

Disruptive Advertising: TRIZ And The Advertisement

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Abstract

This article is about the possible application of some of the TRIZ tools to the problem of marketing, and specifically issues surrounding the systematic creation of disruptive advertisements. Disruptive advertisements according to one of the world's leading advertising agencies are those that attract customers because they fundamentally challenge and disrupt conventional modes of thinking. In TRIZ terms, a disruptive advertisement is one that challenges a contradiction. The article uses a UK survey of the nation's favourite television advertisements as its foundation and examines them for the presence of contradiction elimination and, where relevant, the strategies used to overcome those contradictions.

Introduction

One of the world's biggest advertising agencies has published two books in the past four years on some of the secrets of their success (Reference 1, 2). The underlying philosophical basis underlying a lot of what they have achieved involves the recognition and challenging of conventions. Jean-Marie Dru calls this 'disruption'. Disruption is effectively about finding a new way of presenting things; it is about paradigm shifts; finding new s-curves (Reference 3, Chapter 7). What Dru and his team have found - without any apparent awareness of TRIZ - is that locating these shifts involves the identification and resolution of contradictions. In many senses, from their advertising context, they are looking for the same sort of disruptive shift in the thinking of the recipient that comes from humour. Humour, as discussed every month in the CREAX newsletter (Reference 4), is fundamentally about contradiction resolution. As illustrated in Figure 1, a joke involves sending the listener in one direction while the joke teller travels in another one. The 'joke' emerges when the listener learns that they have travelled in the wrong direction, and make the jump to the right direction - i.e. they solve a contradiction.

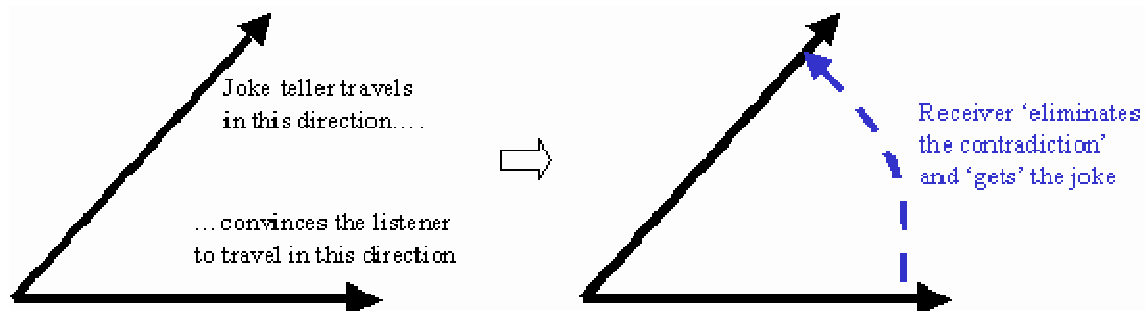


Figure 1: The Role of Contradictions in Humour.

Initial investigations at CREAX have revealed that the contradiction solving mechanisms underlying humour are bound by the same 40 inventive strategies that have been uncovered during TRIZ research (see also Technical, Business, Social, Architecture, Food Technology, Software Development, and Microelectronics examples of the 40 Principles at References 5-11 respectively).

Bearing in mind the apparent similarities between humour and disruptive advertising strategies, our working hypothesis at the start of this investigation has been that disruptive advertising strategies will also be strongly connected to the 40 Inventive Principles contained in TRIZ.

In order to test the hypothesis, the investigation has made use of the output of a national study conducted by a UK TV channel and newspaper (Reference 12), after their survey to find the '100 Greatest TV Ads' in the UK as voted by viewers.

The basis for the investigation, then, has been to examine each of these 100 advertisements - starting from number 100 and working systematically to number 1 - for the presence of a contradiction resolution, and then, if one is present, an evaluation of the inventive strategy used to make the disruptive shift. In recognising that not everyone will be familiar with advertisements in the UK, the results have been presented in generic terms with, for each advertisement, an identification of the underlying convention before a particular ad appeared, the convention shift created by the ad, and then the strategy used to achieve that shift.

Rank	Subject	Year	Prevailing Convention Prior to Ad	Disruption Inserted By Ad	Inventive Principles Employed
100	Stork SB (margarine)	1962	Advertisements are made by actors	First UK 'vox-pop' - everyday consumers featured	35
99	Pedigree Chum (dog food)	1969	All dog foods are similar	Champion dogs ALWAYS eat Pedigree Chum	20
98	Meccano (children's toy)	1967	-	No disruption	-
97	Clark's Shoes	1976	Shoe advertisements feature shoes	Shoe ad features foot (function of shoe featured)	13
96	Sainsbury's (supermarket)	1991-5	Supermarkets sell a wide range of products	Those products are part of a recipe (function of food featured)	13
95	Charlie (perfume)	1975	Perfumes make women more attractive to men	Perfumes empower women ('with one squirt, you can wear the trousers')	13 4
94	Parker Pens	1975	-	No disruption	(famous actress)
93	Timex (wrist-watches)	1964	Advertisements use anonymous 'ad' music	First UK adapted use of hit song by popular group	5
92	Gibbs SR (toothpaste)	1955	No TV Advertisements	First UK TV Advertisement	35
91	Benson & Hedges (cigars)	1974	Advertisements sell a product	Advertisements tell a dramatic story; product apparently incidental	5

