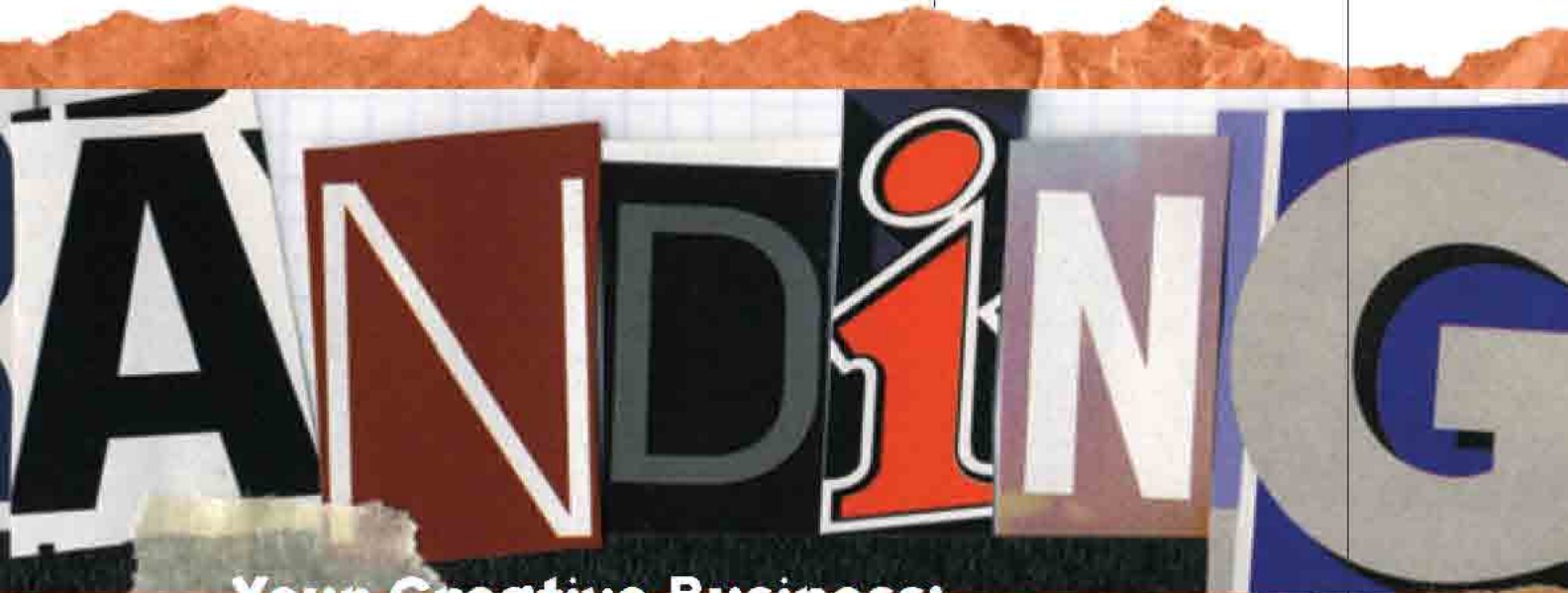




Historical moments. Tropical visions. Splashy murals. They have all been used in advertising and promotion enough times that it would seem nothing new could be done. But some innovative Twin Cities creative companies have found new twists for these and other tired tactics, waking them up to build their brands.

“The main idea behind brand promotion is just to get your name recognition out there,” said Ideal Printers, Inc. Sales and Marketing Manager Dean Kissner. And the St. Paul printer’s recent 25th anniversary campaign “Ideal Moments in Printing History” did just that.



Your Creative Business: Creating Memorable Moments in Twin Cities Branding

It might have been enough for the printer to showcase its capabilities with posters, brochures and trinkets highlighting historical Twin Cities’ events. But Ideal added a swing to the thing – not only creating the printed pieces, but also creating, literally, the moments.

Remember the lines of people waiting to cross the Friendship Ice Bridge of 1979, which spanned and reconnected the feuding Twin Cities? Do you still have your button? Did you or your friends get front-row tickets to the 1985 Metropolitan Stadium Demolition Jam, featuring the Beatles, the Stones, Zeppelin and Pablo Cruise? Is there any butane left in your commemorative lighter?

