

Truth in Marketing Communications: Oxymoron or New Paradigm

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Picture this: a beautiful beach filled with young, vibrant and terribly fit men and women playing a game of volleyball or otherwise cavorting about. All this while they slake their thirst with a beer. Implicit is the idea that this beer is an integral part of their fun... indeed, that without this alcoholic beverage, this good-looking group of people would be having a much duller time.

Or how about this one. A BMW races through the mountains, taking the twists and turns of the rain-slickened highway with ease ... "BMW, The Ultimate Driving Machine." The ad continues with the voice-over talent telling you that you can experience this pleasure by paying no money down and a lease payment of \$599 a month (for 60 months in the fine print).

If you're hungry, you may find your attention drawn to the McDonald's commercial telling you "you deserve a break today" or the Burger King ad trumpeting that "you can have it your way."

Have an anniversary coming up, men? Then you will want to take notice of the diamond consortium DeBeers ad which suggests that the way to your woman's heart is with a diamond ... preferably a big one, or perhaps one of the three-diamond rings that speaks of love in the past, the present and the future.

Maybe the Ralph Lauren Polo ads will catch your fancy as the company portrays a life style of affluence and sophistication, even as the main characters go riding off on their polo ponies. While you may have never been on a horse in your life, you know that people will respect you as a man or woman of taste and style if you sport the Polo logo on your clothing.

If that isn't your style, perhaps the Nike ads will suit your taste more. After all, you know down deep that the only thing keeping you from athletic success is the right pair of shoes, the right apparel, and/or the right equipment. Certainly if the best golfer in the world uses Nike golf clubs, then they have to be good enough for me ... in fact, those clubs will no doubt take at least 10 strokes off of my score.

The list of ads that portray a fabulous lifestyle or appeal to some non-utilitarian need or simply suggest that your life will be better with this product is a lengthy one. The typical person sees at least 3,000 ads every day and more than two million ads by the time he or she is 25 years old (Baran, 2003). As professors teaching our students to understand marketing principles and how to communicate more effectively with an audience, we have to face the reality of the advertising world today and understand that the examples above are fairly commonplace. Underlying any discussion of marketing communication is an implicit acceptance that most ads portray an idealized version of life to which we should aspire. Buying the product of interest will bring us happiness, popularity, status, prestige or any number of other outcomes that are certainly better than where we find ourselves.

Branding

Effective advertising campaigns draw consumer attention away from the competition and onto the product being advertised. Perhaps the most shocking example happened in the 1980's when the amount of smokers was declining. RJR Nabisco developed an ad campaign for its Camel brand cigarettes. At the center of these ads was Joe Camel. Anti-smoking groups felt that by using the cartoon camel, RJR Nabisco was trying to appeal to young people in order to replace the customers it was killing off. In 1991, Dr. Joseph DiFranza discovered that Joe Camel was the single most recognizable logo in the country. Children as young as 3 years old could recognize and name the camel. As a result, several California cities initiated a lawsuit alleging that the campaign violated the state consumer protection laws that was in place to protect young people from misleading advertising. RJR Nabisco settled the case out of court for \$10 million and suspended the campaign (Baran, 2003). This is a great example of the influence branding can have on us. Nearly every company has a logo next to the name of their company. The goal being to get their logo in the heads of consumers so they will recognize it with or without the company name attached.

It's no wonder that consumers end up disaffected and suffering from cognitive dissonance. The chances that many products will truly live up to the implied expectations created in the buyer are remote. Even though the product may provide the promoted utility, that often is not enough to overcome the disappointment in the product on other dimensions. The perfume may indeed smell lovely, but fails to deliver the promise of an exciting, romantic evening. Or the beer may have tasted great and been less filling, but the realities of the morning after diminish the advertised appeal. And while the BMW may be a great car to drive, you are left with empty feelings of dissatisfaction when no one singles you out as a person of prestige ... and an empty checking account when you have to make the high monthly lease payments.

