

# MEDIA THINK PIECE

## Unconventional wisdom

### Getting away from basics can be an effective way to make our message glitter among the clutter

By Gene Willhoft

Two of the most competitive advertising areas these days are imported automobiles and distilled spirits. At Grace & Rothschild we have two premium products in these areas -- Range Rover of North America and J&B Scotch. The competitive marketing situation for these types of products long ago spilled over to create a competitive media frame.

In striving to create an edge in media strategy and execution, we have found that many of the old media guidelines no longer apply. In addition, we believe that some of the more recent media dictums are out of focus.

This article will address a number of philosophies or approaches that we apply to media planning for J&B and Range Rover as well as discuss a number of recent shifts in emphasis that we have noticed. Some points are general, while others have a more narrow application. Focus notwithstanding, most of these concepts in one way or another have contributed to the success that both brands are experiencing.

**1. Deal making is as important as strategizing.** Today's advertising world tends to rate media execution and media strategy equally. Deal makers, whose jobs include ensuring visibility, getting exclusivities, attaining favorable rates, etc., are more important than ever. When you have a reputation as a deal maker in any medium, salespeople seek you out for all sorts of special opportunities. Even if you take advantage of only 10 percent of what comes your way, your clients will know you are on top of what's going on.

**2. Too much emphasis-is placed on media creativity.**

I suspect that too many media planners today beat their brains out trying to come up with a blockbuster creative approach —special inserts, advertorials. That's OK, but first make sure the basic strategy and execution are wrapped tight. Few brands are going to be built on sustained creative media approaches alone. Yes, the budget may be extended here and there, or a unique way may be found to complement the creative. As

**Be a risk taker — lock up the covers of a startup magazine**



practitioners of real-world guerrilla media, we (and our clients) would rather have a dead-on, visible, traditional approach that we know is right than an amalgam of creative media sizzle that we're not sure will work. To use a tennis analogy, the game will be won with strong, deep ground strokes rather than with fancy drop shots, half-volleys or backhand overhands with backspin.

**3. Place more emphasis on ad visibility.** This sounds like a no-brainer- already at the top of everyone's mind. But I'm not so sure. For our accounts we stress magazine cover placements. To ensure message frequency, all sports on television are either double- or triple-spotted; In the area of liquor, where we informally track distilled spirit cover positions, we never see a number of big-budget national brands. If you look at the movers and shakers in the distilled spirits category, namely Absolut, Tanquary (both gin and vodka) and Dewars, you see that covers are a strong part of their ad placement.

**4. Traditional television and radio minimum GRP levels no longer apply.** Not everyone markets like Procter & Gamble or General Foods. Range Rover is as far away as you can get. We stress an "event" approach in television planning and buying, built around up-scale high-interest properties. They include U.S. Open Tennis, PGA, USA Open and British Open Golf, yachting races, The National Horse Show and others. All events are multi-spotted. If all we get during a

certain week are 20 to 30 GRPs, that's fine. It doesn't make sense to buy programming with low target-audience composition just to reach a preordained GRP goal.

**5. Advertorials are bad news.** The quality of these special "advertising sections" varies greatly. In addition, they are always printed in a different typeface, always say "Special Advertising Section," and usually are not written by a magazine's regular writers. We believe that readers see these sections as a "come-on." We suspect they place little value on the surrounding edit, which lessens the effectiveness of the advertising. Regular editorial is what appeals to readers, not fluff pieces intended to sell space.

**6. Buying outdoor based on "showings" is not optimum.** The best way to judge how many boards are needed in

market is to consider the media objectives (brand introduction, line-extension, reminder advertising, etc.) as you physically ride the market. All markets have a number of freeways that feed the business districts. Gauge how many freeways are important, determine if the brand needs two exposure possibilities per day (in-bound and out-bound), and determine the number of boards needed for visibility.

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**7. Take a chance on new media vehicles.** The best way to lock up cover positions in startup magazines or to get incumbencies in certain television programs is to buy in the early stages. We have done this for J&B very successfully in a long list of underground city books as well as in national consumer magazines like *Premiere*, *Memories* and *Spy*. There may be risks, but the long-term benefits far outweigh them.

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