

By Lois K. Geller



The Power of Taglines

Present a benefit and play up your personality

As always, the Direct Marketing Association's Conference and Exhibition has a theme. This year it's "Customers Are on a Journey: Be the Destination!"

I suppose I understand that. It's a bit of a reach—and a command without a benefit—but at least I know what it means. Customers are looking for something, and your product should be it. It's a tagline, and I love taglines.

My all-time favorite tagline came from a tech company that wanted people to know its geniuses used their brain power to create brilliant products. So it came up with the tagline "Out of our minds."

My favorite spoof tagline was Jerry Della Femina's idea for Panasonic:

"From those wonderful folks who gave you Pearl Harbor."

Great taglines have three things in common:

1. You see them;
2. You understand them;
3. You connect them to the company.

For instance, everyone can fill in the blanks in these taglines:

The ____ of beers.

Just ____ it.

A ____ is forever.

Reach out and ____ someone.

Fly the ____ skies.

One cigarette company pulled off a miracle when five letters, L.S.M.F.T.,

became a tagline many of us knew and understood. (For those of you who have forgotten or are too young to have seen the campaign, the letters stand for: "Lucky Strikes Means Fine Tobacco.")

But taglines can do more than merely jog the consumer's memory about your company.

Taglines Strengthen the Brand Promise

Coming up with memorable, distinctive and relevant taglines that succinctly summarize your product or service can be tricky. But when done well, the right tagline makes the promise of the brand so much stronger.

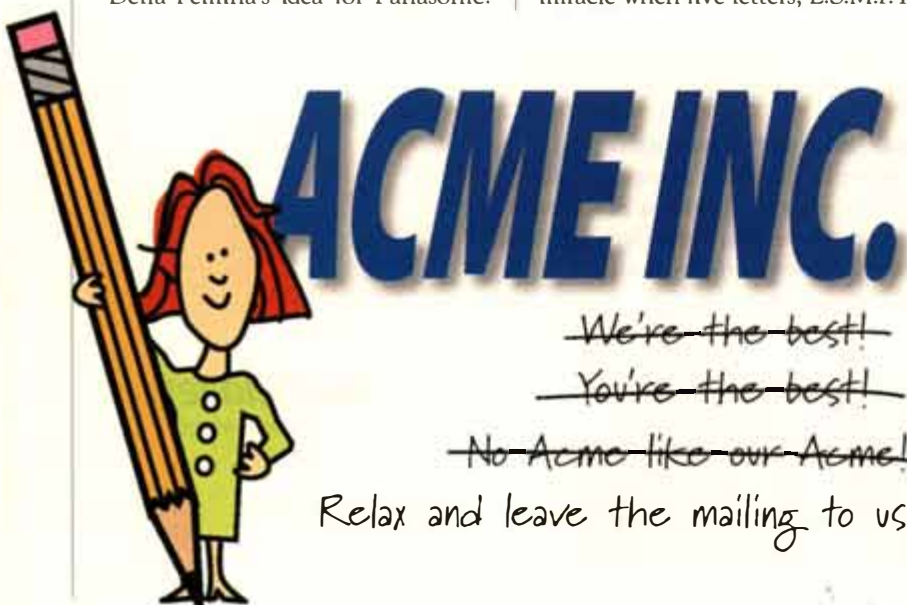
I've been thinking about this for our own Mason & Geller brand. My assistant, Theresa, recently was looking at our Web site and said, "You know, our Web site says this:

About Us

Mason & Geller is a full service direct response agency providing our clients with strategic direct marketing programs and execution. Our primary focus is on response rates and profitable results.

"And we do all that, but it's only part of what we do." She's right. We develop a quarterly 64-page consumer magazine for a financial client, a regular 12-page newsletter for a personal services client, an e-zine for a gifts

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client, preemptive public relations for another client, and sometimes we train a client's staff on what its brand really means (and how to live up to it). Yet our own site doesn't hint at any of those things. The shoemaker's children truly do go barefoot, no?

So we started talking about fixing it, and somebody mentioned, "We need a solid tagline that summarizes everything we do." Another colleague added, "You know, a tagline is like an elevator pitch. Finagle a ride in the elevator with a potential client, and you have as long as the elevator ride takes to say what you have to say."

