

SPEAKING WITH CUSTOMERS

BY DAVID WOLFE AND RICHARD J. FRAZIER

A thirsty grasshopper bounces his way into a bar and with a mighty leap, lands on the bar counter. He clicks to get the bartender's attention and says, "May I order a drink?"

Despite the unusual nature of the little green customer, the bartender says, "Certainly. In fact, we have a drink named after you."

"No kidding," says the grasshopper, "you got a drink named Alfred?"

One-to-one marketing guru Martha Rogers tells that story to audiences to make the point that one-to-one marketing is about giving up *generic marketing talk* and speaking to customers in terms of their own uniqueness.

For a long time, marketing primarily focused on *company* or *brand* uniqueness, not customer uniqueness. Marketers incessantly declared the products they were hawking and the companies that made them were superior in all ways relevant to a customer's interests. This began to change in the 1990s. New marketing ideas under such rubrics as *relationship marketing*, *one-to-one marketing*, and *permission marketing* began taking hold. Generic marketing talk began losing its edge.

These events were predictable two decades earlier when the fertility rate fell below the replacement rate of 2.1 children for each woman of childbearing age. U.S. Census Bureau projections in the mid-1970s showed that fewer young people would increase the percentage of older people. This was a bigger factor than longevity increases in moving the adult median age to 40 in 1989, and to 45 by 2000. Most adults are now in the time of life when they become most resistant to generic marketing talk.

An Aging Customer Universe Dramatically Changes the Rules of Marketing

For the first time in marketing history, the majority of adults are beyond their family-starting years, beyond their acquisitive years, beyond their career development years. People's need profiles change as they move beyond those years. But more than need profile is changed. People entering midlife generally experience changes in world views, needs, motivations and behavior.

The effects of midlife changes in the customer universe have gone widely unnoticed by business in general and marketers specifically. Not that these changes are a mystery. Ever since Carl Jung's pioneering work in adult development, behavioral science has known that in the second half of life people generally begin undergoing changes that dramatically influence their behavior.

Abraham Maslow observed that as people become more mature in the second half of life, they become, "less subject to enculturation." That observation goes far in explaining why advertising appears to be less effective than a few years ago when customers in their first half of life were in the majority.

Customers in today's adult majority depend less on sources of external cues, like advertising, than they did when younger. Generic marketing talk doesn't get through to them like it did when, as young people, they tended to move in tandem with other young people. Marketers need to learn the art of one-to-one talk to get serious attention from members of the new adult majority. It's well worth the effort because these people spend the majority of consumer dollars.

Marketing messages have two parts: *message content* and *message style*. To date, one-to-one marketing has focused almost exclusively on content. Amazon is a cardinal example. Using sophisticated software, Amazon makes purchase recommendations to repeat customers based on their earlier purchases. However, Amazon ignores the importance of message style. Recommendations are presented in generic marketing talk. A book recommendation for a 25-year-old is styled exactly the same as a book recommendation for a 45-year-old despite differences in world views, needs and motivations—*and in how each mentally processes information*, as we will discuss.

Direct response marketers, especially on the Internet, have given most attention to one-to-one marketing. Mass marketers have given one-to-one marketing little attention. In fact, the idea of one-to-one mass marketing seems an oxymoron. But that is not so. Any message takes on a one-to-one character when a listener *emotionally* internalizes the message as relevant to her interest. In other words, when she can say, "That speaks to me."

Marketers Can Learn Much About One-to-One Talk From Storytellers

Storytellers practice the art of one-to-one talk. They write so that readers get deeply drawn into a story as vicarious characters. They establish a *virtual* one-to-one correspondence with their readers. In a sense, then, there are as many stories between the covers of a novel as there are readers. Often, readers even become one of the author's characters, feeling his passions, fears and ecstasies. We indeed respond to stories as though they are happening to us. Why? Because our brain puts us in the story.

