

When simplicity beats creativity

AT PIVOT, THE MARKETING agency where I work, I have the enviable (at least I think so) position of being on a creative team tasked with dreaming up creative campaigns for our clients. We're the group that sits around bringing every resource to bear — clever plays on words, less clever puns, cultural references, eye-catching headlines and images, whatever we can — to help our clients' advertising sing.

Occasionally, though, we happen on a campaign in which we try to come up with creative ideas but end up with something simple. That doesn't mean talking down to customers; it means being forthright and clear with your messaging.

Here are some examples and things to consider on this question of simplicity vs. creativity.

1. When you've got a great offer, put it up front. If your retail store is offering a 50 percent off sale, you *could* use a headline like "Half is a laugh!" or "The odds of loving this sale are better than 50/50." You could show a clever image that pictures half of your store normally, and half wrapped in money or something.

You *could* do those things, but even if they are creative (debatable), they are the wrong choices. The only headline you should use, big and bold, is something like "Everything 50% off!" or "50% off sale!" Why hide a great offer behind a creative slogan or image that might make the message harder to understand?

Yes, sometimes we need creative marketing; we don't create ads that just say "Buy Our Flowers." But when you have a fantastic offer, though, keep your advertising simple and give the offer pride of place.

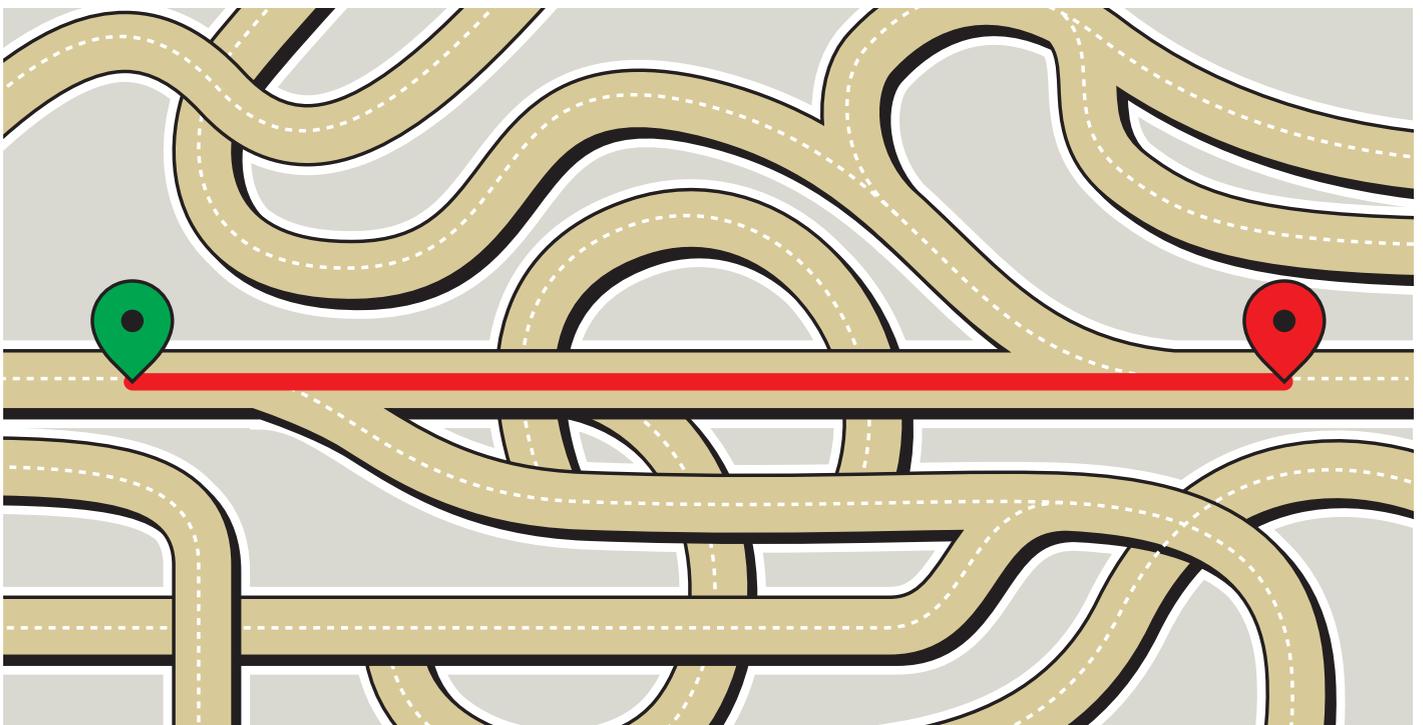


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2. If there's a common name for something you're doing, use it. Not too long ago, a client (a regional cellular provider) asked us to brainstorm a name for a quarterly flash sale in their retail store. We came up with a few different names, like Selling Point, Red Hot, The Real Deal, and The Hookup.

You get 500 bonus points if you can guess what we eventually called it. If you guessed Flash Sale, you are correct. And you know what? It was the best name. Why? Because people understand what a flash sale is. ➤➤





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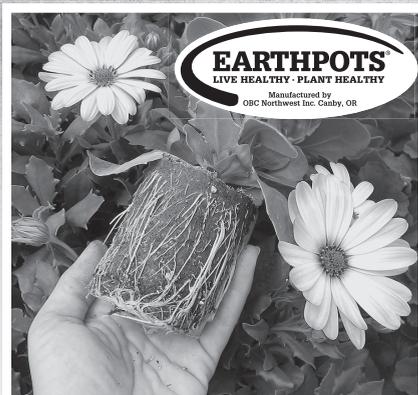
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PIVOT POINTS

You don't call cell phones "frequency-enabled personal connection tools." You don't call shoes "podiatric locomotion devices." You don't call plants "aesthetically-pleasing natural chlorophyll receptacles."

Think about the terms your customers use — not what your industry uses or what a more creative name might be. Speak in their language.

3. Being effective trumps being creative, every time. Some ads are merely creative, while others are creative and effective. (Some are uncreative and ineffective, but let's not talk about those.) When it comes to marketing, effectiveness trumps creativity.

You can have the most creative idea — an idea that makes thousands of people burst into spontaneous laughter and applause when they see it — but if it doesn't produce results for your business, it's a failure.

4. Put every idea or ad to the test. When you look at an ad you are creating for your business or a campaign headline, ask yourself: do I understand the main message in five seconds or less? If a headline is so creative that it needs explanation — "You see, it's clever because René Descartes famously said, 'Cogito ergo sum,' and we're breeding and selling corgis, so 'Corgito ergo sum' is brilliant!" — it's the wrong headline.

If you understand the offer or the message in five seconds or fewer, you are in good shape. Even better if you get that down to two seconds. (Remember, people have shorter attention spans than ... sorry, what was I saying?) Sometimes, to accomplish this, you have to set aside creativity and focus on simplicity.

As much as it may pain me — a creative professional — to say so, there are plenty of times when simplicity beats creativity. Sometimes, the most straightforward message is the most effective one. Keeping the points above in mind will help you know when that's the case. ☺