

Campaign Strategy Newsletter No 32, 23 April 2007 Apple Computer Issue

Most of this issue is a long article about the Greenpeace campaign on computers and Apple in particular - see below. It has points relevant to many campaigns, especially those concerned with brands. First some other bits and pieces:

Webby Award

The Greenpeace Apple campaign has been nominated for a 'Webby' award. If you want to express support for it, add your vote at:

<http://pv.webbyawards.com/account/login>

Natural Injustice

Sometimes a campaign can be made noteworthy and arresting by personalising it. This may be because we identify emotionally with individuals whereas we tend to ignore mass suffering; or because it resonates with long-established 'frames' which have emotional profile. On March 19 for example the UK newspaper *The Independent* (www.independent.co.uk) carried a short article with the headline: 'Czech village votes to ban US missile defence site'. Here we have David and Goliath and the cat calling on the king.

By taking a vote amongst its 100 or so residents (71 against, one in favour), the village of Trokavec converted an issue of politics into something far more personal: We can imagine living in the village, and picture the impact of a huge military installation dropped in by a super-power. The stark polarity of a superpower and a village instantly says 'this is unjust'. The same piece mentions that two-thirds of Czechs oppose the plan but that national statistic has nothing like the emotional impact of the tiny village trying to speak out. The campaign lesson? Personalise and create events which cause the reader, viewer or listener to do an instant calculus of right and wrong.

(See also 'Genocide: When compassion fails', New Scientist 2598 - www.newscientist.com - 07 April 2007, Paul Slovic on the psychology of why we will help one persona more readily than two, and one more readily than a thousand).

Amazing Visual Resource

People sometimes complain about my love of diagrams - but you haven't seen anything yet - try this resource for communications and other planning. A treat for the visually preferred.

http://www.visual-literacy.org/periodic_table/periodic_table.html (Give it time to load up - it's worth it). Thanks to Janet Bloomfield at Atomic Mirror.

Stories

Stories are much under-used in campaigns. They are however all the rage in business change programmes. A useful place to start is

<http://www.storytellingcenter.net/resources/articles/simmons.htm> with material from Annette Simmons. See also <http://business.library.emory.edu/info/storytelling/index.html> for a table of seven different story types and their uses and Chapter 2 of How To Win Campaigns.

Message for James Henty

If you are reading this James, you won a prize in the 'pointless contributions to climate change' competition but I've lost your e-mail. Please e-mail me chris@campaignstrategy.org with your postal address. Thanks.

The Greenpeace Apple Computer Campaign

Campaigners may have noticed that Greenpeace has been running a campaign to persuade Apple to 'green' its computers. This has been much discussed in the IT business and amongst Apple customers. See iabcUK: "*Reputation in a Digital Age*" <http://evaapp.typepad.com/iabcuk/2006/11/index.html> and <http://del.icio.us/TominAms> along with the website <http://www.greenpeace.org/apple>, as well as videos and more at www.technorati.com/tag/greenmyapple. This content is also reflected back to users at the site: <http://www.greenpeace.org/apple/buzz>

This article gives some insight into the thinking behind the campaign.

Last year I was to give some advice on the communications strategy by the coordinator of the 'Toxic Tech' campaign at Greenpeace International Zeina Alhajj.

Like others, Greenpeace had been pursuing the 'greening' of the computer industry for some years, and had succeeded in starting something of a 'race' between manufacturers to comply with legal and voluntary standards and go further in removing toxic compounds such as heavy-metals, pvc and brominated flame retardants. The emphasis and framing of the campaign had been on 'waste' and responsibility for waste, nearly all of which ends up in unregulated or little regulated smelting and scrap operations in India, China and other developing countries. In other words, in communications terms it was pursued and primarily presented a waste, and waste-trade issue, with images and political measures focused on waste - children with waste mountains, the European waste electronics directive, the Basel Convention and so on.

As of 2006 Greenpeace had succeeded in creating some environmental leaders on recycling and commitments to phase out some of the worst chemicals in the PC market: notably from Dell and Hewlett Packard, which are fiercely competitive, and between them dwarf other producers with over 30% of the market.

Much of this had been achieved with very little public engagement. For example a survey for Hewlett Packard found that 95 percent of American consumers did not know the meaning of the term "e-waste", and 58 percent are not aware of an e-waste recycling program in their community.

By summer 2006 Greenpeace wanted to push the sector further towards completely re-engineering electronics to design-out toxic components at source. To do this it had identified Apple and Sony as the two companies which, while their market shares are tiny (Apple is less than 3%), are the technical innovators. If a step-change was to come, then these were the obvious players to influence.

