



What made it such a big deal then and why should we care today? Here are my impressions:

1. ***It's disarmingly honest*** – It confronted and celebrated its small size in an era where BIG was better and preferred. Nobody would admit to being diminutive. As Anthony Hopkins opined in a commercial for a BIG British bank, “Everybody wants to be BIG. Even the little guy wants to be the BIG guy.” Not the Beetle! It’s small and proud of it.
2. ***It's free of fluff*** – There is no “doe-eyed, bodacious babe” draped over the car, the practice of advertising cars at the time. Marketers sold automobiles on sizzle and sex. This ad has neither. It’s about the car and nothing but the car. The VW Beetle is the hero. No borrowed interest in this ad. It is simply selling the car.
3. ***It's different, which makes it both arresting and engaging*** – First, there's a lot of space in the ad. It's not filled with a BIG, bold headline and a BIG product shot. Additionally, it starts with a rather stark visual of the Beetle in the upper left-hand corner, and the headline at the bottom of the page. What's captivating is that the car, which is no beauty, directs the reader's eyes below to the provocative headline, which engages him to find out what the advertiser means by “Think small.” Moreover, the ad is not even in color. It's a black and white ad, which, in itself, is a grabber.
4. ***It fit the VW Beetle to perfection*** – Small means BIG savings and few headaches: getting 32-miles on a gallon of gasoline, 40,000-miles on a set of tires, never needing anti-freeze, yet being able to squeeze into a small parking space!

I can only imagine what took place when the agency shared the concept with the client. Surely someone might have said, "Wouldn't it be better if we changed the headline to BIG SAVINGS? Or, why don't we say, ‘Think BIG?’ My goodness, I can barely see the car, let's make it bigger! After all, it's about the car, and I can't even find it in this ad. Where's the sizzle? We sell cars on sizzle. Shouldn't we show a real beauty shot? At least can't we show a real beauty in the ad? How can we expect to cut through the clutter with a black & white ad when our competition is using color? All that wasted space! You can put that ad on a half-page, and it would cost us half the money. Why would you put a period in the headline? Isn't that going to stop the reader from reading the body copy?"

If the agency had done what other automobile marketers were doing at the time, or what the client may have expected and wanted, it would not be iconic. Importantly, it probably would not have sold as many Beetles as it did (particularly as it had was referred to as "Hitler's car by a previous generation).

Icons like Lee Iacocca, the VW Beetle and, even, the “Think small.” ad campaign pass away. However, their memory and the learning from them burn forever.

*Richard Cyert*



## **Richard D. Czerniawski**

430 Abbotsford Road

Kenilworth, IL 60043

847-256-8820

847-312-8822

[richardcz@bdn-intl.com](mailto:richardcz@bdn-intl.com)

[www.bdn-intl.com](http://www.bdn-intl.com)