Our responses to a story, like responses to anything entering our brain, begin outside our conscious mind. They take form as changes in body states, such as breathing, adrenalin flow, pulse, blood pressure and perspiration. Changes in *body states* are what create emotions. Emotions are the brain's way of alerting the conscious mind of the importance of new information.

We experience excitement and tension in a story because the brain reads the stories events as *actually happening*. It has a hard time distinguishing between *depicted* reality and *actual* reality. Fortunately, a good working mind can easily tell the difference.

When we get caught up in a gripping movie, we vividly experience the differences between the brain and conscious mind in telling what's real and what's not. We say to ourselves in our conscious mind, "It's only a movie," but our brain keeps pumping adrenaline and speeding up our heartbeat because it thinks it's all actually happening.

Storytelling is shaping up to become the heart of marketing. Rolf Jensen who heads the Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies wrote in *The Dream Society*, "Storytelling has become an important part of market strategy; whoever tells the best story, and whoever tells it best, will win."

Marketing messages can be lectures or stories. Directly touting product value, attributes and benefits is a lecture. Showing people using a product to help shape their lives is a story, although the effect of such stories is often compromised in broadcast marketing by a voice over that delivers a lecture on the product. A more indirect way to generate product awareness and appeal through storytelling is to tell a story that projects values likely to be strongly held by customers. This leads to *emotional transference*.

Emotional transference happens when a person becomes emotionally engaged with a story and transfers the meanings and feelings behind the original emotions to its source. Saturn has done this masterfully, especially in its pre-launch advertising in stories about workers in their off-work lives. After the car began rolling off assembly lines, it tapped the same technique using buyers. By projecting the values of buyers, Saturn invited customers to emotionally connect those same values to the company and its product.

Storytelling Works Better Than Lectures in Marketing to the New Adult Majority

The growing role of storytelling in marketing was also predictable two decades ago. And it's safe to predict storytelling will be even more important in the years ahead. The stronger autonomous disposition of people in the second half of life predisposes them more favorably to information delivered in stories rather than by lecture. Actually, this is true for people of all ages, but older people tend to be more resistant to lectures because of their "resistance to enculturation."

It is widely believed that people become more rational in their decisions as they grow older. But just the opposite happens. People depend more on emotion as they age. Younger minds depend more on reason to figure things out. By midlife, a person has many more things figured out than when they were younger. In a new situation, they often only need an emotional stimulus to call into play lessons from previous experiences to work through the situation. This is the foundation of intuition, which research has shown grows stronger in the second half of life. Since stories generally stir emotions more decisively than contents of a lecture, members of today's older customer universe often prefer stories to lectures.

Stories help people process their lives. Imagine rewriting the Bible to replace its stories with didactic lessons. No one would be interested in such a version because it would have no human soul. Religious teachers have always known that people use stories to help them process their lives. Marketers are beginning to see this with a clarity they never had before.

A story emotionally involves a person only when it connects with some aspect of their personal interest. This is so obvious as to not warrant expressing except to highlight the idea that telling stories effectively in marketing requires a better understanding of customers' interests than is common. Marketers of course depend on researchers to inform them of customers' interests, but as everyone

knows, often "buyers are liars." The ensuing discussion will show how to get beyond the misleading testimony that customers often give researchers, and home in on what really will interest and motivate them.

Different Life Seasons Call for Different Stories

What engages a person in a story changes across a lifetime to reflect changes in life processing needs. The themes of stories that engage people have remarkable consistency among people in the same season of life. This is because each season of life has a distinctive set of challenges that people need to process.

Developmental psychologist Dan McAdams charts life story themes by season of life in his book, *Stories We Live By*." Exhibit 1 is an adaptation of McAdam's ideas about personal life story themes by life season. Each season has a development focus, a survival focus and a personal story theme.

