

What came first: the advertisement or the egg?

It's not easy being an advertiser. Consumers are being bombarded with ads wherever they turn, and creating an ad that actually stands out from the multi-colored slew of the others involves hefty investments in businesses that only specialize in creating ad campaigns. Even then, success is not a given. How, then, can a product generate enough interest to help the company remain profitable? Contrasting from most commercials on television, the advertisement for the incredible edible egg steers clear of any brand reference -- a welcomed change for some, perhaps, but looking past the fifteen seconds that air on TV, the absence of brand is not as significant as it claims to be. In fact, its purpose is as profit-oriented as any other product being advertised on TV.

The advertisement opens to a shot of a football field featuring two opposing teams facing off before the snap. In the background, clearly distinguishable from the other players, a gigantic egg lines up next to one of the teams as though getting ready to play. None of the other people on the field take notice of it.

The game resumes and the ball is handed to the egg, which takes off down the field. The rival team, even though it consists of able-bodied

players, merely bounces off the egg as it continues its scrimmage. Finally, the egg reaches the end zone, upon which it hatches, revealing a celebrating football player.

Then, the scene changes, showing a set breakfast table. A person off camera wielding a frying pan and a spatula places a freshly cooked piece of toast with a fried egg on a plate decorated with fruit. The camera rests on this scene while four words appear in the middle of the screen as well as being announced by a monotonous male voice: *the incredible edible egg*, followed by the URL to a website, *incredibleegg.org*.

And... *scene!* Contrary to what you might think, *incredibleegg.org* does not, in fact, lead to 'Incredible Egg, Inc.' or something along those lines. On the other hand, we are greeted to the American Egg Board (AEB)'s web site. Incidentally, my first impression told me this was a government funded organization, perhaps an offshoot of the US Department of Health and Human Services. I assume I jumped to this conclusion based on my nationality – I was raised in a generally social democratic country in which government funded advertisements were not as rare as they are in America. A quick tour of the AEB web site confirmed my suspicions:

The American Egg Board (AEB) is the U.S. egg producer's link to consumers in communicating the value of the incredible egg. Our mission is to increase demand for egg and egg products on behalf of U.S. egg producers.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the AEB is a producer based organization created to – in the simplest sense – sell eggs. Yet, I was not completely wrong in my assumptions:

AEB is funded by a national legislative checkoff on all egg production from companies with greater than 75,000 layers.

We seem to be closing in on an important point. The AEB, while government funded, functions as a kind of advertising company that works with one product: eggs. Instead of simply serving as an informational advertisement, the incredible egg works as an initiative for an increase in revenue.

Though the ad might stand out because of its neglect of brand names, it is by no means revolutionary. As a matter of fact, it takes advantage of the tried and tested method of implying that the advertised product will make you succeed in life. This translates to the action on the football field, where the player who has had eggs for breakfast triumphs almost single-handedly over the other team, which (we can assume) was not treated to a breakfast of champions that same morning.

Instead of placing the events in the correct chronological order, the scene at the football field is shown first. By itself, this sequence makes little to no sense, so viewers are 'forced' to sit through the entire commercial in order to understand exactly what the absurd imagery is attempting to advertise. The combination of the pacing of the ad and its ludicrous content is a highly conscious decision, hopefully resulting in more people watching the ad all the way through, and thereby be subjected to its message.

An interesting element in this ad is the way contrasts are featured. In the first half of the commercial, we are shown the action-packed football field, which is immediately replaced by the serenity of the breakfast table. Additionally, the catchphrase *the incredible, edible egg* sounds like it ought to be announced with great gusto and accompanying fanfares. Instead, there is no hype, no glorification – just a statement. The reason may be that producers are tapping into public response to their advertisements – we can no longer be captivated by a hearty voice proclaiming the wonders of laundry detergent. Because of this, advertisements have changed. Advertisers are aware of the ironic content of their commercials, but it is easier to put out a simple, bored message (to which equally bored consumers might identify with), than actually straining to think outside the box.

The incredible egg ad borrows heavily from a different dairy product that has been using a similar advertising technique for nearly two decades. *Got milk?* is a national advertising campaign coined in the early 1990s, and has maintained its popularity to this very day. The parallels between these two ads are astoundingly similar, and egg producers are most likely aiming for an equally high rate of recognition as their ads run both on TV and in print.

In his article, “What We Are to Advertisers,” James B. Twitchell examines how each and every one of us fit into one of eight categories of consumers. Unsurprisingly, advertisers have also come to discover these different consumer groups, and can tailor their advertisement campaigns in order to draw in one or more of these demographics

of identity. For example, people belonging to the group named *experiencers* might take interest in a car commercial that features vast, open territories 'ready to be explored' by the purchaser of said car. With that said, an important part of advertising is making sure the commercial reaches a demographic consisting of the people most willing to purchase the product. However, the AEB's egg commercial does the exact opposite. Though the ad mostly consists of an egg participating in a football game, it is – in the broadest and most ambiguous sense possible - more of metaphor for life itself: by including eggs in your diet, the daily challenges will suddenly be a lot easier to overcome. This message is universal enough to not exclude any possible demographics.

Naturally, there are also downsides to eggs, whatever the American Egg Board might have you believe. They do deserve credit, however, for attempting to "crack the cholesterol myth." In a three-paragraph part of the web site, it is concluded that "eating one or more eggs per day does not increase the risk of coronary artery disease or stroke among healthy adults". In the fifteen-or-so seconds of the ad, there is hardly enough time to explain this, but the illustrious nature of the ad might make more people stop by incredibleegg.org in order to get the full story on the commercial.

Again, this might also be another conscious decision on AEB's behalf, seeing as the web site itself features more information than you will ever need on eggs - including a full rundown on the ad campaign the AEB has launched, and not to mention the host of recipes portraying how eggs can be used in cooking. Quite simply, after visiting the web site after seeing the advertisement, it becomes instantly clear that the two are actually one, logically linked to one another by the content they offer. Perhaps we are

seeing another new trend in advertising – that short commercials link to web sites where the products advertised can be fleshed out more fully?

As stated in the introduction, advertisers are constantly coming up with new ways to make consumers buy their products. With the introduction of such products as TiVo, viewers need no longer sit through the tedious interruptions of their favorite shows. This, of course, is a major threat to advertisers, who have to rely more and more on product placement within the shows themselves instead of simply buying air time to showcase them. In addition to this, consumers expect more from advertisement than they did before – so much that the advertisers themselves must worry about creating entertaining or informational commercials to keep the audience interested.

In the case of the incredible egg, the American Egg Board has successfully created something that stands out from the rest of the ads competing for attention: a commercial with no reference to brand. A look behind the curtain reveals that there is, in fact, a whole collaboration of egg producers behind the advertisement, just like with the *Got milk?* campaign. Even so, the mystery of the ad is also what causes its success, for there is more information waiting online for those who are drawn in by it.

Consider this, though: is the only way to create interesting commercials by cutting out brand reference, which in turn means we are being shown advertisements for vague and broad product groups, and perhaps not even specific products at all?

Works cited:

- Twitchell, James B., "What We Are to Advertisers", *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers*. 5th ed. Ed. Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006. 203-7.

- *American Egg Board*, Sep./Oct. 2007. <<http://www.incredibleegg.org>>.