



Marketing Matters

By Richard D. Czerniawski

IS AWARENESS ALL IT TAKES TO WIN CUSTOMERS AND BUILD YOUR BRAND?

I'm having difficulty with the theme and, therefore, the title for today's Marketing Matters article. I could have chosen a title about the BIG Idea. Or, it could have been about creating relevance for your target customer. Perhaps, it is about all three. And more?

What triggered this article? Well, Pill Club ran an event to celebrate World Contraception Day (WCD), which, if you didn't notice, was Sunday, 26 September. The purpose of WCD is to bring attention to individuals' and couples' rights to "decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children." OK, I get it.

Now, the Pill Club, a direct-to-consumer (telehealth) wellness(?) brand, believes contraception should be more accessible for women. How accessible? I guess, like Coca-Cola, they want contraception to be in the arms' reach of all women. No, there won't be a gnome popping up from under the bed to provide needed contraception when the moment is right.

Instead, they believe that "Accessing contraception should be as easy as going to a vending machine." So, they placed a vending machine on a highly trafficked corner—Lafayette and Houston Streets in Soho, NYC. The vending machine dispensed condoms, individual packets of lubricant, and sanitary protection products.

Now they used the image of the uterus to adorn the vending machine. You couldn't miss it. That's just "ducky."



PILL CLUB

So, let's break it down starting with the target customer, whom I infer is, undoubtedly, young, hip, independent-minded women who share an active sex life but, for the time being, want to avoid pregnancy. These women are open to talk about birth control honestly and provocatively. These are women whom one might expect to live and/or work in Soho.

As per gaining awareness for WCD and the Pill Club, the targeting appears sound. While the reach is limited, it undoubtedly generated attention through talk value and publicity.

The vending machine is certainly provocative, bolstering curiosity to drive awareness further. Even packaging for the company's condoms is provocative. However, the latter is clearly consistent with their target customer and, from what I can gather, the Brand Character (i.e., the brand's personality).



Now, is it a BIG Idea? Well, that depends. It's not a BIG Idea unless it has a BIG impact on line-of-sight to enrollment and subscriptions in the Pill Club. I don't believe that the sales from the vending machine nor the amount of publicity it generated are appropriate metrics. Au contraire. It's about growing enrollment and subscriptions to the Pill Club by switching target customers from traditional retail outlets.

So, what's your assessment and take on the Pill Club vending machine and event. Good idea or not? Is the awareness it generates enough to build the brand? If you were the CMO, would you approve the idea? Thumbs up or down?

My Assessment and Take

I'll start with the last question. I vote thumbs down. I disapprove of the idea. Awareness is not enough to win customers and grow the brand. In my judgment, the idea is tasteless.

One of the late, great admen David Ogilvy's criteria to determine if you have a big idea is whether it makes you "gasp." Yes, it made me gasp! However, not in a positive way. I think that a vending machine adorned with the image of a uterus on a highly trafficked corner is just too in your face. It's gynecological. It's inappropriate and, perhaps, offensive to too many pedestrians.

Please, don't think me a prude. (It's clear that I come from a different era by using the word "ducky.") I recently wrote about advertising for phexxi, non-hormonal birth control. I mentioned that the commercial grabbed me with the opening line, "Welcome to my vagina." It was refreshing and playful in contrast to the vending machine, which, as I mentioned, is gynecological.

Another of David Ogilvy's criteria is whether you wish you had thought of the idea yourself. No, I do not. I think it is tasteless. There are many ways to be provocative, but I don't accept being

tasteless. It's not a Brand Character I aspire for my brand—ever!

Awareness is probably good for the limited investment in the event. However, I'm not sure it represents a sufficient population to make a dent in sales for the Pill Club.

Moreover, awareness is never all it takes to win customers and build your brand. Awareness is not a target customer behavior objective. It is a media objective. High levels of awareness don't spell success in winning customers. Awareness of Afghanistan won't get me to holiday there or support the rule of the country. Awareness of Kmart doesn't bring me to shop there. I don't see anything in the idea that would get me to join the Pill Club. Indeed, there's nothing to compel me to choose it over a competitor like NURZ.

Proposed Action(s) for Implementation (*Crossing the chasm from learning to impact*)

1. What is your assessment of the event and idea? Explain your rationale.
2. Identify criteria you use or will use for determining whether you and your team are creating and have a BIG Idea.

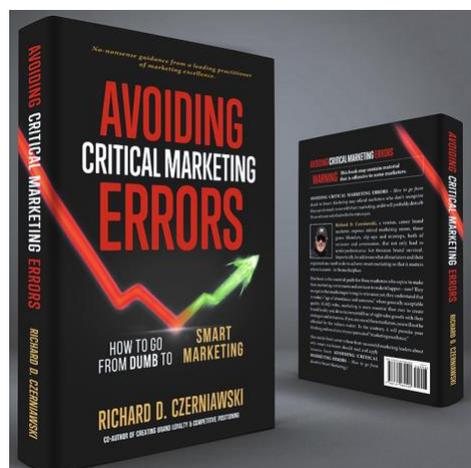
The Last Word

My thoughts on the Pill Club vending machine idea and event may differ from yours. They do differ from the Pill Club team! Who's right? Who's wrong? Find a way to test the idea, any idea, before you do it. If you learn it tests well (assuming you have the right objectives and test design), you can run with it by all means. However, I will continue to voice my objection based on my feelings that it's tasteless and inconsistent with their intended Brand Character.

Let me hear from you. Would you please let me know what you think?

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Peace and best wishes,

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