

More than Just a Slogan

A Universal Theme is the First Step in Building Confidence in Communications

by Thomas G. Goodwin

“Innovation Today for Better Health Care Tomorrow.” Just a catchy slogan for MDMA’s letterhead, right?

Well, no. MDMA’s theme allows the organization to define itself on its own terms and enables to better manage the reputation of the industry. A universal theme can help drive your company’s business success, as well.

The most common communications challenge facing entrepreneurial organizations is that they lack a coherent, cohesive strategic approach to communicating information about their business, culture, people and products. Too often the attitude is, *“If-only-I-could-just-tell-you-everything-about-my-company-then-you’d-understand-and-you’d-buy-my-product.”* But our audience’s interests often are narrow, and they have other things on their minds.

A well-chosen universal theme is the first step in building a communications program that will have a positive impact on your business. In just a few words, a theme evokes the many attributes and benefits of your company and its products. And if you employ the theme consistently, in concert with well-organized, concise supporting facts and information, you will build confidence that your audiences -- customers, legislators, regulators, prospects -- will absorb and react to your information as you intend.

“Just do it.” Nike was originally a shoe company that decided to expand into a broad range of sports-related gear, clothing and accessories. The company’s universal theme is deliberately vague so as to encompass all the desires and wants of the consumer: *“Want to shoot hoops today? Just do it.”* *“Want to go golfing? Just do it.”*

“The Power to Make It Better.” Millions of Americans view AARP as the protector of Social Security and Medicare. Others rely on AARP for health insurance and mail-order prescription drugs. Millions more see AARP membership as a way to obtain discounts on products and travel. This theme allows AARP spokespeople to communicate the association’s clout (“the power”) on behalf of older Americans in many diverse areas.

MDMA’s theme is a real workhorse. In seven words it enables the association to deliver a broad message: MDMA member companies are much more than manufacturers of medical devices: they are forward-looking researchers, scientists, inventors and entrepreneurs who recognize that the patient always comes first and that innovation drives important implications for quality and cost -- not simply price. And with this theme, MDMA itself easily can communicate its advocacy for innovation in technology, in medical practice, in operations management, in reimbursement policy, in federal and state law, and in financing.

As a practical matter, a universal theme provides the common ground on which everyone who may be called upon to represent your organization can build their own story. It is so much more than just a slogan: When backed up by informational material (fact sheets, FAQ, etc.) and training for your spokespersons, it provides a new avenue to enhanced business success.

*Thomas G. Goodwin is president of Thomas Goodwin Communications, Inc.
He created MDMA’s theme and has provided communications counsel, training and materials to MDMA and its members. Tom is a former reporter and editor of “The Gray Sheet.”*