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Sony had already made a commitment to phase out chemicals listed under the OSPAR Convention (that guides international cooperation on the protection of the the North-East Atlantic from dumping waste at sea and land-based sources of marine pollution). Greenpeace particularly turned its attention to Apple - the campaign which is now in full swing.

Its initial ideas for upping the ante were to *'to expose the contamination which is hidden behind the sleek design of electronics and advertising. We want consumers' to pressure industry leaders into creating durable products that are toxic free, last longer and are easy to recycle and dispose of.'*

Greenpeace had identified its primary target as consumers: *'Consumers - suppliers, techies, young people (who get a new mobile on average every 18 months) and 30-somethings with disposable incomes - 'adaptors', and secondarily 'decision makers' and regulators. It recognized that its campaign had to be as cool as the products: one campaigner wrote, "we need to give Greenpeace 'bling!'"*

For the campaign as a whole Greenpeace said *'The main strategy will focus on enraging the public about the "true" and dirty image of the industry'*. Now the sorts of traditional Greenpeace tools to do this include non violent direct actions - such as 'return to sender' and exposes with investigations and scientific analysis of waste water, ground and air contamination at plants and waste facilities. But was this the best approach to change Apple?

The obvious route to attack Apple was a direct assault on its image. Indeed various Apple-knocking images were already at large on the net - rotten Apples and so on. This is where I got involved, and although all of the subsequent campaign development was not down to me, below are a few strategy points which can be shared, and may be relevant to other campaigns. (There's a lot more which can't yet be shared - so this may be an interesting campaign to watch).

From my point of view, as a consultant, three factors helped considerably.

First, in this case, the underlying Greenpeace campaign strategy analysis was almost faultless. It had used consultants and its own resources to examine in detail the business strategies, models, interests, culture and policies of all the significant players in the computing and associated sectors. It had studied the interaction between companies and the ways in which innovation came about, as well as being on top of developments in UN and other fora where regulation was in development.

In other words, the PEST - political, economic, scientific and technical -factors were pretty well known, and the power analysis had been done, before Greenpeace turned its attention to communications strategy. The organisation had done its homework looking at how the system worked that it is trying to influence [see extract from How To Win Campaigns posted at http://www.campaignstrategy.org/book_extracts/making_a_campaign_concept.pdf]

Second, it recognized the need to fundamentally review its communications effort and was prepared to discard existing plans. All too often a campaign group tries to refresh or improve a campaign while continuing with existing projects on established tracks - a recipe for muddle.

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Third, it was prepared to commit sufficient resources to the communications to give them a chance of really working.

These points may sound like 'stating the obvious' but they are not always accounted for.

I spent some time trying to understand the culture of Apple, its customer base and in particular, its famous and idiosyncratic boss Steve Jobs. I asked around amongst people who worked in, or consulted for the IT industry and who had done market research and product strategy for computing companies. Some of the thoughts that emerged from this process included:

The main conclusion of this thinking was that to engage consumers, as Greenpeace wanted, it needed to lift the focus of the campaign out of the 'waste' frame and relocate it in the retail and user environment: in the home, on the street (eg iPod), in the office, rather than 'a distant country' [the 'waste stream' of the campaign continues but this shift has largely happened].

For the consumer to engage with the 'issue' (of toxic tech content), it had to relate to their possessions - in this case mainly their Mac - and not just 'waste' or 'electronic waste', which was in the 'post-consumer' world.

I wrote to Greenpeace that:

'Currently the campaign is essentially focused on waste and waste policy, both company-policy and governmental. This is good as far as it goes but it is limiting the impact of the campaign because

- it's a 'their world' not 'our world' campaign for most potential campaign supporters
- it allows the industry to treat it as a policy issue (and the industry-wide working group proposed will tend to exacerbate this)
- it enables the retailers, and the retail setting, where both computer makers and retailers are most exposed to public values, to largely avoid the campaign (ie it happens elsewhere)
- it is not personalised to the user or owner of a computer
- it limits politics and media coverage in most countries to 'foreign pages.

Consequently it is proposed to develop a market campaign, in the arena of retail (both internet and real-world), as well as a waste track (the current campaign core) and a solutions track.'

I suggested:

- Make the product the problem (rather than just the waste)
- Make this real through consumer, retailer, market engagement
- Personalise the campaign for the consumer-citizen
- Make this real through their own products
- And their buying decisions

In terms of style and feel, a campaign about Apple posed a fascinating communications problem. It was easy to identify and easy to reach but it was also highly media-savvy, cool and self-contained with customer loyalty that is a legend in itself.