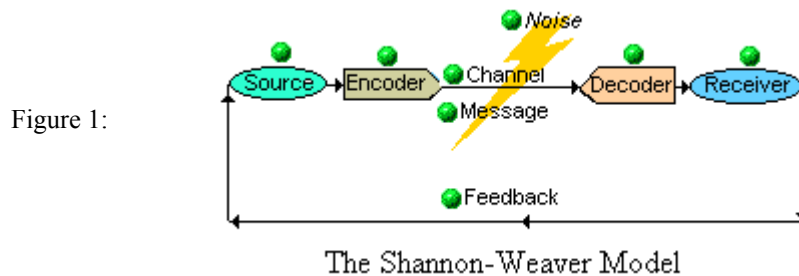
Note that this gap between promise and reality in advertising is something we encounter at a young age. How many of us have experienced the sweet anticipation of getting a particular toy on Christmas morning only to find that it did not include the special effects that were shown in the Saturday morning commercial? Or maybe you ordered a set of toy soldiers from the back of a comic book thinking you would be able to recreate the D-Day invasion ... until you received the package and found out the contents did not look anything like the ad.

Still, we persevere as consumers, buying and consuming a multitude of "toys" and apparel items and other stuff that would hardly qualify as basic necessities. And after a brief endorphin rush that comes from the purchase and initial use, the thrill goes away, and we are left with an empty feeling. Those feelings may be rekindled every time we encounter those items stuck away in a closet or gathering dust in the garage until finally we practically give them away in a garage sale.

What is with us that we watch TV commercials or look at magazine and newspaper ads and have a reaction not too different from Pavlov's slobbering mutt? Why do we continue to "buy" what the Madison Avenue ad agencies are dishing out? Why do we seem to prefer the empty promises and fantasies that marketers offer us in their communications rather than seeking out the "truth" and

buying from those purveyors who offer it to us? Indeed, are consumers actually wising up and starting to insist on truth in marketing communications or is that term doomed to remain an oxymoron?

In order to build a framework to answer these questions, we must understand the means in which advertisers communicate with consumers. The most widely accepted communication model is based on the work of Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver (Underwood, 2003). They contend that all human communication has a source and a receiver. The source sends a code or message through a channel to the receiver, who decodes the message and then sends feedback to the source as shown in figure 1.



Source: www.ccms-infobase.com

In person-to-person communication, the communication process is performed by the motor skills of the source, mainly vocal mechanisms, and the feedback is often immediate. Although, it may seem as though advertising maneuvers under a different model of communication, we contend that the same model is used for advertisers communicating to consumers. The difference comes in the feedback. Interpersonal communication codes use words and signs for feedback. In the context of advertising, the model uses consumer behavior as feedback. The feedback behavior in most cases is not immediate, but exhibited at a later point in time called the "point of purchase." Feedback in this instance is not solely based on the decoded message but on several influencing factors that we will discuss later.

The History of Advertising

The earliest recorded advertising was in the ruins of Pompeii on a city wall announcing an upcoming fight. By the 15th century, ads were commonplace. Siquis, shopbills and newsbooks contained most of the early ads in Britain. Advertising made its way to the American colonies from Britain and was used primarily to encourage farm owners to visit local retailers. With the ever-improving media, advertising has grown over the years into a \$236 billion a year industry (Baran, 2003).

What is Truth?

In all fairness to honest marketers of the world, we look at this word "truth" with a different perspective from the government and consumer groups that are concerned with monitoring "truth in advertising." In general, those bodies focus on the veracity of any claims that a company makes about what its product does. The FTC Improvement Act of 1975, expanded the Federal Trade Commission regulatory powers over unfair or deceptive acts or practices (Kotler, 1997). This ensured that companies would make truthful claims about their products. These claims are often measurable and objective. Although telling the world that the ingredients in your pizza are better than others can get a company in hot water, as Papa John's found out when they made such a claim and Pizza Hut sued them for false and deceptive advertising. More importantly, the regulatory and watch-dog agencies are not concerned with the more subtle truths that are communicated in an ad ... the kind of "truths" conveyed in the ads mentioned at the start of this paper.

As Christians, we must ask ourselves if the choices we make reflect the Truth in our life. If we agree with the proposition that promoting teenage sex is wrong, and then we pull a shirt from Abercromie & Fitch over our head (or allow our children to wear their clothes), our actions have said something completely different than our words. The complexity lies in the fact that adolescents and young adults live in a world driven by peer pressure and that pressure often dictates consumer choices more than Truth. When it comes to a teenager

