

Getting ads Banned is a planned PR and Advertising strategy

Various advertisements are designed to be banned so that the resulting earned media gets the ad more eyeballs than if it ran without the ban.

The recent Iceland Christmas orangutan TV ad is the latest in a string of advertisements that have been banned in the UK. The advertisement was created originally by Greenpeace and selected by Iceland because they knew it would be banned for being considered as 'political'. This is a common Public Relations (PR) and Advertising technique called 'controversial marketing'.

The objective is to cause a scandal in the press that generates public interest in the campaign, then an online petition magically appears on social media to share the story, and it becomes viral. The benefit to the company is not to spend money on buying media space, and have the press and public effectively become the broadcasters by sharing the ad on social media and in the news. This productively allows Iceland to save hundreds of thousands or even millions of pounds from buying airtime on media channels. In Iceland's case the ad has been seen millions of times despite having never aired once on television.

Another example appeared this summer in Beyond Life funeral ads that were banned by TFL (Transport For London) because the edgy copy promised "roasting temperatures" for a "low cost cremation" service. The ads were later toned down, but not before the "offensive" original versions were shared on Twitter by the company and mentioned in various news platforms for over three days, hence allowing the brand to broadcast its campaign for free.



Some advertisements are deliberately designed to shock, and this technique is called 'Shockvertising.' One extreme example is the 2016 Vegan vs Meat eater PETA ad that was submitted to be aired during the USA's most watched TV show SuperBowl seen by over 90 million Americans on a Sunday afternoon. The ad featured a side-by-side comparison of two couples having passionate sex. One man is a meat eater and the other a vegan. The meat

eater loses his erection and later dies, while the vegan continues satisfying his willing partner through various multiple orgasms. The ad was banned and immediately PETA announced this news to the press, provoking over 1.1 million views on YouTube in just three days. Without spending a single penny on media and saving PETA the cost of buying 30 seconds of Superbowl airtime, which is over three million dollars, their message was still received on an international scale.

In Mexico 'shockvertising' was used for a 2-minute online ad for a Vinyl Toy from a company called Alimana. American magazine Adweek said the commercial Ursula and Spore 2.3 was so violent that it was an "ad begging for an NC-17 rating" (restricted to those under 17 years of age) because it features some of the most "shocking and bizarre death sequences every filmed." YouTube banned the ad after it had reached over 100,000 views but the product had already sold out.

Another explanation for how shock advertising appears in the media is because the ad agencies often run ads without the client's permission, which is called 'scam ads' or 'truchos'. This is so the agencies can enter their advertising product into creative award shows. Often these competitions have entry rules stating that ads have to be aired at least once in order to be submitted into the contest. Ad agency JWT caused a global uproar for its client Ford India by suggesting the new car Figo had so much space that it could hold at least 3 nearly naked Kardashians in the boot. This was free advertising that Ford did not want to have.



Since it is harder for brands to reach their desired target audience and with media costs rising, clients and their Public Relations and Advertising agencies are driven to find cheaper techniques to get their message out. The use of 'controversial marketing' and 'shockvertising' has increased in popularity.

Authorities banning ads was designed to stop the public from ever seeing the advertisement, however in today's multichannel digital environment, these rules are having the opposite effect.

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