



ADVERTISING TO CANADIANS WITH BEER, JOIE DE VIVRE, AND SID LEE

Catherine Yuile

Many Americans assume that, with the proliferation of cross-border pop culture, marketing to Canadians is much like marketing to Americans. This is simply not the case. For the past eight years, Ipsos ASI has done extensive transferability work in North America and around the world. Our research has revealed that *60 per cent of ads tested in the U.S. have a completely different sales effectiveness potential in Canada!*

And within Canada, we see major differences between English Canada and Quebec. Even if we look only at very strong, tested ads in English Canada, just 25 per cent can be transferred to Quebec as is, and a mere 10 per cent can be transferred with some adaptations. *That leaves a whopping 65 per cent of strong ads that should not be ever aired in French Canada; instead, a new creative treatment is needed!*

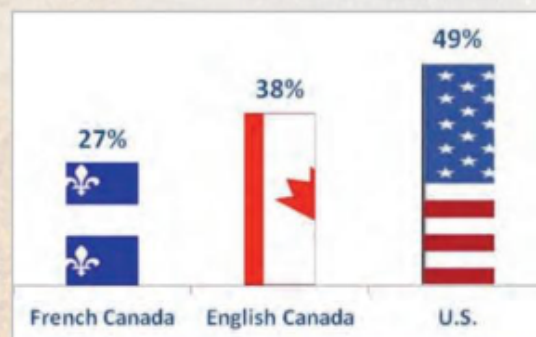
So why are there such differences? Books like *Fire and Ice*, by Michael Adams, have suggested that there is a continuing divergence in cultural values between the two nations. The book argues that, fundamentally, we are becoming less alike, not more alike.

It is interesting that Americans do not think we are different from them. But Canadians' views on many fundamental social and values issues are in fact quite distinct from those of the Americans; and we need to take these views into account when designing communications for Canadians.

It is important to understand that Canadians are more skeptical of advertising than Americans are. *Fire and Ice* suggests more than four in ten Americans agree that it is very likely a product will be good if it is widely advertised. Only two in ten Canadians have this blind trust. When we look at our Ipsos ASI database across the two countries, we also see that Canadians have a harder time agreeing about the credibility of an ad's message – particularly in French Canada.

Figure 1 illustrates the differing percentages of American, French Canadian and English Canadian consumers who find a particular ad's message credible.

Figure 1: Percentage of Consumers Who Find an Ad's Message Credible



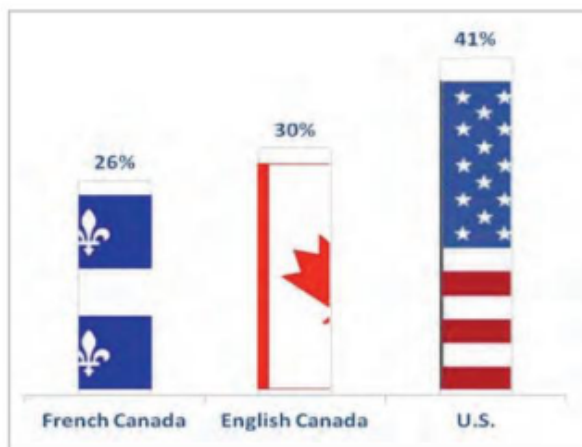
Source: Ipsos ASI North America Copy Testing Database

So while Canadians in general are a skeptical bunch, there are some interesting nuances that help marketers overcome the skepticism in each market.

For English Canadians, it is particularly important for brand stories to provide strong information value that includes real, tangible benefits. English Canadians really like to understand how a product works in resolving a problem, so having strong reasons to believe are key. This disposition holds across all consumer touchpoints, and especially in-store, as Canadians invest less time in making purchase decisions and are more impulsive, while also being more hesitant to try new products.

For French Canadians, information is not necessarily the way to go; they react more positively to emotional benefits. French Canadians are a more skeptical market, and they are less likely than either Americans or English Canadians to relate to advertising messaging.

Figure 2: Percentage of Consumers Who Find an Ad's Message Relevant



Source: Ipsos ASI North America Copy Testing Database

If an ad does not feel as if it were made for French Canadians, it detracts from credibility and relevance. (See figure 2, which illustrates the differing percentages of American, French Canadian and English Canadian consumers who find a particular ad's message relevant.) Because the French language has a sacred place in French culture, it is important to ensure that there are no obvious signs of an English connection – no English-based music, no obvious signs of a voice-over, and no improper use of language. Any of these would be a sign that an ad was not made for the Quebec market and would provide an invitation to tune out.

French Canadians respond more positively to being entertained, as they approach life with much *joie de vivre*: advertising should reflect that disposition. They live a more hedonistic lifestyle and prefer experiences to owning things. A recent study by Headspace Marketing revealed that French Canadians are more likely to live for today and less likely than English Canadians to think about the future. The firm also suggested that French Canadians are looking to simplify their lives and manage their time more efficiently, and that they will reward those who come up with simpler solutions. Thus, rallying around experiences and a simpler life in creative content will resonate much more effectively with French Canadians.

French Canadians often talk about being very socially active in a small, confined circle of those they know well – “*ma petite vie*,” an inner circle that is off limits to all but the closest friends and family members. They tend to be even more private than English Canadians: newcomers, strangers, new brands, and new products all fall outside the inner circle. Cultivating friends and maintaining loyalty to those friends are very important, and Quebecers do not “trust” outsiders. In relation to brands, they have a resistance to change and are loyal to brands that are established. They are not likely to try new brands or products before their friends do.