insisting on fitting in with his or her friends, the battle between morality and peer pressure is won by strength of conviction. This does not only apply to teenagers. What about adults? Many Christians are disgusted by the advertising strategies used by Victoria's Secret. Let's face it, Victoria doesn't have many "secrets" left! While many of this company's ads are pornographic in nature, people (both Christian and non-Christian) buy lingerie at their local retail store. Victoria's Secret is not the only offender when it comes to double entendre. Sex sells...and everyone knows it. Sexual appeals in persuasion are very enticing. "The emotional nature of sexual information in advertising plays an important role in processing, evaluation, and persuasion" (Reichert et al, 2001). Research on the effects of cognition and persuasion found that "sexual appeals stimulate more positive ad execution-related thoughts than nonsexual appeals do" (Reichert et al, 2001). Sex can be sinful in some contexts but not in others (marriage). If a married woman shops at Victoria's Secret, she can feel confident that she has only supported the part of the industry that God finds pleasing. But what happens to this same woman when the Victoria's Secret catalog comes in the mail and finds its way into the hands of her teenage son and his friends?

If you make a purchase from a store you are saying that you approve of that store and all that they do. Many people disconnect from this thought process because they don't think in terms of having consumer power. This thinking fits into the postmodern thinking that people can live comfortably while holding two opposing concepts in either hand. A key study shows how consumers can shop with mixed emotions. O'Donohue (2002) identifies "postmodern paradoxes" that influence consumer attitudes (Stevens et al, 2003). She claims that these paradoxes,

"Influence consumer attitudes to advertising [by forcing] consumers to draw on their understanding of conventions from other cultural text to make sense of advertising, they enjoy advertising as a form of popular culture while enduring its repetition of form and content and their advertising literacy skills enable them to feel both immune and vulnerable to the persuasive and ideological powers of advertisers" (36).

This is no secret to professionals in marketing communication. Billions of dollars have been spent to tell consumers what they want. Then they choose their medium and take the advertising strategy to the edge because, "In a saturated media environment, the ability to attract favorable attention and interest to the message is vital." (Reichert et al, 2001. p.25). Shock value has become a measurable force in advertising success. That is why it is so important for Christians to act on their convictions.

As Christians, we should seek to apply a much more stringent test of truth, one that unfortunately is often forgotten by companies seeking to sell more of whatever it is they make. This should not surprise us since \$3 trillion, or approximately one-third of the total U.S. economy is dependent upon consumers buying discretionary products and services (Danziger, 2003).

Christians are fortunate in that we are able to apply God's standard of truth as revealed in His Word and to approach this issue of truth in marketing communications with a Biblical worldview. Of course, it is this worldview that guides us here at DBU as we seek to mold our students into the kind of individuals that God wants them to be. In summarizing Wolters' description of what a biblical worldview is, we can say that it is a "comprehensive framework of beliefs about things ... that must be shaped and tested by Scripture." (Wolters, p.2 and p.6).

We believe that there is "absolute truth," and that this Truth is both created by God and revealed to us through a variety of ways (Scripture, creation, etc.). The concept of absolute truth runs counter to the moral relativism that marks our time and pervades virtually every aspect of our culture. Sad to say, there are many Christians who believe that truth is a relative concept and that truth resides within the individual rather than resting in a Holy Creator. "If it feels good, do it" and "I can do whatever I want as long as it doesn't hurt someone else" are just two examples of this relativism in practice.

The vast majority of companies adhere to a worldly concept of truth...Enron and MCI notwithstanding. Advertising adheres to Federal Trade Commission and other standards, press releases are issued with the highest

degree of professionalism, and in general most companies try to conduct business in an ethical manner (for now, we'll sidestep the issue of where those ethics originate). A sample of the standards applied to companies through marketing legislation can be found in Appendix A.

Only when we apply this more challenging perspective offered by our biblical worldview do we question how those companies communicate to their customers. But it is God's standard to which we must ultimately adhere. Are we creating our advertising campaign in the light of His truth ... are doing it the way He would want us to? Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life ..." (John 14:6). To borrow the popular phrase from the bracelet (a real marketing genius), are we doing What Jesus Would Do?

In the end, the question of what is truth in any given marketing situation will be answered by turning to God and His Word. He is both the Creator and the keeper of what is true. Any other standard is false and deceptive and threatens to lead us down a road taking us away from our Creator.

