

The Bermuda Triangle - Digging Deeper (from *Mythmaking on Madison Avenue* by Sal Randazzo)

In a project in which the team was trying to find the motivations for not using a product, the assignment was to develop a new business pitch for the Bermuda Tourism Board. The agency was asked to develop some rough advertising that would get American vacationers to consider Bermuda as a vacation spot. The problem was that many American vacationers were not even considering Bermuda, despite the fact that the island is located only a few hundred miles off the eastern U.S. coast.

The tourism people and advertising team needed to understand why many American vacationers generally failed to consider Bermuda as a vacation spot. The advertisers needed to understand vacationers' lack of motivation and interest - why Bermuda was not even a part of their consideration set.

Focus group interviews with frequent vacation travelers and travel agents revealed that many vacationers loved Bermuda's brand mythology – which combined its British heritage and its own island culture - but they complained about the perceived higher costs of travel in Bermuda and the fact that the Island is not warm enough for sunbathing during the winter season. There were also some aspects of the Bermudan mythology that, depending on your point of view, might be less appealing. For example, some vacationers said they found Bermuda's staid, old Republicans and honeymooners Image - boring. All of this information had the ring of truth.

The account group watching the research from behind the one-way mirror was encouraged and excited by the findings. They were already racing ahead to rough out some advertising ideas. Obviously, the advertiser couldn't do anything about Bermuda's weather. If vacationers were looking for a warm beach in the winter, Bermuda would not do. But the team could develop advertising that addressed some of the more "boring" aspects of Bermuda's image and its perceived priceyness. In fact, the account team was already moving toward a message strategy that leveraged the appealing aspects of the Bermudan mythology (its British heritage coupled with its proximity to the states).

The creative teams were delighted. They didn't need to create an advertising mythology for Bermuda. All they had to do was to capture and convey Bermuda's existing cultural mythology.

But something seemed to be missing. There was something else going on that had not yet surfaced. And, suddenly, there it was. In the middle of

her interview, a young woman said, "We considered Bermuda, but we lead very hectic lives and, when we go on vacation, we like to relax." When the interviewer stammered out, "You mean you feel you can't relax on this island?" she replied, "Not really. You know how the British areYou have to dress up and stuff."

This was the missing piece-the hidden emotional reason for not considering Bermuda. Although Americans are almost Anglophilic in their admiration of the British, they are, at the same time, a little intimidated by them. Indeed, most of the American vacationers subsequently interviewed said they felt a sense of inadequacy around the British, a feeling that "we're still the colonists."

This consumer insight, revealing a hidden negative motivation, was the key to helping the team to develop more effective advertising. It clarified the idea that, if the advertising tried to attract American vacationers by playing up the appeal of the British heritage, it also ran the risk of scaring them away.

Bermuda's brand mythology, with its dominant British heritage, turns out to be a double-edged sword for U.S. vacationers. It creates what psychologists call an approach/avoidance situation. The positive aspects of the British culture have a positive effect and attract the consumer in an approach behavior. But the perceived negative aspects of the British culture (feelings of intimidation and inadequacy) have, on some level (probably subliminal), a negative effect; they repel the consumer (create an avoidance behavior).

The approach/avoidance situation can create a conflict of feelings and leave the potential vacationer psychologically uncomfortable. So, the team's task was to overcome this psychological barrier through advertising that captured and conveyed the rich, British-Bermudan mythology in a way that did not leave the American vacationer feeling intimidated or inadequate. (Who said advertising was easy?)

You usually have to work a little harder to get consumers to reveal their emotional reasons for using a product but, again, it is important to understand both the rational product level motivations and the emotional! psychological level motivations. As any good salesperson knows, consumers often rationalize their purchases, but their emotions are what close the sale.