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What Makes an Ad Likable?

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If your ad is already memorable and persuasive, likability can be the icing on the cake. Likability can make the difference between a good ad and a truly great ad.

PhaseOne analysts applied PhaseOne's proprietary methodology (including more than 300 communication variables) to a set of 70 ads covering 21 brands in seven categories. Independently, these same ads were given consumer test scores from four different testing services. Multiple regression and factor analyses were used to determine which of PhaseOne's communication variables were associated with high likability among consumers.

Five communication elements stood out as essential to likability:

- 1. Entertainment:** Not just any entertainment will do. Likable ads contain *cognitive entertainment*, entertainment that arouses viewers, engages them mentally, and draws them to the brand. Entertainment must be engaging *and* tied to the brand to make the ad likable.
- 2. Brand Integration:** There needs to be a strong link between the brand and the engaging elements in the ad. Merely juxtaposing an entertaining message and brand is not good enough.
- 3. Meaningful Differentiation:** The brand must be differentiated from similar brands in ways that are relevant and meaningful to the target. Whether the differentiator is price, quality, or a defining feature, the difference must be one that the target understands and values.

4. **Limiting Turnoffs:** Likable ads do not contain content that is likely to offend target viewers such as insulting language (even of competitors) and condescension. Of course, it is important to bear in mind the targets' preferences; what is humorous to one target audience might be offensive to another. In addition, likable ads generally do not contain content that is likely to irritate target viewers, such as annoying characters, flashing lights, loud soundtracks, or heavy repetition.
5. **Limiting Communication Issues:** Likable ads are clear and understandable. They do not suffer from communication barriers such as trying to convey too many messages or trying to be so clever that the message is unclear.