French Canadian celebrity is not seen as an outsider. More than any other province, Quebec has its own celebrities. Many of the top ten TV shows watched by Quebecers are “made in Quebec.” Importantly, only a minority of francophones watch English network channels. Similar habits apply to books and magazines, meaning that celebrities that English Canadians think of as household names may have very little, if any, presence in Quebec, highlighting the importance of local talent.

One of the most compelling examples of advertising in Quebec is the Pepsi story. Pepsi actually lagged Coke in the Quebec market until the mid-eighties. Although Pepsi's ad at that time – the “New Generation” campaign, featuring Michael Jackson – was a hit globally, it didn't do much for the brand in Quebec, for the reasons we mentioned earlier. So Pepsi turned to local celebrity Claude Mcunier to launch Quebec-only ads for the first time. Pepsi used the slogan “*Ici, c'est Pepsi*” (“Here, it's Pepsi”) in answer to Coca-Cola's “*Everywhere in the world, it's Coke*.”

And the impact was nearly instantaneous. The ads scored in the top percentage of all ads ever tested in Quebec. They did a brilliant job of capturing some distinct Quebec sentiments in very relevant ways, generating strong emotional connections with, for example, *Moving Day*, *poutine*, the cold, the condition of the roads, and connections to friends. Whereas Pepsi sales lagged those of Coke by about 15 per cent in 1984, Pepsi had a twelve-point advantage two years later, its lead growing to 20 per cent by the early 1990s. To this day, Quebec is one of the few markets in the world where Pepsi still dominates Coke.

While English Canadians may not have the same *joie de vivre* as French Canadians, we are an optimistic bunch. We want to see a product solve a problem, and we want the delivery of that solution to be done in an upbeat and positive manner (though we don't like things to get too crazy, so sounds and voices that are overly excited and energetic are much less likely to resonate in English Canada than in the U.S.).

When it comes to advertising, we Canadians are less aspirational than our American counterparts. The implications for creative are the following:

- Characters need to be diverse, relatable and relaxed.
- The ads have to have real, recognizable settings.
- Aspirations should be couched in the everyday.
- Ads should show types of modern families that challenge stereotypes.

English Canadians prefer diversity in characters. In fact, English Canadians respond positively to types of modern families that challenge stereotypes – for example, one in which dad does household chores. This preference is not the case in the U.S., where traditional types of families are embraced. For years now, about half of Americans have believed that the father of the family should be the master of his home (see *Fire and Ice*).

French Canadians, more than any other North American market, love to see characters interact with each other. We've seen this idea of relatable characters depicted in the everyday, in real settings and with real aspirations, play out many times and across categories – whether it be in advertising for beauty products or for beer. So let's have a closer look at these two categories.

When it comes to beauty ideals, Canadian women want to look the best they can in a natural way; that means not too much makeup, no drastic anti-aging techniques, and so on. They want to see models that represent Canadian women themselves, models they can identify with. So models that are too young, too skinny, or too “perfect” do not tend to resonate in this country the way they do in the U.S. Canadians are much more likely to tune out to an ad's message if they think that the models don't look the way they do because of product performance, but because they are already beautiful. It comes back to our deep-rooted skepticism.

As for beer advertising, Canadian men want to be able to see themselves in the male characters who are having a good time or experience in the ads. While they may not have issues watching beautiful models in ads, they do want to see male characters they can relate to. And when it comes to being aspirational, even young Canadian men seem to prefer contests touting smaller prizes that they have a greater chance of winning over those offering grandiose prizes with worse odds. We are a realistic bunch, indeed!

One of the most successful of Canadian-developed creative content, resonating strongly in this country, is Budweiser's “Flash Fans” video, created by Anomaly. Debuted during the Canadian Super Bowl broadcast in 2012, the content quickly

went viral, and it has now been viewed more than four million times on YouTube. In the “officially sponsored” world of sports and brand partnerships, connecting with consumers in a genuine way can be challenging – particularly when an iconic U.S. brand is trying to make a play on the sport that Canadians hold so dear.

However, Budweiser not only obtained permission to play in this space, but did so in a way that genuinely elevated that space by uncovering a unique and untapped Canadian consumer-centric passion for playing the game, and thereby transforming an everyday beer-league hockey game into a special once-in-a-lifetime event with fanfare. Further, though the brand clearly presented itself as the sponsor of these moments, doing so did not come at the cost of keeping the content true to the game and its fans – a delicate balance when trying to create branded content based on a true consumer passion. (You can watch Budweiser's “Flash Fans” at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0qZYqdsYAg>)

While ideal, it is not realistic to think that we can create a homegrown ad for Canada every time. So do imported ads really resonate with Canadians? Unfortunately, more often than not, the answer is no. So if a brand imports creative content across the border into Canada, it is important to consider two fundamental principles.

First, *the strategy must be big enough – it must be fresh and/or relevant enough – to effectively penetrate Canada.* If the brand's position or message is not seen to be differentiated, relevant or believable, it will fail to generate effective interest and/or persuasion.

Second, *the executional idea must resonate well.* Fundamental executional elements (e.g., characters and scenario) that fail to support English or French Canadians' cultural attitudes, habits or sentiments will leave the audience uninterested in or distracted from receiving the key message and/or recognizing the brand.

A final thought: With our diverse culture, a critical eye toward advertising, and hot homegrown agencies like Sid Lee, why not use Canada as a test market for global creative, eh?

Catherine Yuile is a senior vice-president with Ipsos ASI and heads up one of Canada's client service teams overseeing both creative development and brand health tracking for many top Canadian and global brands. You can reach her at Catherine.Yuile@ipsos.com or follow her on Twitter (@cyuile).