

# Dare to Be Different

**Being different is scary. In marketing, trying something different is really scary.**

Nobody wants to be the marketer that messes up a multimillion-dollar brand.

It's easier to play it safe, relying on what has worked before or for others.

That must be why I've often heard from clients that there is a certain way to advertise in their category—for example, TV ads for men's razors must start with a 10-second story, continue with a 15-second product demo, and end with a 5-second joke. "This is how we *must* advertise in order to succeed," they say.



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But copying from a template often leads to mediocrity. In today's world, it's ads that are different that stand out and really capture attention, and it's ads that capture attention that have a chance to be remembered, to convey brand impressions, and to deliver messages. Therefore, ads that are different are most likely to build brands.

## DIFFERENCE MAKES A DIFFERENCE

When the Dos Equis *Most Interesting Man* campaign in the United States launched in 2006, most beer ads featured attractive women being won over by feckless young men (with the help of beer) or relied on sophomoric humor. Often they included both. Instead of trying to mimic the success of category leaders,

**Ads that are different stand out and capture attention, and ads that capture attention have a chance to build brands.**

Dos Equis launched a campaign built around the exploits of the rugged yet sophisticated "Most Interesting Man in the World," an aspirational figure for young beer drinkers who embodied the phrase "women want to be with him, men want to be like him." Replacing the traditional frat boy jokes with over-the-top but not quite unbelievable snapshots of the most

interesting man's life, such as the grainy black-and-white footage of him arm wrestling Fidel Castro, the ads were unlike anything else in the beer category. They captured viewers' attention and made them remember the brand. Sales of Dos Equis doubled in the four years following the launch, and the campaign has since won numerous awards, including a 2009 Gold Effie and a 2010 Bronze Cannes Lion.

U by Kotex, a feminine care brand launched in the United States in 2010, has also leveraged different advertising to great success. Advertising in this category has traditionally relied on euphemistic images of young women riding horses and performing gymnastics routines; the reality of menstruation is not openly discussed. In its first U.S. spot, U by Kotex parodied these ads in a young woman's description of how her period makes her feel. "It makes me feel really pure ... I like to twirl, maybe in slow motion, and do it in my white spandex."

The campaign, which targeted women aged 14 to 22, then proceeded to talk frankly about menstrual cycles and feminine care products. The 2013 U by Kotex campaign, called *Generation Know*, pushes boundaries even further, debunking myths, speaking matter-of-factly about menstruation, and addressing questions many young women have. As a result of this straightforward, plain-speaking approach,

the brand has claimed a sizeable 7 percent share of the \$2.6 billion feminine care category after only three years.

**Difference Is Involving**

Looking beyond these two examples, we observe that in the United States, ads that are seen as different from other advertising have significantly higher levels of involvement. Thus they have a stronger ability to get noticed by consumers. But this isn't just the case in the United States; it's something we see across the globe. As Table 1 shows for countries around the world, involvement is consistently stronger for ads that are different. People pay attention to the unexpected.

**Table 1**  
**Ads That Are Different Are More Involving**  
*Involvement Scores, Indexed on Average Level of Difference\**

	Bottom Tertile	Top Tertile
<b>United States</b>	82	150
<b>United Kingdom</b>	78	126
<b>Germany</b>	73	124
<b>Russia</b>	85	122
<b>France</b>	88	121
<b>China</b>	93	109
<b>Brazil</b>	96	104

Source: Millward Brown, 2013

\*Difference tertiles defined by endorsement of top box of Difference scale: "It's very different from other ads in CATEGORY."

**Difference Creates Enjoyment**

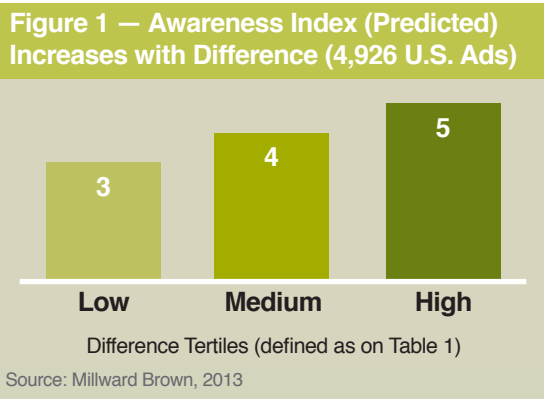
In the context of TV, a medium we look to for entertainment, offering people something enjoyable is a good way to get their attention. In general, the more enjoyable an ad is, the more likely it is to be remembered. And we have found that ads that are different also tend to be more enjoyable to watch; what makes them different often enhances them in other ways as well. They may be laugh-out-loud funny, such as the ads in the Old Spice *The Man Your Man Could Smell Like* campaign, which featured non sequiturs and visual humor.

**People pay attention to the unexpected. Around the world, involvement is consistently stronger for ads that are different.**

They may be edgy, like Kmart's "Ship My Pants" TV spot from early 2013, which played up the "sounds-like" pun of "Ship My Pants" and garnered 13 million views on YouTube in its first week. Or they may be gripping, like the famed Guinness "Surfer" ad from the UK, in which the drama of surfers riding an enormous wave is enhanced by black-and-white footage, a pulsing drumbeat, and images of mythical horses rising out of the water. (Incidentally, the qualities of ads that are different—being laugh-out-loud funny, edgy, or gripping—are the same qualities we observe in ads that go viral.)