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The whole culture of geeks and net-heads, while not representative of mainstream consumers (even Apple customers) was also highly influential in the innovative part of the IT business and amongst the most fanatical and therefore most easily engaged Apple customers. While they might be expected to see themselves as somehow "green", their culture is individualistic, resistant to admonishment, even revelling in not being told how to be but liking to fix life themselves. Any external knocking or 'trashing' campaign would be an attack on their stuff and on themselves, because they 'live the brand'.

So rather than a head-on attack on Apple I advised that Greenpeace perpetrate a campaign of seduction, putting themselves in the shoes of the Apple consumer, and invoking the culture of the innovators, the geeks. Rather than going for outrage we would be stimulating sorrow - these people love (and often also hate) Apple and the persona of Steve Jobs but above all they are deeply wedded to it. Any 'boycott' type campaign which asked consumers to sever their relationship with Apple would be likely to misfire, while a focus just on Apple's 'policies' would lead to an arid policy-wonk exchange - perhaps the optimal result for Apple resisters.

My advice noted:

'Despite the distinctiveness of the Apple brand (which is arguably diminishing, ie becoming same-ier) and the prominence of Jobs (whose position and future is ultimately imponderable), the nature of the industry means that Apple is permeable to influences at large in the rest of the sector. This is especially true of the lateral geek- and engineer-worlds. These people - and Jobs identifies with them - are drawn by technical brilliance and challenges, and lured by facilities and teams (though they are really lone operators who use teams to get ideas and approbation). They are not so much interested in an institutional home (ie, as with other technically-led industries, it is permeable horizontally).'

'Therefore we can assume that although Apple is like a closed citadel in terms of news media control, PR and product and policy info', it will rapidly absorb news of external events because this travels by the individual network. We should use this, and only reinforce it by direct overt approaches, which should be intended to echo, amplify or validate the conclusions that some inside Apple will be coming to'.

'Direct attacks on the Apple brand will not easily work because Apple is equipped to deal with them. They will be like rain on the roof. Moreover, they may work against 'The Project' by alienating some potential participants. They may also make Greenpeace look naive and therefore lead insiders to discount other things Greenpeace does or says'.

Thematically or qualitatively, I suggested the following principles in shaping a campaign on Apple:

- *'Try seduction first.*
- *The appeal of the future, emerging from the problems of the present.*
- *The geek doorways - lateral penetration.*
- *Juxtaposition of the complexity of toxic products with simplicity of good design.*
- *The intuition that good products are naturally green.*
- *Personal, music, entertainment or other close to personal applications (emotional pitch).'*

Also, to use the exposure to public and its supporters granted by Apple through running (and expanding) its retail shops (threat to coolness), and:

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'Avoid a head on GP assault on the Apple brand, subvertising or other outsider sneering or complaints. Instead stimulate a play on:

- internal engineer/designer doubts that they are doing the right thing*
- dilemmas for Mac/apple users about the beauty of their products and the horror of the contents/its effects*
- dilemmas for Mac/apple users (the loyalists who follow developments in the Apple world) about their expectations of the company of its relative performance*
- the self-myth of Apple that it can force through any innovation because of its people: "I get to come to work every day and work with the most talented people on the planet. It's the best job in the world" [Jobs] and they hire "the best of the best"*

Greenpeace's communication strategy would eventually incorporate that advice. (There's much more to the strategy and to Greenpeace's campaign than this but rather than try to describe it here, it's best to have a look online). Internally, the campaign decided:

"We won't "attack" the Apple brand in the conventional sense. We'll use a bit of judo to "jam the brand" and use the weight of their own brand values to get users to ask why they aren't being more environmentally responsible. We'll focus on positive messaging that doesn't defame the brand, but which exposes the gap between image and practice. Our messaging will ask more questions and make fewer demands or declarations".

"By focusing on Apple's customers we will engage them to help us change Apple for the better and push Apple to be an environmental leader and positive example for the whole consumer electronics industry to follow. By subverting, rather than challenging, Apple's own messaging, we applaud and encourage the values we share - achieving the seemingly impossible, challenging conventionality, doing things differently - and demonstrate how Apple's own values mandate a better policy toward the environment".

For my own part, I particularly like the Steve Jobs presentation - in fact a spoof of his famously personal celebrity appearances at his own events. See 'Steve at Macworld 2007' written and voiced by Brian Fitzgerald of Greenpeace International at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Uo_4kyrkDc

The leading imagery deployed by Greenpeace focuses on music (the iPod), close to the heart of Apple's corporate ambitions, rather than the keyboard. The campaign enlists the creativity of Mac users in sending visual messages to Apple - a gallery of video letters from jilted Mac lovers. Here's some of what blogger Eva had to say at the website of the International Association of Business Communicators

http://evaapp.typepad.com/iabcuk/2006/11/reputation_in_a.html

"I have been paying a lot of attention to a recent Greenpeace campaign that urges Apple to create greener products and reduce its use of toxic chemicals, as an ongoing example of how digital media makes it easier to impact reputation".

