



# Be More Deviant



With the economy currently on its knees, we make the case for why your brand proposition needs to stand out like a gimp at a garden party.

 NOKAMO

With the economy currently as fragile as a social media mogul's ego, it's little wonder so many marketers are feeling like they're in a corporate chokehold for which they've forgotten the safe word.

Yet despite this, many businesses continue to describe their products and services as though they exist in splendid isolation, doling out anodyne cut-and-paste propositions created in a fictional world where factors like competition and audience apathy don't exist, ceding control to the market and submissively waiting for an upturn in their fortunes.

Did you know 81% of CEOs think their brand is different, but only 7% of customers agree?

Without an arresting articulation of what you stand for and the value you offer to the market, products and services become mere commodities, relegating enquiries to a price negotiation and keeping you gagged, bound and operating with both hands tied behind your back.

If all you do is shout about what everybody else is shouting about, is it any surprise nobody's listening? Which is why 'a conspicuous proposition' are the safe words brand marketers need to be thinking about right now.



Camouflage. Good for soldiers. Bad for brands.

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What do we mean by that?

Growth ahead of business as usual requires that you deal in something exceptional. Platitudes and clichés do not a punchy profit make. Ambitious businesses need propositions that destabilise the order of the market, reposition competitors, and put things on an unequal footing.

There are a number of ways to do this. Either via a product that is materially different with a genuine USP (e.g. Dyson is the only vacuum cleaner with a ball) or via a materially distinctive way of positioning a reasonably interchangeable product (e.g. Beats by Dre providing the 'focus' you need to win).

The point is to answer the question of 'why you?' specifically in a way that makes you stand out like a gimp at a garden party.

The more deviant a proposition is from everybody else's offerings, the better. Why? Because people don't clamour for category standards. They don't fetishize features. They don't stand agog at generic attributes.

The brain is hard-wired to notice difference. It is aroused by novelty. It gets its kicks out of kinks. And the less resource you have available to expend, the more important this deviancy from the norm is if you want to magnify your investment's intensity and impact.

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Like David v Goliath, slaying the competition requires thinking differently.





Your proposition has to be a distillation of your essence, relative to the audience's desires, needs or attitudes.

That doesn't mean resorting to shock tactics to flog people into a frenzy for the sake of it. Equally it doesn't mean pretending to be something you're not. Case in point, Kim Kardashian can wear all the Balenciaga rubber masks she likes, but no one really believes she's subservient to anything other than her own avarice.

Your proposition has to be a distillation of your essence, relative to the audience's desires, needs or attitudes, one that delivers meaning beyond mere description and the potential for creativity beyond wallpaper.

For example, Rapha believe cycling is about 'suffering', a far more emotive platform from which to rhapsodise than 'the chamois in their shorts' ever could. It gives customers something to identify with; it's incomparable and something hard-core cycling fans absolutely understand and can believe in.

But getting your proposition right isn't just about turning customers on. A conspicuous proposition - and the differentiated business strategy that it acts as an articulation of - can generate media interest, attract the best talent, and appeal to investors and backers.


It also works internally, acting as a guiding principle, a set of bindings that reduce wriggle room, set tighter tolerances and keep all stakeholders tethered to a common purpose.

Any confusion at brand proposition level tends to waterfall through the business, eroding competitiveness, compromising value, and leaving marketing nursing the welts from the beatings administered by the rest of the board.

But like all good safe words, a clear proposition keeps things consensual, ensures everyone's clear on boundaries, and stops any miscommunications from getting too far out of hand.

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A proposition's development requires discipline and servitude to the rigour of strategic marketing.

**So how do you go about making sure yours is stiletto-sharp and ready to leave an imprint on your audience?**

Anyone expecting a pointy step-by-step guide may find this bit frustratingly anti-climactic.

Conspicuous propositions are not easy to arrive at. Nothing good ever was. It's a bit like trying on a latex bodysuit purely out of curiosity. Lots of thrashing and sweating and before you're even three quarters of the way in you'll wonder if it was worth the effort.

Their development requires discipline and servitude to the rigour of strategic marketing; the slavish execution of research, segmentation, targeting and positioning to validate or course correct the very foundations on which your business or brand has been built.

But it is only by working through the pain and pinpointing your particular proclivities that you uncover the insights on which the lateral leap into something brand spanking new can be made.

