

What company is the most vivid example of corporate advertising? How are they trying to position and what themes are they using? What have you seen that is a vivid example of promotional advertising?



AFLAC – “Ask about it at work”

The Aflac duck is one of the hottest icons in advertising. Many love it, some hate it – all remember it. "Truly memorable campaigns are sometimes polarizing because that's what is usually required to break through clutter in highly competitive categories," says Jim Stengel (2004), Proctor & Gamble's global marketing officer. Say "AFLAC" and almost anyone will certainly mention the duck, and will probably also know that the company has something to do with insurance. The AFLAC duck, symbol since 1999 of the number one provider of guaranteed-renewable insurance in the United States and Japan, now ranks as one of the most successful advertising icons of the last decade. Now part of popular culture, the duck has driven AFLAC to 88 percent name recognition, 55 percent sales growth (Hegedus, 2003), AdWeek (2003) selected Aflac's television ads as one of that year's best, and the Wall Street Journal lists Aflac as having one of the top advertising campaigns having an impact on popular culture (Vranica, 2004).

The duck concept, as well as all of the commercials to date, were created by The Kaplan Thaler Group, an advertising agency based in New York City. Struggling to come up with a concept to make the big but relatively obscure insurance company's name memorable, art director Eric David stumbled upon the duck idea by walking around at lunchtime while uttering "Aflac, Aflac" and realizing how much it sounded like a duck quack. "We realized we are competing for the attention of viewers who are not only watching insurance ads, but entertaining commercials for other products," says Kathelen Spencer, director of corporate communications and deputy counsel for the \$9.7 billion (revenues), Columbus, Ga.-based company, whose name is an acronym for American Family Life Assurance Co (Bertagnol, 2001).

"You're talking to a guy in love with Linda (Kaplan Thaler) and her agency," gushed Daniel P. Amos, Aflac's chairman and chief executive. "I don't think any of us dreamed of the success the duck would have," Mr. Amos said. "Our sales were up 28 percent the first year and 29 percent last year (2001), compared with the industry flat or up slightly." (Elliot, 2002)

What's notable, though, is that AFLAC did this on the cheap. Creating a brand icon often takes years and can require a massive ad budget. Aflac spends only \$45 million on commercial time annually, a relatively paltry sum to the ad business (Ibid).

On Sept 26th, 2006 the Aflac Duck was enshrined on Madison Avenue's Walk of Fame recognizing the corporate mascot as one of America's Favorite Advertising Icons (PR Newswire, 2006).

References:

- AdWeek (2003). Best Spots. 17 March 2003 edition. Retrieved 2 October 2006 from http://www.adweek.com/aw/creative/best_spots_03/030317_01.jsp
- Elliott, Stuart (2002). Why a Duck? Because it Sells Insurance. *The New York Times* (24 June 2002). Retrieved 2 October 2006 from http://www.kaplanthaler.com/press/printer_article.php?id=11
- Hegedus, Mike (2003). How'd They Come Up With a Duck? - The story behind the origins of AFLAC'S television mascot. CNBC television spot, aired 11 June 2003.
- Bertagnoli, Lisa (2001). Duck Campaign is Firm's Extra Insurance - *Marketing News Case Study* (27 August 2001). Retrieved 2 October 2006 from <http://www.kaplanthaler.com/press/index.php?id=45>
- PR Newswire (2006). Aflac Duck Enshrined of Ad Walk of Fame - Duck receives honor as favorite icon during advertising week (26 Sept 2006). Retrieved 2 October 2006 from http://www.kaplanthaler.com/press/printer_article.php?id=41
- Stengel, Jim (2004). *USA Today* – Money section 7/25/2004. Retrieved 2 October 2006 from http://www.usatoday.com/money/companies/management/2004-07-25-thaler_x.htm
- Vranica, Suzanne (2004). Aflac Duck's Paddle to Stardom. *The Wall Street Journal* (30 July 2004). Retrieved 2 October 2006 from http://www.kaplanthaler.com/press/printer_article.php?id=29