If you can’t recall these Ideal Moments in Twin Cities’ history, you’re not alone. And it’s actually those who were willing to question the events that got the last laugh.

The posters, the lighter, the button, the brochures “that could be real, but were not real,” Kissner said. All were a branding spoof conceived by Ideal Printing to showcase its creativity and capabilities. Conceived by Ideal, the campaign also got some creative assistance from ad agency Spy Glass Group.

IMAGE COURTESY OF IDEAL PRINTERS >

Whether printing commemorative pieces of the past or keepsakes for the future... Ideal Printers will build relationships that will stand the test of time!

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HISTORY

ideal
PRINTERS

The spoof was created to set the company apart in an industry which does not allow for much differentiation, Kissner said. "You're not going to get people to say, 'I love your brochure, where do I sign?'" Any printer can do what any other printer can do. It's really about building a relationship." And this campaign gave Ideal the opportunity to do just that. When sales representatives made calls with an Ideal Moment poster and trinket in hand, it gave them 10-15 minutes in front of each person, Kissner explained. "Some salespeople played the act," saying "Do you remember this?" Others, who were not as comfortable with that, gave the "mementos" to their customers as gag gifts to play on their employees.

Whichever way it was played, both Ideal and its customers had fun with the branding campaign, Kissner said. But most important were the results: "Now when we walk in the door, people say, 'Yeah, I've seen your name.'"

Skyway Branding

In downtown Minneapolis, Carmichael Lynch is getting its name seen by becoming the client in a unique re-branding of the skyway area around its office. A CL mural had adorned the walls for a number of years, and the advertising company was ready for a change. But, rather than redesigning the area itself, CL came up with the idea to partner with the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD), proposing a relationship in which students create a new piece for the area every two years.

The result was an interdisciplinary MCAD class connecting studio art production and design with a client-specific project. It was a natural partnership. CL Communications Manager Ellen Montgomery said. "We are both entities that thrive and survive on creativity." Fittingly, CL gave the class a theme of creativity, with the caveat to consider the hundreds of people who move through the 100-foot-long space on a daily basis. "Then we let the students go from there," Montgomery said.

The class had to work as a team to consult with their client, present a proposal – within budget – and produce the finished piece. They could use techniques ranging from



drawing and painting to photography, screen-printing or even digital imagery, but they had to work within city specifications. “The students did have to work with building maintenance gentlemen as well as fire code officials and people such as that,” Montgomery said, which gave them the experience of applying their art within real-world limitations. The result was an eye-catching mural, leading skyway traffic straight to the Carmichael Lynch door, and some seasoned students, who are now a bit more prepared to meet the real world.

Year-Round Heat

Skyways are an essential way of life in Minnesota where warmth is not standard year-round fare – unless you are a client of Lorraine Rosecrans of Hot Tropics Creative, where sun and sand are simply part of the plan. Its tropical-colored brochure, with “Cool Ideas” and “Hot Creative” slogans, is distributed in a translucent grey envelope – complete with a fistful of white sand. And the sun? With captions such as “Sit back, relax, even go to the beach ... Hot Tropics Creative will take care of your business creative and production needs for you.”

Rosecrans came up her company’s branding by following the same process she does for clients. “I just start writing,” she said. “I write down everything I know about the subject. I write down every word.” In this case, she started with words clients have used to describe her work: “What a hot promotion!”, “Oooh – a sizzlin’ ideal!”, “This will kick sand in the face of our competition!”

“Ultimately,” Rosecrans said, “You look at the paper and there’s your idea!” Add her dreams of ultimately retiring in the tropics, and her brand was born. After that, Rosecrans just added the fun – incorporating bright reds and fluorescent green into a brand design, including a casual photo in spaghetti-strapped black, and adding lines such as “Our sand pail is just filled with creative ideas to help you build your sandcastle!”