"Now, I am a big fan of Apple (the company - and fruit), which is probably why I really love the campaign. Its differentiator is that it uses the voice of an Apple fan to communicate its message, and targets that loyal and well defined lobby to pressure Apple to become greener (rather than the activist community or green lobby)".

"The campaign uses the tagline: "I love my Mac/iPod/etc, I just wish it came in green". So, while yes, it is critical of Apple, it is approaching the company from a positive position, and therefore enabling productive dialogue even amongst Apple enthusiasts".

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"The digital campaign centres around a website www.greenmyapple.com , which looks fantastically similar to www.apple.com."

"The digital campaign, (which also includes a video on YouTube), urges people to blog about the campaign (these blogs are then listed on the campaign website), to recommend the site by social bookmarks such as Digg or Del.icio.us, to send video e-cards to friends - especially Apple users, and to create games or digital animations promoting the campaign. This is virtuoso activism - with the best usage of online and digital media I have ever seen. From a digital communications perspective, I think that Greenpeace have really upped the ante with this one."

"So far, online coverage is plentiful. A quick search found 2,560 blogs linking to the campaign website (2,561 when I post this one), and 116,000 Google results. Apple consumers seem to be generally supportive of the campaign – for example there is an editorial on MacUser (an online magazine for Mac computer users), which states: We should applaud Greenpeace for picking up on Apple's environmental record, as it means we could soon be enjoying its products with a clear conscience."

"As communicators, IABC members should be very interested in how Apple has chosen to respond to this campaign. Such a sophisticated campaign deserves a clever response".

"Well, so far, I can't find anything anywhere. There is nothing on the Apple website, and a Google search came up empty as well. The only thing I found was that Greenpeace was ejected from the MacWorld Expo in London last week, (however that may have had more to do with the event management, rather than Apple's official position)".

"So, again, as communicators, how do we think that Apple should respond? Well, personally, I think that the best response is to take the green suggestion seriously. Apple must know its demographic - chances are they're green. So, why shouldn't Apple try to make their products more environmentally sustainable. This could be what they are also thinking, which may explain why they have been keeping silent (the campaign launched in September). The company could be waiting until they can announce exactly what their green plans are."

"Rather than responding to Greenpeace, Apple should respond directly to their users and fans. The message could be about how they realise this issue is important to their stakeholders, which is why they are reacting. Apple can then clarify their green strategy and future plans to improvement."

"Given their overall culture and track record (the Red iPod for example), I can't see why they wouldn't want a Green iPod."

"The worst response would be to attack the campaign. Some critics of the campaign have noted that Apple does not have the worst environmental record in the industry, or that other industries are most polluting. Maybe, but as Greenpeace says: Apple [could] be at the forefront of green technology, and show other companies how to do it the right way. So, rather than go on the defensive, Apple should engage in discussions about what "green technology" means - with environmental groups, with users, with fans, with critics, with bloggers, with employees, even with competitors. A really innovative approach would be to incorporate the Greenpeace campaign (or something similar) into their own website, and open up an inclusive and boundless dialogue - both internally and externally - which investigates how the company could improve its products".

"Interestingly, one of the most common reactions I have heard from communicators is: "Doesn't that website infringe Apple's copyright?" I am certain it does, but I doubt that is a conversation that Apple will want to have... (then again, I am an Apple fan, so maybe I overestimate them)?"

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Apart from a storm of online Apple mimicry, nominations for awards and debate amongst Apple consumers, what else has the campaign achieved? Word has it that behind the scenes Jobs has angrily denounced the campaign and refused to discuss it with visitors. He's also received tens of thousands of personal emails.

A Greenpeace person told me "We know that the rest of the industry is sitting and watching the show, as they try to beat Apple's environmental policies. Will Jobs turn the table around and surprise us all and deliver beyond the challenge?"

So has Greenpeace done enough to win? Maybe not yet, and I'm not privy to their future plans. Sometimes in campaigns you reach what I call the "point of inevitable consequence", that is the point where something happens which makes a big change inevitable. With a formal political process of very public reversal that's obvious but often this isn't, and sometimes it's not even obvious to those inside 'the target' of the campaign at the time. In a case like this everything rests on relationships: Apple's strength has been in being both 'different' and closer to the next aspirations of their customers than their competitors are. The biggest risk for Apple must be if the market demands innovation in an area Steve Jobs has chosen to ignore.

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