Slobbering for Saks, Drooling in Dillard's

It is fitting that this paper is being delivered during the annual festival of consumer excess we call the Christmas shopping season. If you get a daily newspaper, you awakened on Thanksgiving Day to an edition containing enough advertising flyers to require a second bag for the paper carrier to put them in. At some point during the day, you may have sat and looked at what great deals could be had at various retailers... if you were willing to get there in time to line up for the 6 a.m. opening time. While some might have thought the drooling was in anticipation of the turkey to come, the reality (if we were willing to admit it) was that we couldn't wait to get out and buy, buy, buy.

The reality is that there really is very little that we need. But that doesn't stop us from looking and wanting even when we know the credit cards are at the limit and the bank account is in negative territory. And the reflex reaction is only worse when out in the stores where the sights, sounds and even smells can mix to concoct a potent brew that says "buy me!" Even as I sit writing this I

occasionally take a peek at a JC Penney catalog and think to myself "I wouldn't mind having that." That is, I think that until I remember what I'm writing and realize I don't *need* that item at all.

If you're a compulsive shopper, then you know the misery of not being able to restrain yourself when it comes to buying stuff you don't really need. You convince yourself that you just have to it (whatever "it" is), but like a crack addict, the high that comes from the purchase soon fades. You are left with the "need" to score another purchase, and another, and another, until the stack of bills is as high as your stress level.

So what makes us do it ... what makes us go on binges of conspicuous consumption, despite wanting to be sensible and to save our money for the proverbial rainy day? Even when the spending is not destructive, why do we buy so many things that have little, if any utilitarian value?

Marketing theory suggests that at the root of every marketing exchange (i.e. purchase), there is an underlying need for whatever the product or service might be. Generally, needs are considered fundamental to a person's well-being. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is just one of the theories that attempts to explain the basis of what we call needs. Hence, we can explain away the need for a Rolls Royce by saying that the buyer had a need for both transportation ... certainly basic... and a need for prestige or status that Maslow would say is tied to self-actualization. Otherwise, how can we rationally understand why someone would pay \$250,000 for a car when there are cheaper alternatives available? However, this explanation may not get to the most fundamental level ... the level where a person's soul is engaged in the decision process.

Indeed, there is a need that drives us to make many of the discretionary purchases we make. However, rather than being economic in nature, this need is a spiritual one. When we indulge our appetites for buying things that satisfy our desire for status, prestige, entertainment, etc., are we possibly trying to fill a God-sized hole in our souls? Are we trying to make up for the loss of relationship with our Creator? Is the acquisition of material things really an attempt to regain

the place in the Garden of Eden that our ancestors lost at the Fall? Perhaps this is one more manifestation of our separation of God due to sin.

Most marketers would probably scoff at the idea that people would buy a company's products as a substitute for God. On a conscious level, they would be right. However, take a look at how much of a product's benefits are derived from some dimension other than pure utility. We use terms such as experiential, psychological, prestige, and status to describe these benefits. We suggest that such terminology may in many cases mask a much deeper need of the soul. Anyone who has ever purchased a new pair of shoes as a pick-me-up from a depressed mood should appreciate this concept. The person who insists on buying the new electronic "toy" just so he can be the first on the block with it certainly is buying more than what the product does ... he's buying what the product will do for him. And all of us who buy designer brand apparel in order to impress those around us with our wealth and taste are saying as much about our own spiritual condition as we are about our sense of style.

Understand that we're not suggesting that buying nice clothes or expensive cars is bad. Nor are we saying that the companies marketing those or other products are inherently evil. The reality is we live in a consumer society where we have the tremendous freedom to buy things that we think we will use and that we think will make us happy. We are simply motivated by desire and emotion. Because of this marketers are constantly trying to create new, innovative products that will improve our lives in some way and market those products in such a way as to tap into a need that will drive the purchase of those products. As a result of our industrious capitalism, we have a standard of living that is the envy of most of the rest of the world.

The danger arises when we stop worshipping the Creator and start worshipping that which He has created. Having substituted a surrogate for the real and living God, we are assured of the emptiness and lack of fulfillment that comes anytime we let our God-instilled thirst for Him lead us to a poisonous well.

On the other side of the equation, sellers who use words and images to appeal to false hopes, lustful desires or senseless vanities are guilty of manipulation and deception. Examples abound. Among the more egregious offenders, Abercrombie & Fitch has gone beyond pushing the envelope of God-inspired standards in its catalogs. More subtle would be the various weight-loss programs and health clubs that show only fit and trim individuals who have found success rather than the 95 percent who are still fighting the battle of the bulge.