**Difference Builds Memorability and Effectiveness**

Beyond being more involving and more enjoyable to watch, ads that are different can offer another important advantage. The elements that make them different can become strong brand cues. In the case of Dos Equis, phrases like "he can speak Russian ... in French" and "his blood smells like cologne" are readily associated with the brand. We have found that ads that combine strong branding, enjoyability, and involvement are best at generating TV ad awareness for their brands. We measure this using our Awareness Index (AI). Figure 1 shows the predicted AIs for 4926 U.S. ads in the Low, Medium, and High difference groups.



Ads that are different yet still fit with their brands—ads that are *appropriately* different—are much more impactful in market.

**Established Brands Can Also Be Different**

New or little-known brands have an advantage when it comes to creating different advertising as they have little to lose and few existing consumers to alienate. But that doesn't mean it's impossible for established brands to create advertising that's different or that they shouldn't aim to do so.

A great example of an established brand leveraging different advertising is the "Pinky" ad from Australia for the New South Wales Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA). Safe-driving advertising across the world has traditionally used scare tactics to frighten consumers into following traffic laws. But in their 2007 "Pinky" commercial, Australia's RTA did something different. The ad showed young male drivers,



full of swagger, speeding as they tried to show off to women walking by. Unimpressed, the women wagged their pinkies to suggest that the drivers were overcompensating for a lack of manhood. As a former young male driver full of swagger, I know that's a message I would listen to! More importantly, it's a message that stood out to drivers because it was so different from what they expected to hear. The ad, behind a \$2 million budget, is credited with saving \$264 million in accident-related costs and the lives of up to 56 people.

**THE DIFFERENCE MUST FIT THE BRAND**

It's not enough, however, to just have advertising that's different. In 2004, the U.S. sandwich restaurant Quiznos started a TV campaign featuring the "Spongmonkeys," a pair of creepy, google-eyed hamster mutants singing about Quiznos' toasted subs. That was certainly different, but it wasn't appealing, and it did nothing to make consumers want to go to Quiznos. The campaign was pulled within the year amidst declining sales and negative reactions from customers and franchisees alike.

Different for the sake of being different doesn't work. It's ads that are different yet still fit with their brands—ads that are *appropriately* different—that are much more impactful in market. Table 2 shows the predicted Awareness Index and Persuasion scores for "different" ads that have a low, medium, or high degree of fit with their brands.

**Table 2**  
**AI (Predicted) and Persuasion Scores for Different Ads, According to Degree of Fit\***  
*4,926 U.S. Ads*

	Degree of Fit with Brand		
	Low	Medium	High
<b>AI</b>	3	5	7
<b>Persuasion</b>	15	19	24

Source: Millward Brown, 2013

\*Fit tertiles defined by endorsement of top box of Brand Fit scale: "How well does the ad fit in with how you think of BRAND?"

One brand that has successfully leveraged appropriately different advertising time and time again is Apple. All of Apple's advertising conveys the message that the advertised product will help you do the things you love to do—and this, in fact, is the meaningful difference that makes Apple so successful. While competitive advertising focuses on technology, which is constantly changing, Apple focuses on delivering an outstanding brand experience. As a result, the brand's iPod campaign from 2003 fits just as well with the brand as their 2013 advertising for the iPhone 5C.

## BREAK THE MOLD ... WITH CARE

Breaking the mold isn't something that should be considered lightly or done haphazardly, least of all when it comes to multimillion-dollar brands. First, consider the strength of your brand and current advertising. Strong category leaders with successful campaigns shouldn't focus on creating something different if what they're doing is already working. But they do need to keep an eye on what competitors are doing and be wary of and prepared for how to deal with imitation.

Second, don't lose sight of what your brand stands for. Unless you're trying to completely reinvent your brand, make sure you build on its legacy and its meaningful difference. Make sure you also understand your market and the type of advertising you can get away with without offending consumers.



Third, understand how consumers view advertising for your category. Maybe a product demo is required, but the way you present that demo can be different. Also, keep in mind that what you think of as a big change may be too subtle for consumers to notice; don't be afraid to be bold.

Lastly, give your creative team some freedom. Don't put narrow boundaries on what they can and can't do. Make sure they understand your brand's heritage and consumers' perceptions of your category and then turn them loose.

Copy testing will help you understand if the bold efforts of your creative team are working as intended or if the risks they have taken are reckless ones. As we've seen, Link will show the positive impact of difference—but it will also act as an early warning system if that difference is inappropriate.

**Don't put narrow boundaries on what your creative team can and can't do. Copy testing will help you understand if their bold efforts are working as intended or if the risks they have taken are reckless ones.**

Many advertisers develop effective formulas that they depend on for years. But often, copying someone else's template hinders as much as it helps. So when your goal is to create advertising that will really get noticed, dare to break the mold. Dare to throw out every convention you know about advertising in your category. Dare to be different.

To read more about advertising and building brands, please visit [www.mb-blog.com](http://www.mb-blog.com).

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*["Big ideas: Research Can Make a Big Difference"](#)*

*["Creativity in Advertising: Eyebrows, Greek Banquets, a Violin and Some Invisible Fish"](#)*

*["Measuring Long-Term Ad Effects: A Meaningfully Different Approach"](#)*