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### The Genius of Don Draper: Three Lessons B2B Demand Generation Marketers Can Learn from “Mad Men”

by KAREN OAKLAND on MARCH 27, 2012 | NO COMMENTS

Like many marketing professionals, I'm a big fan of the TV show “Mad Men,” which premiered its new season last weekend. If you haven't seen it, it's a drama centered on life in a 1960s New York advertising agency. Beyond the soapy storylines and retro styling and music, the show's best moments for marketers are when the agency's creative team meets with clients to discuss strategy.

The truth is, many of the “ah-ha” moments for clients could be applied to today's brands, whether B2B or B2C. Content strategy in particular is all about telling a brand's story to potential buyers. Even in B2B, many buyers ultimately make their decisions based not just on facts, but on how the company makes them *feel*.

Here are just a few of my favorite examples of how Don Draper, creative director for the agency, helped his clients figure out their content messaging. As you read about them, think about how to incorporate simple big-picture ideas into your marketing content and long-term [content marketing strategy](#).

#### 1. “It's Toasted.”

In the very first scene of the first episode, Don Draper is seen in a bar in the middle of the day, drinking an old fashioned, smoking and jotting content ideas on a napkin. The marketing problem Draper faced was how to help Lucky Strike distinguish itself in a commodity market. The question wasn't “why smoke,” it was “why smoke Lucky Strikes.” (And doesn't every brand have to answer that question?) The client had no answers.

Draper asks the client to describe the manufacturing process and has a light-bulb moment: “It's Toasted.” Isn't everyone else's? Of course. But Lucky Strike gets to market first with the idea, which helps the brand move away from the health issues every other competitor was targeting. “Advertising is based on one thing: happiness,” Draper says. “It's the smell of a new car. It's freedom from fear. It's a billboard on the side of the road that screams with reassurance, ‘Whatever you are doing, it's okay. You are okay.’”

Takeaway No. 1: Your content needs to reassure potential clients that choosing your brand will make them feel happy. Or feel smart. Or feel a sense of satisfaction.

#### 2. “Mark Your Man.”

The agency develops a campaign for a lipstick maker around the idea that a woman wants to be an individual. She doesn't want to be like anyone else; she wants to “mark her man” with her own shade and her own lips. The campaign taps into the deeper concept of women's freedom, which was just coming into vogue in the 1960s. The client's response? “Where are all the colors? We have more than five colors.”

*Watch “Don Draper's Lipstick Pitch”*



As a content marketer, I see this sort of product bias all the time. Product marketers often want to focus on features. They want content marketing that lists all of the colors and sizes and bells and whistles. Some might even go so far as to talk about buyer benefits. But what's so great about this campaign is that it goes beyond just benefits, and again, delivers an emotional punch. In addition to promoting women's freedom, it's a little sexy, too.

Takeaway No. 2: Don't focus your content marketing on features. Focus on what those features bring to the customer in terms that carry emotional power.

### 3. "Change the Conversation."

Dumped by American Tobacco, the agency's biggest client, Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce faces a heap of negative press from the trades, who question the agency's ability to survive. The team is desperate. Draper realizes that he needs to "change the conversation" in a big way. He takes out an ad in the *New York Times* with text that implies that the agency dumped the client, not the other way around. The result? The agency gets a meeting with the American Cancer Society and goes on to position itself as *the* anti-tobacco, pro-health agency.

Every marketer sometimes has to deal with negative situations—whether it's a PR mess or product flaw or competitive situation. What's so brilliant about Draper's move is that he takes control of the situation. He doesn't allow other people to define it.

It's the same approach [David Meerman Scott](#) advocates today in terms of "newsjacking" to generate earned media. When a big story in your industry breaks, respond with your unique position on the conversation. Create content marketing opportunities fast to support it—interviews with executives or customers, social media messages, video content, etc.

Takeaway No. 3: Don't let the market define you. Define the conversation you want to have, and create content to support it.

In B2B demand generation in particular, marketers are tempted to be logical and conservative, focusing on features and benefits. But B2B buyers are people, who respond to humor, fear, pain, love and other emotions as part of their buying process. Successful marketers will think beyond simply generating more leads and will think about incorporating simple, emotional messages throughout their content marketing strategy.

At Left Brain DGA, we are focused on taking these ideas and creating content that guides the B2B buyer down the purchase path. But that doesn't mean the content needs to be boring. Contact us to discuss how we can come up with some creative ways to tap into your customers' emotional needs.

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