As long as we find our sense of self-worth in our material possessions rather than through a close relationship with God, we will continue to succumb to the temptations offered up by Madison Avenue. And as we are numbed to the short-lived satisfaction that comes from a new acquisition, we will seek newer and more exciting things to fill up the hole that only God can fill ... much like the addict who needs stronger drugs in order to satisfy his perceived need.

Make no mistake ... God has created all this good, and that includes BMWs and Polo shirts and Callaway Golf Clubs. It is when our sin ... the sin that comes from our fallen nature ... enters the picture that the goodness of His creations is distorted and perverted. And it is important that we keep the goodness of God's creation separate from the parasitic effects of sin. Wolter's (1985) made this point well:

"The central point to make is that, biblically speaking, sin neither abolishes nor becomes identified with creation. Creation and sin remain distinct, however closely they may be intertwined in our experience. Prostitution does not eliminate the goodness of human sexuality; political tyranny cannot wipe out the divinely ordained character of the state; the anarchy and subjectivism of much of modern art cannot obliterate the creational legitimacy of art itself" (47).

Nor does man's desire to fill his empty soul with something other than God Himself render all products and all marketing campaigns spiritually bankrupt. Indeed, in what could be the ultimate pandering to the people's needs, companies could well argue that they are merely giving the customers what they

want ... even if those wants are perversions of the natural desire for a relationship with God. We cannot assume that the Federal Trade Commission will protect us. They are concerned with outright lies, lies of omission and lies by implication. They have little concern for edification. When a company defends its practices by only "giving customers what they want," their defense sounds much like what Aaron did when surrounded by the people of Israel clamoring for a god. Giving into their "need" for a god they could see, Aaron told the people to take off all their gold, melt it down and fashion it into a golden calf. Needless to say, God was not pleased with how His people had chosen to violate the First Commandment: "You shall put no gods before Me... (Exodus 20:3).

The choice is ours. We can continue to buy the false hopes of our own modern-day "golden calves", or we can hear and speak the truth? If we demand truth from ourselves then it won't matter what marketing communicators say. We will be in the right frame of mind to discern whether or not the product being pitched has value and is necessary. This may force a new day dawning in advertising and communications. Otherwise truth in marketing communications will remain an oxymoron.

"The Truth Will Set You Free"

Newspaper and television reporters made much of the spiritual awakening that marked the days following the 9/11 attacks. Story after story noted how churches were filled ... even during weeknight services ... and how more people seemed to be seeking a spiritual anchor during those difficult times.

Clearly the mood of our nation changed, taking on a more somber tone and putting more emphasis on relationships with family and friends than going out and indulging our material appetites. Of course, some of that was due to the recession that started in 1999, but the systemic shock to our nation's economic system was causing people to look for what was real and true in life.

Even a cynical marketer such as Abercrombie & Fitch decided to tone down the raciness of its catalogs, noting that it did not fit the mood of the nation (Dallas Morning News, 12/3/03). Ads from companies such as General Motors

took on a minimalist look, with limited production values and an emphasis on the main message of zero-percent interest rates on car loans. President Bush chose to bluntly portray the options before us a nation rather than trying to sugar-coat our military's mission.

People in this country seemed to be more interested in the truth, even if the truth hurt. Among marketers, there was discussion that there might be a new day dawning in advertising ... customers no longer would be interested in the glitz and hype and idealized portrayals of life that characterize much of marketing communications. Instead, consumers would want the truth ... tell your message in simple terms and tell it straight, or don't tell it all. Investors burned when the dot-com bubble burst were unwilling to accept even the hint of marketing hype. We're reminded of what Mark Twain once said about the cat and a hot stove ... a cat that sits on a hot stove won't sit on a hot stove again, but it won't sit on a cold stove either.

Is the world ready for reality advertising? Imagine for a moment a beer commercial that showed middle-aged guys with beer bellies hoisting a cold one rather than the lithe young bodies seen normally. Maybe the message could be "Drink Miller Beer ... It will really hit you in the gut!" Or more stark would be scenes of the carnage from a traffic accident caused by someone who had too many beers after work. "We want you to drink our beer, but not this much."

Colognes would be interesting advertising subjects. "Splash on a little Polo Sport ... but don't think for a moment that women will give you a second look." Perhaps a woman's perfume would get customers by promising that "We'll make you smell nice, but we can't make you look beautiful like our model."