Bingo.

A tagline is, indeed, a kind of elevator pitch. Say what you have to say really fast, and make it great. Of course it's also a lot different from an elevator pitch because outside the elevator your little tagline has to clamor for attention along with a zillion others.

Fortunately, most of them are bland: "the window people"; "the bagel people"; "the cleaning people"; and on and on. So many taglines are ho-hum because it's hard to sum up everything your company represents in just a few words. But it's worth doing, even for direct marketers.

Why Direct Marketers Should Consider Taglines

So why should we, as direct marketers, care about a general advertising concept like a tagline? Many direct marketers don't bother. Barnes & Noble and Lands' End seem to be tagline-free.

But credit card marketers MasterCard and Visa leverage mighty taglines. MasterCard uses "There are some things money can't buy. For everything else there's MasterCard." And, Visa uses "It's everywhere you want to be." American Express also has used a few taglines over the decades, including "Don't leave home without it." Outdoor apparel and gear cataloger Cabela's touts its tagline "World's Foremost Outfitter." Meanwhile, Dell Computer is known for its "Easy as Dell" tagline.

It strikes me that a tagline is good

for direct marketers to use for at least four reasons:

—In the mail, on an ad and somewhere on a Web site, the right tagline is as good as a headline, even if the prospect has never seen it before.

—If people have seen your tagline before, it can be a strong reminder of what you can do for them.

—A tagline can hold together a multimedia campaign, particularly if consumers are apt to view your message at different times through different media. The repetition helps build awareness for the overall campaign.

—It's a brilliant and attractive summary.

Three Guidelines to Getting Your Tagline Right

At their best, taglines are short, pointed statements of who you are, and what you can do for your customers and prospects. Another crucial element of a great tagline is its stark simplicity. Nothing could be simpler than "Just do it," "The Real Thing," "Life Takes Visa" or "The King of Beers."

Taglines should be simple and evocative, and present both a benefit and a personality. "The bagel people" doesn't cut it. "Tastes great, Less filling" and "Where's the Beef?" do. How do you get there? Here are a few things we're considering for Mason & Geller; you might like to try the same approach.

1. Be true to what you are. Have you seen the TV commercial for a product called HeadOn? A woman applies what looks like roll-on deodorant to her forehead. The voice-over says, "HeadOn: Apply directly to the forehead. HeadOn: Apply directly to the forehead. HeadOn: Apply directly to the forehead." Three times in row! Then the voice says, "HeadOn is available without prescription at retailers nationwide."

At first I thought it was a joke. There's no explanation of what the stuff is. Maybe a wrinkle cream? Turns out it's a homeopathic headache remedy. A few days later, I read something that amazed me. HeadOn sales are up 50 percent since April 2006. The product

is something you apply to your forehead, and apparently that's all it takes.

Not too long ago, Jolt Cola appeared on the scene with a great tagline: "All the Sugar, Twice the Caffeine." It has since cut it to "Twice the Caffeine."

2. Write down all the words that might describe your company, your company's personality, products and services. Then, write down all the words that might describe your prospects and customers. Try them in different combinations, add verbs, cut excess words, really stretch things. Make sure you try everything you can think of from the totally ridiculous to the mundane. You'll be delighted with the 100 or so taglines you'll come up with after a few hours.

I was thinking about that the other night when I saw a commercial for Target. At the end of the spot, the female voice-over said "Tarzhay" in an over-the-top French accent. Why would it mess with its name? Well, a lot of Target customers say the store's name just like that, as a joke to make it sound classier. Someone at "Tarzhay" decided to be the customer, and it works.

3. Express your unique selling proposition from your prospect's perspective. "Apply to the forehead" is one way. FedEx's, "When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight," is another way. So is NyQuil's, "The nighttime, sniffing, sneezing, coughing, aching, fever, sleep better to feel better medicine."

Levenger's catalog uses "Tools for Serious Readers." Hallmark is for "When you care enough to send the very best."

You could easily write 500 or 50,000 words about your company to explain its *raison d'être*. Try doing it in less than 10. Remember, it's the elevator pitch for your company that will sharpen your competitive edge in the integrated world of brand and direct. ■

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