Spring, the initial development season of life, extends from infancy to adulthood. The survival focus of Spring is play, the primary medium of learning among the young. Children and adolescents model (play with) the world in their imaginations, first with toys, most of which are stylized reflections of adult artifacts – toy trucks, dolls, etc. In adolescence, attention turns to modeling identity options, career options, relationships and ideas. Spring's story theme is *comedic*, reflecting an idyllic worldview in which everything works out thanks primarily to others in one's life. Expectations are grounded in the archetypal notion of *deus machina*—the gods will descend to make things right if no one else can.

Season	Developmental Focus	Years	Survival Focus and Personal Story Theme
Spring	Initial development	0 to 22±	Play (learning) Comedic Theme: "everything will generally break in my favor."
Summer	Vocational development	18± to 40±	Work (becoming somebody) Romantic Theme: heroic—"the world is my oyster—I can do anything I set out to do."
Fall	Shift to inner development	38± to 60±	Work-play (search for meaning) Tragic Theme: "I'm not who I thought I was; I can't do as much as I once thought; who am I really?"
Winter	Integration of life experiences	58±	Reconciliation (making sense of life) Ironic Theme: "There's good in most every bad, bad in most every good; c'est la vie!"

Exhibit 1

In **Summer**, work is the survival focus. Work is key to *becoming someone*. The tagline used by the U.S. Army until recently in recruiting efforts, "Be all you can be," squarely connected with the survival focus of Summer. The personal story theme in Summer is romantic. Young adults have more heroic visions of what they can accomplish than they will have later in life. Nike's celebrated "Just do it," tapped into the romantically heroic story theme of Summer.

As the passion cooling winds of **Fall** sweep over the landscape of the midlife personality, survival focus shifts to a quest for the meaning of one's life. Craving for a balance between work and play develops. Less attention is paid to being "one of the guys" as a more introspective disposition develops. This does not mean everyone turns into a soul-searching philosopher in midlife. Many people reflect inward turning in more subtle ways, hardly aware that anything has changed. Nevertheless they evidence deep change in their lifestyles and activities. Tragedy is the story theme of Fall, reflecting dawning realization that the heroic dreams of Summer have been more difficult to realize than once thought, and that too many have gone unrealized. Hardly any company has better captured the story theme of Fall than New Balance shoes. It has helped New Balance become the fastest growing company in its category, enjoying double-digit growth year after year while competitors have languished in the single digits or at even lower levels. New Balance speaks to the inner self in product messages that clearly acknowledge the more autonomous midlife personality. Its tagline is "Achieve New Balance."

With arrival of the **Winter** of life, yearning for reconciling life's good and bad, sweet and sour, kindness and cruelty fire up. It is about making sense out of life, especially trying experiences that seemed to make no sense when they happened. The story theme is irony, the device of poets to make more understandable and tolerable what literal interpretations of challenging events can't do.

Three Basic Requirements of Authentic One-to-One Talk

Given the advanced state of information technology, Amazon could develop algorithms necessary to recommend a Tom Clancy book in one style to customers in their Summer of life and another style to customers in their Fall of life. L. L. Bean could "manage" its customer relations more productively by doing the same, online and offline in catalogues. We have regional versions of periodicals, so why not generational versions of catalogues?

Effective one-to-one talk goes beyond recognizing world views, etc. by season of life. As often observed by disciples of one-to-one marketing, dialogues with customers are critical. However, the focus has been on personalizing product information content. Enduring relationships depend less on content than on style, with three attributes in communication style being critical to sustaining a relationship.

The first attribute is *conversational reciprocity*. This attribute is in place when each side sends the other side evidence of listening to and being influenced by the other. It's not enough to invite customers' input. A company needs to show in palpable fashion how customers' input influences a company.

The second attribute is *reciprocal empathy*. Every marketer wants to connect empathetically with customers, but the relationship equation is unbalanced if customers can't empathetically connect to a brand or company. The famous Tylenol poisoning story of the early 1980s illustrates how the power of customers' empathy for a brand can keep it healthy.