Let's not forget the automakers. Instead of touting itself as the ultimate driving machine, BMW could go with the tagline "The Ultimate Drain on Your Bank Account." Hummer could bill its H2 as the "Gas Guzzler to Beat all Gas Guzzlers" or "A vehicle that will make everyone stop and stare ... and think what a showoff you are!"

Haven't seen these commercials yet? There is a good reason ... marketers do not believe that customers want this kind of brutal reality. And

while there have been some advertisers trying to inject more "truth" into their campaigns ... the Philip Morris anti-smoking ads come to mind ... the bulk have chosen to avoid the craze that has given us a slew of so-called "reality shows." Indeed, the reality shows such as "Survivor" or "The Bachelor" are nothing more than a new way for viewers to escape the "real reality" of their lives.

On a deeper spiritual level, the re-awakening that followed 9/11 has reverted back to a gentle slumber. Newspapers have reported that attendance at most churches has gone back to normal levels. In general people have seemingly said that, "We've had enough reality ... let's go back to the days before we had so much reality we couldn't sleep at night."

And on the eve of the first Christmas since 9/11 that we've had good economic news, consumers seem ready to unleash a torrent of pent-up demand for all sorts of new electronic items, toys, and other items (Dallas Morning News, 11/29/03). After a couple of Christmas seasons where people were reportedly more interested in getting together with family and friends, the familiar cry of "charge it" is again being heard throughout the land. Example: Wal-Mart posts a record one-day sales figure of more than \$1.5 billion on the day after Thanksgiving, while check processors and credit card companies were reporting increases of seven to 10 percent. In their holiday forecast this year, accounting firm Ernst & Young stated that the projected jump in sales is attributed to: increased disposable income, low interest rates, reduced federal income tax rates, low mortgage rates, and a steadily increasing stock market (Stephens, 2003).

Examine the advertising on television or in the print media and you'll see that marketers have pretty much reverted to selling dreams and images and romance (if they ever really got very far away). And the consumers who were clamoring for more truth in advertising? They are remembering the ads that tap into nostalgia or portray a life-style to which they would aspire ... and tuning out anything that resembles the harsh realities of the news. Thus the desire for "Truth" has waned as people feel more secure in their own lives and don't feel the need for God as strongly.

It is a familiar tale that has been told throughout the Bible as God's people have sought Him and then fallen away. It is a key refrain of the story of the creation, the fall and the redemption of mankind. When we can buy whatever we want, we do not feel the need for God as we do when we are destitute or stricken with disease or seeing our families fall apart. But just because we don't feel that void in our lives ... just because we've managed to fill it with material possessions ... that doesn't mean the hole isn't there.

It also doesn't mean that people want more truth in marketing communications. While the idea of creating commercials with a dose of truth serum that avoid showing a product as something more than a bundle of utilitarian attributes sounds appealing, it probably has a limited scope of application. Pharmaceuticals might be one possibility (consider the ads for new prescription drugs); however, it's difficult to come up with many others. At the bottom line, virtually all products carry a component that transcends utility, and consequently are promoted by appealing to consumers on an emotional level.

Ever since the Garden of Eden, we have wanted to run from the Truth of God ... to run and hide and convince ourselves that we really don't need Him. In Jesus' time, legalism took the place of Jehovah ... today, it is materialism that creates a roadblock preventing us from having a close relationship with our Creator. Against that backdrop it is difficult to believe that customers wouldn't in a similar fashion run from the truth if presented in any marketing communications.

Ultimately, the question of whether truth would "sell" in marketing is part of a much larger battle that has waged since the Satan first tempted Eve with a smooth sales pitch. It is a battle that Wolters (1985) describes well:

"A genuinely biblical worldview recognizes that a real battle rages between God and his adversary for control of creation. This is a genuine battle, to be sure, but scarcely less serious on that account. Perhaps the battle surfaces most dramatically in cases of demon possession and exorcism, both in biblical times and today. But the confrontation is no less real when less naked and overt, as in the progressive secularization of mass media,

medical ethics, and public education... Paul's warning [in Colossians 2:8], is as applicable now as nineteen centuries ago: 'See to it that no takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.'"

Paul's words sound like a good advice to consumers who want more truth in marketing communications. As consumers, we must understand the absolute power we possess in terms of our feedback with retailers. With the consumer being the controlling factor in the techniques that the retail industry uses, consumer reaction dictates the process marketers and retailers will take to sell a product. However, this power is not a perceived control among most consumers. Retailers are clamoring for every dollar you have. If that is their language, we must speak to them in that language. If you don't like the way a company advertises but you buy the product anyway, you are positively reinforcing the marketing strategy the company employed because the bottom line is their only concern...not your feelings or impressions of their commercials.

