

Getting a First Date

Provocative Images Can Help You Stand Out from the Crowd and Make a Lasting Impression

By Paul Englert

We've all heard the expression "you never get a second chance to make a first impression." What PR professionals need to be mindful of is that every press release we issue, every blog we post and every **Instagram** picture we share is a first impression to a potential new consumer. The truth is that the modern marketplace is like **Tinder**, and if you don't choose the right image, you won't get lucky. **Facebook** photo posts receive 39% more interaction and account for 93% of the most engaging posts on Facebook, according to **Fast Company**. Photos get 53% more likes, 104% more comments and 84% more click-throughs on links than text-based posts, says **Kissmetrics**.

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When you consider share of mind, you are competing with millions of competitors, most unconcerned about brand positioning or selling anything. If social media is a strategic communication tool for you, then you are competing with Taylor Swift, Grumpy Cat and PewDiePie. But even using a more traditional definition of your competition, it's a very noisy world. Imagine a crowded supermarket shelf. Chances are that there are

many items that look different but offer nearly identical benefits. One might be in a tall, lean, elegant, sage-green-with-gold-foil package, another in a more utilitarian, shorter, eco-friendly minimally-decorated-with-soy-ink carton. Some products come in transparent packaging, giving you a pretty good idea what's inside, while others are camouflaged, perhaps obscuring an inner deficiency. We exist in a rapidly changing world where instant gratification is a mere click away, so PR pros take notice—creating great images may be your best tool to catch someone's eye and give you the opportunity to score.

Never have consumers had so many options, and the amount of clutter communications pros need to contend with is staggering. Fortunately, there are myriad scalpel-precise tools at our disposal with which we can hyper-target an audience. Imagine your target viewing its options using **Tinder** (which is in many ways like a shopping app). In this scenario, you often have less than a second to make an impression or risk being left-swiped into oblivion. Good images can garner attention and give pause. Great images can communicate personality and benefits, and maybe even elicit a powerful emotional response. Whether you are creating a logo or generating images for digital marketing, take images seriously. A powerful headline is great, but a picture can be even more effective at garnering attention. There's a reason *USA Today*, America's number one newspaper, has almost double

the circulation of number two newspaper *The Wall Street Journal* (hint: It may not be editorial excellence). Great images should not merely be brand relevant, they need to be consumer relevant, personality relevant. Don't fixate on trying to please everyone—you'll often end up pleasing no one.

Get a Second Date

In the world of online dating apps, you should show pictures that bring out your best qualities, while possibly hiding traits that might work against you. Be careful not to oversell yourself: at some point this exaggeration will be revealed (“I thought you'd be taller!”). If you claim to fight odor for 24 hours but lose your efficacy after just six, kiss your chances for a second date (repeat purchase) goodbye. We all know perspective can make you look taller, thinner, younger, smarter and fitter. Your images should not be blurry or pixelated and should convince the viewer that you are someone worth getting to know. Ideally, your target should be able to imagine you fitting positively into his or her life, even if just for an evening. The same is true in brand marketing; this begins with your packaging.

Many people dread dating apps almost as much as they hate walking down the wine aisle in their local store. The wine category is a good example of fragmentation gone amok. Whether you are in a grocery store, liquor store or fine wine shop, you're not alone if you feel overwhelmed with the variety of images assaulting you—but alone is exactly how you may feel. You may be looking for a companion with whom to share a delicious meal, but with so many options it's hard to decide. Product packaging is an art form unto itself. Alcoholic beverages offer myriad options ranging from elegant and aristocratic to irreverent and obscene—again, just like Tinder. These options exist because some-

times you may be in the mood for a sophisticated wine, while other times you may prefer something simply hedonistic. In 2012, **The Divining Rod**, a new wine, needed to build awareness. It leveraged a great image and attention-grabbing packaging to help start a dialogue. This gave it the opportunity to tell its story. Besides making wine, its winemaker also happens to be a dowser (you know, those eccentric people who say they can find underground water using sticks). The brand created a great image with an attention-grabbing logo. Consumers found the logo provocative. Brand spokespeople told a story about the winemaker finding the water needed to plant his vineyards. Whether consumers believed this wild tale or not, they found the image intriguing and the story entertaining, creating an opportunity for the brand to build a relationship. When creating your images, ask yourself, “what story is it telling?”



The logo of The Divining Rod wine.