< IMAGES COURTESY OF CARMICHAEL LYNCH



SAMPLES COURTESY OF MACGABEE GROUP >

Building from Basics

Northwest suburban video company, QC Media, may not be building sandcastles yet, but the vision of a brand being built from a flat wash of sand could certainly apply. Mention QCTV in the quad cities of Anoka, Andover, Champlin and Ramsey, and you will get instant recognition from most businesses. Say “QC Media” and the response is more likely to be a quizzical look. Such was the challenge Terry Lovaacs faced in last September when he took over the role of creative services director for QC Media – the video communications service of Quad Cities Community Television (QCTV).

QC Media had been in operation for two years, but wasn’t reaching business prospects in a way the company had anticipated. To remedy this, Lovaacs quickly set it on a road of “Relentless Self Promotion.” This was not, however, a capricious QC Media flag-waving tactic, but rather a directional strategy to build from the familiar. “We are using the

known to build the business,” Lovaacs said. “QCTV is really what people recognize.” So that is what Lovaacs begins with when he talks with current and prospective clients: promoting QCTV programming and building sponsorships, then promoting the company’s extensive video production capabilities.

“We need to get the word out to business leaders that we do offer this service,” he explained. And if that means promoting it through the recognized QCTV brand, Lovaacs will take that – for now. For now, it’s simply a business distinction, he explained, but a year from now? Will Quad Cities businesses recognize the QC Media brand? That’s Lovaacs next mission – a sand castle is being built grain by grain.

Small Runs for Big Returns

Also building its brand grain by grain is Stillwater’s Consumer Marketing & Promotions, Inc. (CM&P). Buying sand by the bucket may be less cost-effective than buying it by the truck-load, but CM&P owner Kyle Weed has found there are times that the higher cost of a smaller run can bring a big return with a low investment. “Applying your brand to a unique item and sending it to a very targeted group – or even a single company – can bring great results,” Weed said. And in one case he went even smaller, individually branding and customizing six coffee mills to promote his brand and new laser-engraving capabilities.



The coffee mills were created, appropriately enough, for General Mills buyers with whom Weed had previously done business. On each mill, he had the buyer's signature laser-engraved along with the words "Signature Blend" creating an individually branded logo for each. Below this was then engraved CM&P and Weed's phone number. Although this was actually conducted several years ago, Weed has developed similar "campaigns" many times since. Why? "I am still friends with one of the buyers who retired a few years back," Weed said. "When I went to his house, he still had the grinder sitting on the kitchen counter."

Self-branding can be as complex as creating history or as simple as engraving a unique item. It may result from a trashcan full of crumpled paper or a sudden inspiration. But the most memorable and successful strategies are those in which the creative company brings forth its personality and uses the same tactics as would be applied for a client. When a prospect sees your branding, they feel who you are and know what you can do for them. That's building your brand. □

About the writer:

Lisa Jo Lupo From exhibits and entertainment to cockroaches and mice, from corporate newsletters to commemorative reflections, Minnesota-based, internationally published freelance writer/editor Lisa Jo Lupo has an incredibly diverse writing background. With more than 20 years experience in business communications, newspapers and magazines, she has a B.A. in journalism from The Ohio State University and a passion for creative writing. Lupo has been recruited, engaged and commended for her thoroughness, organization and beautiful words — words which pull in the reader, strike emotions and provide new understanding, knowledge or need. For more information, take a turn through her Web site, www.ljwritng.com or contact her direct at lisa@ljwritng.com.

About the designer:

Bruce Edwards As executive creative director at F&M&E, Bruce Edwards heads up the award-winning retail creative group for an ever-expanding lineup of A-list clients, including Target, DreamWorks, Wilson's Leather, Organized Living, Crayola, Tupperware, Dressbarn, Hanes and General Mills. A 20-year creative veteran, Edwards' creative work has earned him more than 250 industry awards and is part of the permanent collection at the Good Design Museum of Architecture and Design. He has judged numerous creative and interactive shows, and his work has appeared in *Communication Arts*, *Graphis*, *HOW*, *The Tokyo Type Directors Club Annual*, *American Corporate Identity*, *The Art Directors Annual* and *Print*.