Johnson & Johnson invited Mike Wallace from *60 Minutes* to attend company meetings to observe how it handled the crisis. Media briefings were largely unformatted and scheduled for coverage on primetime news. As a result of this openness, people empathized with Tylenol as a victim. After returning to the shelves in tamper-proof containers, Tylenol ended up having a bigger market share than ever. In sharp contrast, when drivers reported Audi cars lurching forward from a stop without warning, resulting in injuries and several deaths, the company blamed drivers. This extinguished any prospect of customer empathy for the company and its product. Sales in the U.S. dropped to almost zero overnight.

The third attribute essential to enduring relationships is *reciprocal vulnerability*. Marketers want customers to let down their defenses and be vulnerable to product messages. However, vulnerability should flow in both directions. Vulnerability humanizes both sides in a relationship. When the Bridgestone-Firestone tire problem involving Ford Explorers broke in 2000, B-F spin artists blamed drivers for not keeping tires properly inflated. Ford was quieter, saying nothing about drivers' possible role, while launching a general campaign acknowledging that Ford had far to go to make their vehicles what they should be, citing need for better fuel consumption, less air pollution and *greater safety*. There should be no surprise as to which company has best survived the calamity.

How to Be All Things to All Customers in Advertising

A few years ago, a team of researchers set out to examine differences in brain wave activity between children watching a story on television and children hearing the same story on radio. Brain wave activity among children seeing the story on television was much more constrained. A little girl who listened to the story on the radio made the most telling comment. She said, "I like hearing stories on the radio best because the pictures are better."

Endless debate has been waged about whether or not the central focus of advertising should be promotion of product features and benefits. Those arguing for making features and benefits central to advertising give little thought to the common sense idea that the more specific a product message, the more polarized a customer's response will be.

This is not to say that product features and benefits should never be promoted. Whether or not they should be the central focus in an ad depends on the purpose of the ad, the media it will appear in (targeted or general), the season of life represented by the core market, and other factors. However, when the objective of an ad is nurturing and reinforcing brand essence, making features and benefits crisply central runs the risk of polarizing perceptions of the brand's essence.

People identify with a product message, as they do a story, according to how strongly it resonates with their interests. A copywriter who in effect says it all, forecloses many customers' chances of contributing to striking up resonance by engaging their imaginations. Unlike the little girl who liked the pictures on radio best, customers can't create pictures of the product and its benefits in their own minds.

In 1981, Al Ries and Jack Trout made marketing history with their seminal book on product positioning, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*. There is another kind of positioning they didn't address in their book. It is called *conditional positioning*. Ries and Trout argued for presenting product messages to project product images without ambiguity. The objective in conditional positioning is just the opposite.

Ries and Trout's ideas on positioning were developed when markets were youthful. Young minds are less tolerant of ambiguity than minds of people in the second half of life. The young mind perceives reality more in "black-and white" renderings. In contrast, the older mind casts reality in shades of gray. This makes conditional positioning often better suited to today's older customer universe.

In conditional positioning, enough is said to attract customers' attention, but enough left unsaid that each customer can complete the unfinished picture by using his or her imagination. This taps into the brain's disposition to fill in missing pieces of a picture with a bias toward a person's own interests.

Michelin Tire has long used the image of a baby to connote a connection between safety and Michelin tires. This image connects with archetypal images of baby. A baby projects values of caring, unconditional love, and the future of the species. Carl Jung said that next to the archetypal image of God, the archetypal image of mother is the strongest. Baby must come next, as Michelin must believe.

Alfred Hitchcock was a master storyteller because of *what he didn't reveal to the audience*. The creators of *Blair Witch* petrified audiences by making what was not shown the main strategy for audience engagement. A storyteller who tells all is a boring storyteller. A copywriter who tells all creates a boring ad.