Dipping Sauce Matters

You've started a dialogue—what now? Keep the conversation going with more great images. Every picture you use in a post, every video you create, doesn't have to fixate on a product feature. It can reveal to your target audience a little about your values, personality and interests. Back to Tinder...when you

set up a rendezvous, do you suggest meeting at **McDonald's** or the chic Pakistani-Uruguayan fusion bistro? Sure, you love McNuggets, but you're not likely to look cosmopolitan dipping them in creamy ranch sauce. Ordering spicy vegan korma may indicate you are adventurous and worldly. But if McDonald's is your only option, choose your dipping sauce wisely. Sweet n' Sour or Spicy Buffalo might make you slightly more interesting than plain old ketchup. Brands need to think this way. What images are consistent with the values of your brand and have the potential to be of interest to current or future fans? Don't be afraid to sprinkle in pictures that stretch your brand a bit. Casting a slightly broader net could greatly increase your audience without jeopardizing your brand's integrity. It may also show your current audience that you have more depth.

Look, a Puppy!

Attention spans are getting shorter. A picture, a video, an infographic—these visual tools can help create more effective communications while respecting the fact that your audience is in a rush to get back to tweeting, fantasy football, naps... McNuggets. Don't obsess about constantly educating consumers. If consumers want education, they are a **Google** search and **Red Bull** away from knowing more than you do about any subject. Focus on entertaining and weave in education gradually. Over time, if you've shown yourself to be interesting, your consumers will choose to learn more about you. They may even introduce you to their parents, but let's not rush things. Move slowly, keep the boring minutiae you call your USP and positioning to yourself. No one cares... yet.

Great images don't need to have a lot of "stuff" behind them. Look at the imagery **Old Spice** employed to reinvigorate the brand.

The images don't reflect a narrow focus on product efficacy. These images are engaging, hilarious and appeal to a younger audience—precisely the people Old Spice would like to welcome to the franchise. Do you think Old Spice will win in blind sniff tests? I don't. But can it make me laugh harder than other fragrances on the market? Yes.

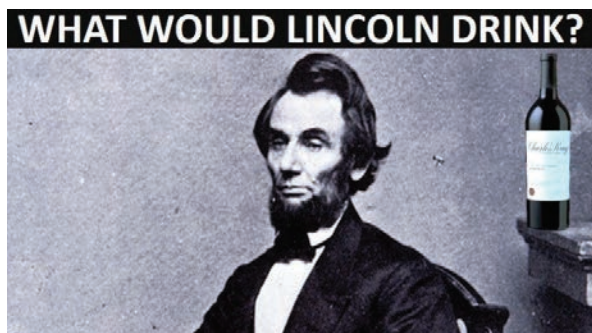


Old Spice uses humor to appeal to a new generation.

Creating great images to support your communications will increase the likelihood of your message being heard. Consider starting with a great image as Old Spice did and craft a loose brand-related message around it. If an image is truly great, it may avoid using copy. What? You don't have a budget to hire a model with six-pack abs and chiseled jaw to pitch your wares? Enter Photoshop. You now have the ability to employ anyone in history to hold your product. Just remember intellectual property rights.

Enter Abraham Lincoln. Honest Abe often is referred to as the greatest U.S. president, so who wouldn't want him as a spokesperson? In 2012, Steven Spielberg was releasing a movie titled *Lincoln*. **The Charles Krug Winery** used this increase in Lincoln-love to reinforce its "oldest winery in Napa Valley" positioning and saw the movie release as an opportunity. A simple image was created showing Abraham Lincoln knocking back a Charles Krug Cabernet with the question "What Would Lincoln Drink?" This simple image and question elicited a common response: "I give up,

what would Lincoln drink?” The first battle was won: Consumers took pause and asked a question. Regardless of what happens next, the winery has successfully used a simple image to start a conversation. The winery’s standard reply was “we don’t know, but in 1861 if he wanted a Napa Cab, he only had one choice.” A picture in the general domain paired with a simple question opened a door and allowed the brand to communicate its core differentiation. Create and use great images to start a conversation, it’s not that difficult.



The Charles Krug Winery tapped into the iconic image of Lincoln to boast about its age.

If you don’t start a conversation, you won’t have the opportunity to tell people about yourself. Don’t abandon your effort to

tout your product’s performance. Be patient and develop good icebreakers. Make people smile, give them pause, blow their minds... elicit an emotional response and you’ll burn a memory into a brain cell somewhere. Creating great images is the best way to do this. The best products perform better than the competition, but the best brands don’t necessarily have to. The best brands don’t always taste better in blind taste-tests, they may not stop odor and wetness better than the generics, but they create great images to create great memories. It’s unnecessary for videos of cute kittens chasing a laser pointer or pubescent boys getting kicked in the crotch to find their way into your brand’s social media streams, but you should learn something from them before you swipe to the left. Remember, while Twitter gives you only 140 characters, adding a photo can say a thousand words. **PRN**

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