just think about some of your favorite movies and what products were placed in them without you consciously being aware of them. I know that after I watched "The Wedding Planner", I bought M&M's that week. Remember, Mathew McConaughey's character eats M&M's and tosses out the colored ones because of the dye. I still ate the colored ones though!

Many companies also use covert advertising on commercial radio. We are all used to so many commercials on the radio that I'm not sure we would even recognize covert advertising in this form. I think that's the point! Whether we recognize it or not, it is successful on radio or no one would use this outlet.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT COVERT ADVERTISING

If you're a business that can afford covert advertising on television, radio, or the movies, then you have people who will make sure that your business will properly implement covert advertising. If you are a small business owner, don't fret. Believe it or not, there are still many ways you can implement covert advertising into your business plan. **Write an article for a local newspaper.** In this format, you need to sneak in your product or specialty as part of the solution to your article. Be sure to include a link at the bottom of the article that gives your name, phone number, and website.

Don't have too much pride to ask a colleague to plug you and your product. If you make cookies, have a friend take the cookies to work and place them at their desk. When people ask about the cookies or better yet, try one, have your friend give them your contact information.

In this day and age, you can have acquaintances use covert advertising in their blogs for you. I can't tell you the number of times I have purchased a product that was carefully placed in a paragraph on a blog that I frequent. I often read the same blogs over and over again. I feel like I know the people who write them. Since we have built up some sort of trust, I am willing to try products that they just happen to mention.

Covert advertising has proved to stand the test of time. It is a tactic that has netted large profits for many businesses. So whether you're a small business or a large business, it's definitely to your financial benefit to give covert advertising a try.

As opposed to covert advertising, public service advertising aims at spreading awareness about issues that are relevant to public interest. Such ads may quote a political viewpoint, a philosophy, or a religious concept. Such humanitarian ads are usually broadcasted on the radio or television, though they can also appear in newspapers and magazines. A PSA or Public Service Announcement is aimed to alter public attitudes on issues ranging from health, safety, and conservation.

Most of the PSA ads use celebrities in order to gain attention. Others focus their ads on the risks that can come to men, women, and children. In recent years, it has become quite common in US to broadcast the public service ads just after or in between the programs that relate to public service in any way. They provide information such as the toll free help lines, websites and addresses. In general, the public service ads are about rape, HIV, cancer, child abuse, domestic violence, and civil rights.

While public service advertising is not as popular as paid advertising, it should be given due importance. All across the world, such type of advertising is now widely used. In fact, in US, public service advertising was once a requirement if the radio and television stations were to get their licenses from Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Public Service Advertising should carry a short and to the point message. The advertisement should be made keeping the target audience in mind. As it is not about buying a product but a change in the attitude altogether, the advertisements have to be amply clear and the message should prompt the

people to take a step forward. If the shift in the mindsets of people does not happen, then the ad is not conveying the message properly. For this reason, the PSA's are often dramatic and expressive.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

How does covert advertising work? As you have learned from reading the last several months of Coffee you know that the human mind is "primed" by viewing this kind of material. It simply makes people watching more likely to purchase when presented with the opportunity.

WHY COVERT?

One question is why are companies going to covert marketing, such as putting their products in movies and TV shows? Everyone needs your business (especially now when companies have to lay off workers because business is so bad) and covert marketing works well. For some companies, traditional advertising (30 second spots on television) are simply not working as well as they used to. Everything from more entertainment options to smaller audiences have a lot to do with this.

Placing an ad in a newspaper or magazine can be one of the most treacherous methods for small businesses to attempt and they are almost guaranteed to fail today for the business who can't afford daily full page exposure.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

So what are YOU, the entrepreneur, the small business person, the professional to do to succeed in promoting their business? How can YOU, the individual or small business person accomplish what the big companies are now succeeding at?

You probably don't have the money to pay All My Children or Survivor but you certainly have the ability to utilize Covert Advertising.

Continue this article to learn specific ideas you can implement now.

Here are some specific ideas you can implement immediately.

(1) **Write an article** about your area of expertise for a **trade publication** or journal and utilize your personal experience and a personal story to illustrate a key point in the article. (Don't overuse this strategy. Remember this is covert advertising.)

(2) **Write an article for your local newspaper**...the paper that shows up in the box below the mailbox once each week...for free. Write a 7 or 10 point article. "10 Ways to Lose Weight in 2003." "10 Ways for Warren Township Residents to Reduce Their Taxes." Then somewhere around point number six or seven include your specialty as part of the solution and link it to the line at the bottom of the article that identifies who you are, your phone number and website.

(3) **Get some contact info printed at the end of your article.** Forget saying the name of your business when people ask you who you are. Say that you are the "FOUNDER or PRESIDENT of the ultimate website on influence and personal growth, kevinhogan.com." Some publications don't like to put too much information in the line at the bottom of the article and this assures you will make it.

(4) **Have a colleague plug you** in their brochure, advertising, speeches, and you do the same for them. I promote a lot of my friends' books and audio programs. They do the same. Key: Pick your best product and service and make sure it is something that all customers will be ecstatic to have!

(5) **Reciprocate.** If your friend makes country gifts, have one on your desk so when people ask about it, you can give them your friend's address. Have them do the same thing for you. (This may not work as well if they sell tires...)

Continue with this article to learn 3 more covert techniques you can use.

(6) Promoting yourself or your own product can work and it can be effective but **having a testimonial** and using quotes is really how to optimally use covert advertising. Always use real quotes and always return the favor. "I always knew that *Psychology of Persuasion* was a good book, but when Richard Brodie, who wrote *Virus of the Mind*, said it was one of the best he ever read, I felt incredible!"

(7) **Ask for quotes/testimonials** if you don't get them unsolicited. I wrote Joe Vitale (author of *Hypnotic Marketing*) in 1995 for a quote for *Psychology of Persuasion*. He came through with: "This is a work of sheer genius. If I were the only person on earth to have this book, I'd rule the planet." Ever since then, I plug Joe's best work everywhere I go. (Notice the second line of this item!)

(8) There are literally hundreds of ways to **make alliances with other people** that can help you. If you work at a gym you can give out the cards of the best nutritionist you know. But don't just give it out. That isn't covert, that is a throw away. "This woman is the finest nutritionist I know and she will help you get in shape, get healthy and become a new you. She is your final destination." Then, the best nutritionist you know can recommend that they go to YOUR gym because it isn't the pickup spot that Bally's and Lifetime are, but a place you can go and not be bothered while you work out. Constantly promote people who do good work and ask them to do the same for you.

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