How to Determine if A Message Will Be Relevant to Customers' Interests

Every product message that enters the public consciousness is dispatched in great hopes that it will connect with customers. But one never knows. Sometimes great sounding messages fall flat, while messages that seem pedestrian hit home runs. A new marketing decision analysis methodology called developmental relationship marketing (DRM) can help message creators assess the chances of a message connecting strongly with customers.

The central premise of DRM is that DNA-encoded developmental forces drive somewhat predictable changes across a lifetime in five behavioral dimensions of a person's life:

- **Worldview** – how a person connects to what lies outside their minds
- **Needs** – deficiencies that alter physical and psychological functioning
- **Motivations** – forces that compel need satisfaction
- **Need satisfaction approaches** – how a person responds to needs
- **Mental processing styles** – how information is processed in the mind/brain complex

Each behavioral dimension has distinctive properties in each season of life. For example, people in the Summer of their lives view reality through the lens of the romantic, heroic theme of their personal life story. This worldview influences their bundle of needs, and the valance or strength of motivations to satisfy needs. Their heroic sense of competence often makes them less patient in approaching needs satisfaction than generally true of more mature minds. And, as previously observed, their mental processing styles tend to be rules-based and in pursuit of clear-cut, unambiguous renderings of reality.

The season-of-life properties of the five behavioral dimensions play a pivotal role in how five systems of *motivating underlying values* (MUV) shape behavior outcomes. The five MUV systems are:

- **Identity Values** – for self-awareness, self-image, self-preservation, and social image
- **Relationship Values** – for connections to others, institutional resources, and beliefs
- **Purpose Values** – for imparting meaning to and validation of one's life and actions
- **Adaptation Values** – for acquiring skills and knowledge to negotiate life
- **Energy Values** – for securing, maintaining and repairing physical and mental well-being

MUV systems are the behavioral equivalent of DNA. They are the basic building blocks of behavior. Knowing the properties of each MUV system by season of life gives creators of marketing messages critical parameters for their design. Knowing how, for example, Identity Values influence middle age behavior differently than they influence young adult behavior gives product message creators guidance not only for content, but also for message style. The more secure identity of a middle age person makes her less responsive to declarative statements about whom she is. The young adult, still strongly subject to external influences, and disposed toward unambiguous cues, will likely be more responsive to declarative propositions about what best serves his or her self-image.

David Ogilvy said, "People buy products that project who they want to be, not who they are." Knowledge of Identity Values by season of life provides creators of product messages keen insight into the probability of who people want to be.

Looking at age-correlated differences in the operation of Relationship Values, the young tend to view relationships more in terms of potential for advancing one's aspirations in career and personal life. This imparts a narcissistic, materialistic bias in their behavior. Older people tend to view relationships in more experiential terms, not so much in terms of gain. They evaluate relationships (generally) more qualitatively than quantitatively.

Purpose Values encourage an egocentric bent in the first half of life because a person must devote more energy to socially establish himself or herself, in work and in personal life, than the older person. The older person, focused more on inner development, probing more for life's meaning, tends to think more altruistically.

Adaptation Values draw the young into novelty more strongly than people in the second half of life because challenges arising in novel experiences promote learning. The learning needs of the young are obviously greater than the learning needs of the more mature. Habit begins to become a stronger force in midlife because enough has been learned that novelty's role has less to do with promoting new learning than it does with imparting yeasty experiences that help a person feel vital.

Finally, Energy Values spur escapist behavior among the young as a means of revitalization. Bungee jumping, hang gliding, white water rafting, and, of course, lively parties all help a person to release tension and recharge. In the second half of life, people are more likely to seek revitalization in activities such as gardening or other hobbies, or giving to others through volunteer work.

