

Using the Evils of Advertising to Help Save the World: We've come a long way in 12 years

by Hugh Hough

The goal of Green Team is to harness the power of communication to encourage environmental and social change.

This is the Green Team credo, our reason for being.

Twelve years ago, a couple years after founding Green Team, I found myself peddling a biodiversity campaign to anybody who would listen. We had created this great biodiversity campaign and I was on a one-man mission to find a sponsor to help run it.

Then I was given an incredible opportunity. I was asked to present the campaign to one of America's largest environmental non-profits during their annual shareholders' meeting in of all places, Indianapolis!

I was so excited. Finally, I would be able to share Green Team's biodiversity campaign with a large audience that would get it. And maybe even buy it.

So I stood up in front of about 200 of America's top environmentalists and gave my slide show presentation.

And was practically booed off the stage.

The reception I received was so hostile, that I thought I had wandered into the wrong meeting, maybe the NRA convention or something.

I couldn't believe it. How could America's top environmentalists hate something that was so dear to them, biodiversity...

Than it hit me.

It wasn't the issue. It was me. It was the messenger.

How dare an *ad agency* try to sell biodiversity! Madison Avenue was perceived as a den of evil, populated by opportunistic, profiteering charlatans.

To this audience, advertising was an oil spill on the pristine waters of environmentalism. And I was the Exxon Valdez.

Fast forward 12 years.

Today, Green Team is proud to be working with various non-profits who not only embrace advertising, but see it as an essential component in the promotion and funding of their programs.

You see, today many non-profits have discovered that it is not enough to have a great cause or program when pitching corporations. The more savvy ones are showing corporations how they can market the cause or partnership!

It's not enough to sway a corporation with a good cause (there are thousands of great causes); you need to show them how the corporation can communicate that cause to all its stakeholders.

To put it bluntly, you need to show corporations how they can advertise the cause to all their stakeholders.

Why?

Because consumers want it. We now know that Awakening Consumers are using the power of their wallets to support companies and products that share their values. All the research we have

done, says that consumers want to know what corporations are doing and welcome it when a corporation communicates its social or environmental responsibility partnerships.

Companies aren't stupid, they know the environment sells product. The CEO of GE didn't suddenly just become a tree-hugger. With the environment, he saw an opportunity to increase GE shareholder value (and help save the planet).

Furthermore, by advertising a corporation/cause partnership, we are creating awareness for that cause. And the more people know about a cause, the more they'll want to do something about it.

Look at global warming. Ten years ago, you couldn't get anybody to talk about it. Today it is top of mind, and people are actually talking about the need to do something. Advertising has played an important role.

I have been in advertising all my professional life. I love advertising. I love the environment. That is why I founded Green Team. I thought it would be great to use advertising to help sell things other than cereal or pet foods. Like the environment.

You see the environment and advertising do mix. Together we can achieve great things and do our part to, yes, help save the Planet.