The greater difficulty comes when the consumer likes the product but doesn't care for the advertising tactics. If you buy the product anyway, you are in effect, promoting a dualistic nature. This is where many Christians shrink back from really wanting to act on the Truth. Sure, you can sign a petition or send a letter encouraging more integrity in advertising, but the only true feedback you give to companies is where you spend your money. The key to this madness is collective control. As Christians we must abide by what we say we believe in and stand firm to the Truth. There is a way to stand up, collectively, and respond to improper advertising. There are certainly enough principled people to be a powerful force in the retail world. The moment we realize that every dollar counts to a retailer, we have taken the first step of major influence.

The next step is Truth-telling. We must be honest with ourselves and with God about our needs and desires. God knows our deepest needs as well as our loftiest wants so it is up to use to come to terms with the reality of those desires and confront our dualistic tendencies. His response to our needs is unique in

that He points to His creation as an example of the depth of God's provision. In Matthew 6, He tells us not to worry about our lives because He has it covered...so much so that He says,

"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you?...But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Our answer is found right there. The true bottom line is that whatever we need, God will provide. So as we approach yet another holiday season with great excess think of these words written by Max Lucado in *Grace for Moment*: "We show our children the Nike star with the million-dollar smile and say, "Be like Mike." God points to the crucified carpenter with bloody lips and a torn side and says, "Be like Christ."

Because we live in a fallen world, Truth in marketing communications ultimately will remain a difficult target to hit. The answer to our over-riding question will be found only when Christ is truly made Lord of our lives.

Appendix A

Sample of Landmark Cases in Marketing

Sherman Antitrust Act (1890)

Prohibits (1) “monopolies or attempts to monopolize”; and (2) “contracts, combinations, or conspiracies in restraint of trade” in interstate and foreign commerce.

Federal Food and Drug Act (1906)

Forbids the manufacture, sale, or transport of adulterated or fraudulently labeled foods and drugs in interstate commerce. Supplanted by the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, 1938; amended by Food Additives Amendment in 1958 and the Kefauver-Harris Amendment in 1962. The 1962 amendment deals with pretesting of drugs for safety and effectiveness and labeling of drugs by generic name.

Miller-Tydings Act (1937)

Amends the Sherman Act to exempt interstate fair trade (price fixing) agreements from antitrust prosecution. (The McGuire Act, 1952, reinstates the legality of the nonsigner clause.)

Lanham Trademark Act (1946)

Requires that trademarks must be distinctive and makes it illegal to make any false representation of goods or services entering interstate commerce.

Antimerger Act (1950)

Amends Section 7 of the Clayton Act by broadening the power to prevent intercorporate acquisitions where the acquisition may have a substantially adverse effect on competition.

Automobile Information Disclosure Act (1958)

Prohibits car dealers from inflating the factory price of new cars.

Fair Packaging and Labeling Act (1966)

Provides for the regulation of the packaging and labeling of consumer goods. Requires manufacturers to state what the package contains, who made it, and how much it contains. Permits industries' voluntary adoption of uniform packing standards.

Child Protection Act (1966)

Bans sale of hazardous toys and articles. Amended in 1969 to include articles that pose electrical, mechanical, or thermal hazards.

Federal Cigarette Labeling and Advertising Act (1967)

Requires that cigarette packages contain the following statement: “Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.”

Fair Credit Reporting Act (1970)

Ensures that a consumer's credit report will contain only accurate, relevant, and recent information and will be confidential unless requested for an appropriate reason by a proper party.

Consumer Goods Pricing Act (1975)

Prohibits the use of price maintenance agreements among manufacturers and resellers in interstate commerce.

Magnuson-Moss Warranty/FTC Improvement Act (1975)

Authorizes the FTC to determine rules concerning consumer warranties and provides for consumer access to means of redress, such as the "class action" suit. **Also expands FTC regulatory powers over unfair or deceptive acts or practices.**

Toy Safety Act (1984)

Gives the government the power to recall dangerous toys quickly when they are found.

Nutrition Labeling and Education Act (1990)

Requires that food product labels provide detailed nutritional information.

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