Wrap-up

It is not within the scope of this discussion to provide a detailed picture of DRM. Rather, the objective has been to describe some of the most important basic principles that should be honored in one-to-one talk with customers. DRM was introduced to show a decision methodology exists that can provide a solid foundation and framework for creating marketing messages that speak to people as individuals. DRM methodology is based on well-established tenets of behavior, and on new findings in brain research about how we process information in various seasons of life. Until recently, tenets of behavior mattered relatively little in marketing. Marketing was driven by numbers: number of exposure, quantitative measures of reach, frequency of message projection, and of course, CPM – cost per thousand exposures.

Today's more mature, autonomous customer universe resists marketing based on numbers. This means marketers need to acquire knowledge of customers as individuals, as a copy of one in terms of the season of life they are in, and really speak with them in one-to-one talk.

Developmental Relationship Marketing Successes

Story #1

Intergroup, an Arizona-based HMO, recently kicked off a campaign that squarely connected with the world views of customers in the Medicare policy market. These older customers tend to paradoxically view the external world with greater independence from it, yet have strong desires to share their wisdom and knowledge with it. Their more independent dispositions make them more resistant to the influence of others. But a stronger disposition toward "giving back" makes them less resistant to the influence of those who are part of a relationship in which they are "giving back."

Elder customers generally have another attribute. Having made many mistakes in their lives, they know that claims of perfection by anyone or any company often fall short of reality. They generally warm more to product messages that reflect an advertiser's vulnerability than to claims of the advertiser's superiority.

Intergroup organized a policyholders' advisory board to get input from members of their SeniorCare plan. Later, it launched a campaign that simultaneously focused on members' more autonomous natures and their desires to "give back." The campaign started with a :30 television spot that opens on a scene in a corporate board room. The camera scans the table showing members of the policyholders' advisory board. Everyone is casually dressed. The voice-over begins:

This is one meeting where you won't find a lot of fancy titles and high-paid consultants. What you will find, however, are people like you. SeniorCare's Member Advisory Board is made up of our members and their families. They tell us what we are doing right, what we can do differently, and even what we can do better. After all, who knows more about you than you?

As the voice-over concludes, a gentleman in a business suit walks into the room and takes a place at the table. He looks every bit the executive he is—he is the company's marketing vice-president. He has joined an actual meeting of SeniorCare's customer advisory board. He speaks:

Good morning. What's our agenda for the day?

The spot concludes with a print screen containing the 1-800 number (1-800-GET PROOF) and other information. Supported by print and direct mail, the campaign registered an impressive 138% increase in quarterly sales over results from the previous quarter's campaign. We must give credit to the agency responsible for the creative execution, Lavidge & Baumayr of Phoenix. If the spot lacked the appearance of authenticity, it would likely have bombed. Using real players instead of actors was helpful to the success of the spot, which was specifically designed around the three conversational elements of satisfying dialogues in DRM: conversational reciprocity, reciprocal empathy and reciprocal vulnerability.

Developmental Relationship Marketing Successes

Story #2

Another example of squarely connecting with the world views of an intended market is a letter used in a direct mail prospecting campaign conducted by Alexander Hamilton Life Insurance Company. The letter also resonated with the mental processing styles of the intended audience.

Dear _____

Imagine the perfect vacation ... Would it be traveling to some exotic new resort?
Or reading a stack of mysteries at home? Would it be mastering a new golf course?
Or visiting your grandchildren?

Now consider a relevant fact: retirement for many people lasts 20 years or more.
Can you imagine 20 vacations?

My point is that it will take a little bit of planning to accomplish all you want in retirement. That's why many of my clients are reviewing their retirement plans now. After all, one's retirement should be meaningful, fulfilling and free from financial worry. Through careful planning now, you can do everything – travel, sports, theater, community work – that makes for a highly rewarding retirement.

(the letter then went into the pitch)

Actually, two letters were sent in the same mailing to test a DRM-based letter against a letter the company had used in past campaigns. The target audience of life insurance prospects consisted of people aged 40 to 65. Before seeing the results, make a guess as to which letter pulled the most response.

