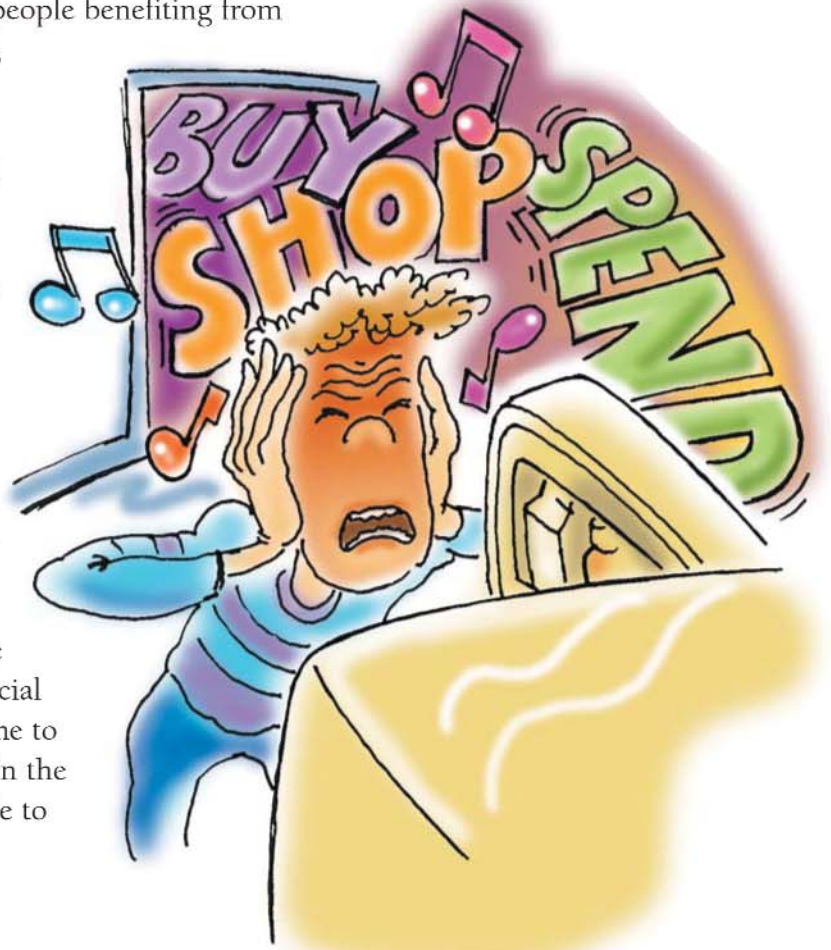


Adapt or Perish

You know the old story about dinosaurs — they became extinct in part because they weren't able to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. Advertisers are familiar with this story, and over the years they've worked hard to make sure they don't repeat the dinosaurs' mistake!

Every time a new form of media has been introduced, advertisers have been quick to figure out the best way of using the new media to promote their products. When radio was invented, they created musical jingles to deliver slogans in a more memorable way. When TV came along, they added moving images and showed people benefiting from their products. More recently, advertisers have developed interactive websites to take advantage of the promotional opportunities offered by the Internet.

They've also had to adapt to other changes in the way people respond to media. Have you ever noticed that the soundtrack of TV commercials tends to be louder than the sound of the programs themselves? Once advertisers discovered that TV viewers would often leave the room during the commercial breaks, they upped the volume to ensure that whoever was off in the other room would still be able to hear the sales pitch.



Also, when television was first invented, remote controls didn't exist. If you wanted to change the channel, you had to get up off the couch, walk over to the TV, and switch the dial manually. That meant the advertisers sponsoring a certain program could be fairly certain that most of the show's viewers would see their ads. But the invention of remote controls changed that. Suddenly viewers had the option of switching stations during the commercials. So advertisers had to develop funnier and more entertaining ways of grabbing viewers' attention in the first few seconds of their commercials, so they would *want* to watch.

Similarly, when the mute button was added to remote controls, enabling viewers to shut off the sound, some TV advertisers created commercials that told the story of their product entirely in pictures. This strategy has helped them adapt to another development: as more and more companies start to sell their products all over the world, it helps to have commercials that don't need to be translated from one language or culture to another. The translation is sometimes tricky because often an image or slogan that's seen as funny or clever in one place isn't understood or appreciated in another.

A recent campaign for Coca-Cola managed to overcome this problem. Broadcast on television and in movie theaters — in places as different as the United States, Japan, India, and Mexico — the commercial features animated polar bears. While tobogganing, the bears work up a thirst for Coke soft drinks. There's no dialogue in the ad so language isn't a problem, and the animals — surrounded only by ice and snow — are not strongly associated with one particular culture. People from all over the world — especially the cold parts! — can relate to them.



On the Language Lookout

On the other hand, language can be very persuasive. When commercials or advertisements do use words, they're very carefully chosen.

Can you think of any ads you've seen recently that included any of the following?



Research has shown that ads featuring these words are especially effective at attracting our attention and selling us products. It's not hard to see why.

But ever since the early days of advertising when patent medicines were popular, some advertisers have used language to deceive people. They can do this in all sorts of ways.

Does your local convenience store label its slush drinks "Giant," "Jumbo," "Mega," or "Max" instead of "Large"? Does the use of one word instead of another make you feel like you're getting more soda? Is there a difference between a "Liter" and a "Full Liter"? A "10-ounce" chocolate bar and a "big 10-ounce" chocolate bar?