

Creative B2B Branding (no, really)

Scot McKee

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 Published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited, Woodeaton, Oxford, OX3 9TJ
<http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com>

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

1 Getting over the stigma (B2B v B2C)

- ▶ The historical importance of consumer brands
- ▶ The shifting importance of 'brand' in B2B
- ▶ The need for change in B2B creative communications

Selling snow to the Eskimos

In a world where marketing professionals of every hue and colour are expected to sell, amongst other things, snow to the Eskimos, we find ourselves... challenged. It is truly a daily struggle to summon the creative potential within ourselves and build brands. For a start, there isn't much snow left to sell to the Eskimos. Our planet is creaking under the weight of our consumerism and those of us with children begin to wonder whether the disease is terminal or curable.

But even if the snow was plentiful and powdery and lightly dusted on the treetops of the world's thriving and pine-fresh scented forests, we would still struggle to sell it to the Eskimos, because they've rebranded. They're not 'Eskimos' any more. According to the Alaska Native Language Center (<http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/>), 'Eskimo' is commonly used to refer to the [Inuit](#) and [Yupik](#) people of the world. Okay, so Eskimo doesn't just mean 'Inuit' anymore. No. I thought the Eskimos had rebranded to Inuit because that was their original native Indian name. No. Regrettably and unfortunately, I was misinformed. Having deconstructed everything I had been taught as a child in an attempt to be politically correct and remember to say 'Inuit' when I meant 'Eskimo', I'd completely overlooked the possibility of 'Yupik'. Bugger.

The PR department has actually decided that Eskimo refers to both Inuit and Yupik. I don't even know what a Yupik is. I'm happy to be educated and more than willing to listen, but I'm sorry, I've never

heard of them. And I would certainly never put them in the 'Eskimo' camp. Yupik? Really? Honestly, truly, part of the Eskimo family? Damn.

And therein lies the problem. The more we scrape around in the Alaskan tundra – if such a place exists, because now I'm more than a little confused about where I am, who I'm talking to and indeed whether they might be North American Indian. I thought Indians scalped the white man and gave Custer run for his money. I never knew they were in Alaska, and had rebranded from Eskimo to Inuit. And Yupik. I give up. Brands are confusing. The information contained within them can so easily become confused. The example given of Eskimos simply becoming known as Inuits is actually far from simple. Wrapped up in the seemingly simple change of name is an encyclopaedia of politics that includes whether (or not) one term is more derogatory to the race than another, whether nuances of language vary from the natives of Canada versus Alaska versus Greenland versus Siberia versus the rest of the world. The perceptions of the word vary and every layer of information presents the opportunity to further confuse audience perceptions of the true meaning behind the message.

As consumers, we are happy to deal with the information presented to us and process it in the best way that we can. We much prefer, however, for the information to be presented in more manageable bite-sized pieces. Simplicity is paramount in the mind of the consumer. Don't get me wrong now, complexity can be good. A PhD, I'm almost certain, requires complexity. Global warming and the consequential effects are complex. Brands, by contrast, are not. Complex brand architecture? No. I don't think so. If you don't mind, I'd really prefer to keep my brands simple. No offence (to the Eskimos, Inuits or the Yupiks).

So how come in business the respective 'tribes' of corporate culture persist in complicating their brand communications to the point where no one really understands them? They're almost impossible to comprehend from the inside so God only knows what the perceptions of the brand are from the outside. And whilst we all strive to understand the brands we work hard to develop, our opinions are inconsequential compared to the ones that really matter – those of our audience.

Chapter extract

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