The first letter pulled a 1.6 response—a response rate that AH's marketers normally considered good. But notice the difference in both content and style between the two letters. The content of the first letter revolved around the recipient and probably reflected the view of the copywriter (likely a young adult) of retirement. The style of the letter is didactic. It lectures to recipients. Middle aged and older people tend to have greater resistance than younger people to being told what is best for them.

Developmental Relationship Marketing Successes

Dear _____

I was walking through the woods behind my house awhile back and saw a sixty-something couple with what appeared to be a grandchild, a little girl of about seven. It was one of those scenes in life you sometimes unsuspectingly come across that stirs something in you deeply.

The grandmother was sitting on a tree stump, eating a bright red apple while writing something on a pad. Granddad was on his knees, holding up a rock, pointing out to his granddaughter tiny creatures that were clinging to the rock and scurrying about on the moist musky ground he had uncovered. Curiously, a crow perched high in a nearby tree was frantically squawking as though letting me know he was enjoying the scene as much as I was.

That must have been so because crows usually don't like people around.

That scene has replayed itself in my mind many times since that day. I've been wondering about the joys I will seek in my retirement and wondering about all those I've helped in planning life in their retirement.

(the letter then went into the pitch)

The content of the second letter is a story. Its style is poetic—it evokes all five senses to build an emotional tone in readers' minds that pleases them, lowers their defenses and sharpens their attentiveness. This letter pulled a 13.7% response.

Marketing messages designed for people in their later 30s or older will generally be more effective if they have a high EQ—emotional quotient. The first letter has a relatively low EQ. In contrast, the "walk in the woods letter" has a high EQ. High EQ in marketing communications is more critical among customers who are near to or in the second half of life. They become increasingly reliant on their emotional reading or "gut feelings" to develop initial interest in a matter.

Developmental Relationship Marketing Successes

Story #3

Developmental Relationship Marketing is a customer centric marketing framework that helps in creating and nurturing a brand essence that speaks to a wide spectrum of the customer universe. A recent campaign of Wachovia Bank illustrates this capacity.

Wachovia had recently been through a wave of mergers and acquisitions that, as commonly happens with banks, had unsettled a portion of its customer base. The big challenge was in Wachovia's desire to have one campaign that would resonate throughout its entire customer base, from heads of major corporations and small businesses, to young people just starting out, to empty nesters and retirees. Long Haymes Carr, an Interpublic agency, employed the DRM concept of conditional positioning to meet this formidable challenge. As previously described, conditional positioning allows a broad range of customers to identify with a brand by limiting specifics so that customers' imaginations can fill them in.

The tag line used in the campaign was, "Let's get started." It was chosen because of its dynamic sound, and because whether customers were looking to start a retirement plan, a new business, a college fund or whatever, Wachovia stood ready to be their partner in making their plans and dreams come true. Clearly neither the theme or tagline projects brilliance, much less originality. The winning difference lay in a campaign rooted in archetypal images of childhood and childhood values. Nearly every television commercial in the campaign revolved around some aspect of childhood, told in a storytelling format. One commercial especially illustrates why the campaign became Wachovia's most successful advertising investment ever.

A geeky looking boy of middle school age sits on the sidelines at a dance looking very alone and very uncomfortable while his peers are whooping it up on the dance floor. Suddenly, standing before him is a very attractive young girl who is a bit taller than he. She takes him by the hand and onto the dance floor as others look on in amazement at the shy boy's good fortune. The underlying message of the commercial, which brought tears of empathetic joy to many eyes, is that with the right partner, your prospects can be dramatically improved. The voice-over spoke to the value of having an understanding partner.

The campaign turned out to yield the best results of any measured campaign in corporate memory. Wachovia cited the campaign in its next two annual reports as a significant factor in its continuing growth. Wachovia CEO, Bud Baker, Jr. also wanted to ensure the values reflected in the campaign were demonstrated inside the company. By so doing, he revealed his belief that a company must "live" the brand if it is to build strong, enduring relationships with customers.



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