Failure to differentiate your take-to-market message isn't just lazy, **it's masochistic. It leaves money on the table.**

Creatively, it means knowing when to push harder and when to pull back, understanding that which will augment your business's existing assets, and that which will make them shrivel.

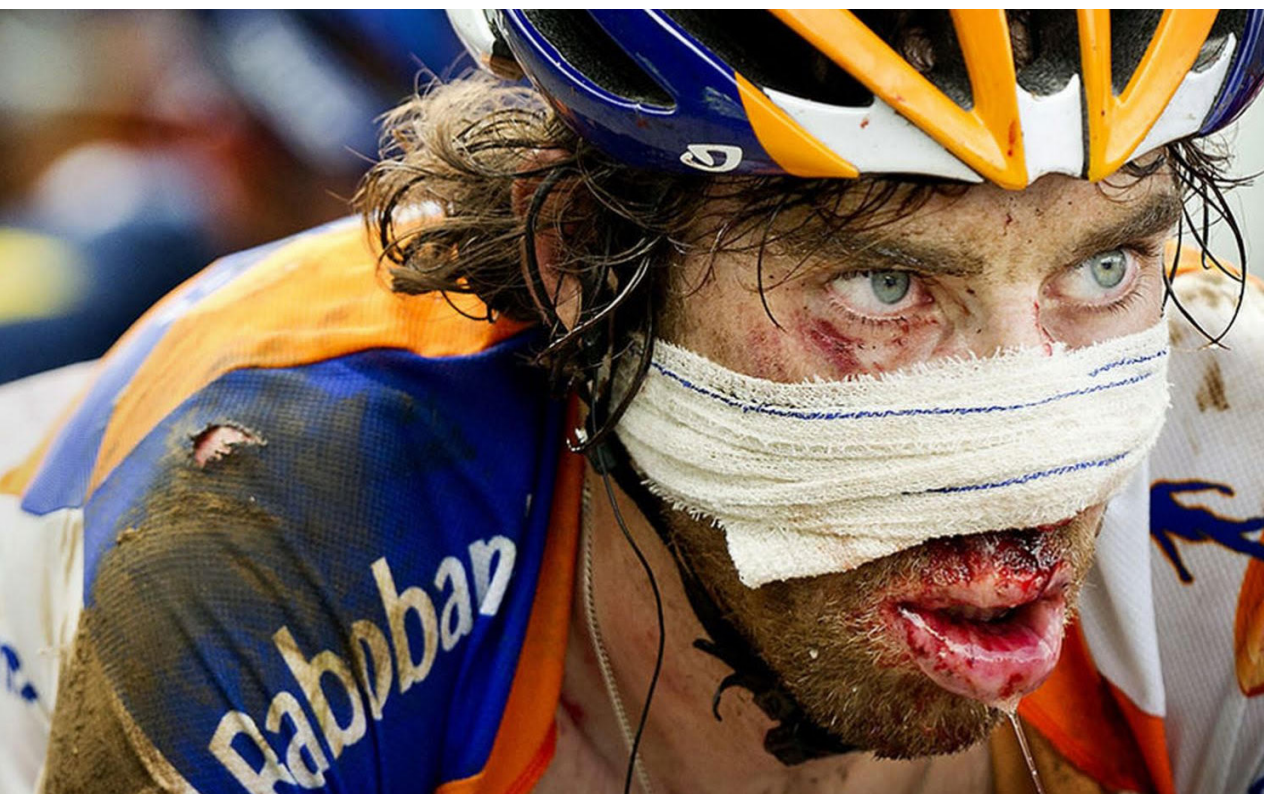
For most people in the world of vanilla marketing, difference from the mainstream can feel like a perversion. A tweak too far. They worry that people might not be into this new approach; that they might turn people off.

And that's all true.

But good marketing means making active choices, it means getting comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Sure you can probably get by playing it safe – we're not so naïve to think that a lack of proposition can break a business - but there's a reason why The Chippendales dress as firemen and not accountants. Risk is sexy. Rationality isn't.

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For Rapha, cycling equals 'suffering'.

For those prepared to overcome their inhibitions and bite the bullet (or ball-gag if that's your thang) a conspicuous proposition is an investment in any future investment made, a shot of Viagra to the corporate bloodstream that both improves and sustains a business's overall performance.

But for those too meek to experiment with something different, their chance of disproportionate profits and growth will continue to be held in check by their own subjugation.

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