90	Barclaycard	1984-8	Credit cards are 'exclusive'	Everyone can have a card and use it anywhere	13
89	Chunky (dog-food)	1967	-	No disruption	(distinctive dog)
88	Double-Diamond (beer)	1968	Difficult to advertise alcohol when you are not allowed to say that it 'enhances your mood'	Drink alcohol and 'something miraculous happens - darts always hit bulls-eye, etc	35 38
87	Strand (cigarettes)	1960	Sell the brand	Sell a 'mood'	28 35
86	Nimble (low calorie bread)	1968	Bread is food - advertised very literally	Woman in hot air balloon used to emphasise 'lightness'	35
85	Courage Best (beer)	1979	Beer is a forward looking drink	Spoof an old black and white film to emphasise 'traditional' nature of Courage	13 5
84	Brut (men's after-shave)	1976	-	No disruption	(popular sportsmen)
83	Cointreau (liqueur)	1972	Show the same ad through the duration of a campaign	First UK 'soap opera' ad - story progresses with time	15 20
82	Shell (fuel)	1962	Oil companies sell fuel	Sell 'freedom' (i.e. the function of the fuel)	35
81	Fruit Gums (candy)	1956	Advertisements are directed at the purchaser	First UK 'pester-power' ad - 'don't forget the fruit gums, mum'	24
80	Bird's-Eye Beefburgers	1974-6	Advertisements always feature actors	Ad contains <i>only</i> non-actors	13
79	Remington (shaver)	1979	CEOs don't appear in advertisements	'Personality' CEO Victor Kiam, 'I liked it so much, I bought the company'	13
78	Olympus Cameras	1977	Use a famous person to advertise the product	Advertisements built on scenario where no-one recognises the famous photographer	13
77	Eggs	1958	Advertisements communicate their message through a script	Ad features only 'go to work on an egg' - which becomes a sound-bite adopted by the nation	2
76	British Rail	1989	-	No disruption	-
75	Mars (confectionery)	1958	Confectionery is not advertised on TV	'Mars helps you work, rest & play' - 1st UK chocolate advertisement	35
74	Lego (children's toy)	1980	Advertisements for toys advertise the toy	Advertising 'imagination'	35

73	Murray Mints (candy)	1955	Advertisements have a voice-over	First UK ad to feature a sing-along jingle ('...too good to hurry mints')	28 5
72	Fairy Liquid (detergent)	1961	Detergent is not a 'generational' thing	Detergent can be a generational thing (mother-daughter conversations)	20 24 5
71	The Guardian (newspaper)	1986	Newspapers advertised on the basis of price, promotional offers, special articles	Ad shows aggressive youth running towards shocked-looking man in suit - audience assumes youth is going to attack man; then camera zooms out to reveal youth is pushing man out of way of falling objects (message - Guardian gives you the 'big picture')	17
70	Cresta (soda)	1972	Advertisements feature visuals, voice and music	Slogan 'it's frothy man' also featured a distinct facial contortion for kids to copy	28 (another sense)
69	Dunlop (car tyres)	1993	Advertisements emphasise traditional safety element of tyres	Character throws very unexpected hazards in the way of the driver - focus on the character not the tyre	13
68	British Gas	1986	Advertisements work by repeating their message	Get the customer to repeat the message for you ('if you see Sid, tell him')	25
67	Sony (televisions)	1995	-	No disruption	(spectacular stunt)
66	Toshiba (televisions)	1984	Television manufacturers make televisions	A television manufacturer with a personality/ Identity	35
65	Birds-Eye Fish Fingers	1968	Fish fingers are nutritious food	Fish fingers are an adventure	35
64	Schweppes (mixer drink)	1963	Advertisements sell mixer drinks	Ad contains a mini-drama - in which product is apparently incidental	7
63	Yorkie (chocolate bar)	1976	Chocolate is for females	Chocolate is for males	13 4
62	British Airways	1989	Advertisements are small	Epic proportion advertisement	35
61	Maxell (cassette tape)	1990	Advertisements are serious and are based on the technical performance of tape	Ad taps into natural tendency for people to mis-hear pop music lyrics and makes a joke about it	13
60	Rice Krispies (breakfast cereal)	1955	Breakfast cereal is nutritious	Ad is about the 'snap, crackle and pop' feature of the cereal	28
59	Audi	1984	Advertise in a	'Vorsprung Durch Technik'	13 35 5

	(automobiles)		language your audience understands	(thus emphasizing the 'German'ness of the car)	
58	Hofmeister (beer)	1983	Men drink beer	A friendly beer character drinks beer	35
57	After Eights (chocolate)	1963	Chocolate is for children	Chocolate is eaten 'after eight' when the kids are in bed - selling a sophisticated eating experience	13
56	Fiat (automobiles)	1979	The best cars are made by 'craftsmen'	'Hand-built by robots'	35 13
55	Whiskas (cat-food)	1976	Advertisements are targeted at cat-owners	Ad aimed at the cat (flashing light, canaries, fast moving objects, etc) - things cat owners know their cats like	24
54	Holsten Pils (beer)	1983	Advertisements are filmed especially for the campaign	Ad built on existing (classic) films with beer feature electronically inserted	5
53	Sugar Puffs (breakfast cereal)	1976	Celebrities from TV shows sometimes make advertisements	First UK celebrity man-in-costume (Cookie Monster from Andy Williams show) makes ad	35
52	Homepride (flour)	1965	Flour is an ingredient, advertised by chefs	Cartoon character emphasising 'Britishness'; also subsequently generated a number of spin-off products	35 17 5
51	Dulux (paint)	1968	-	No disruption	(cute dog)
50	Stella Artois (beer)	1991	Beer price is not an advertising issue	'Re-assuringly expensive'	13
49	Heinz Beans	1967	Advertisements spell words correctly	Beanz Meanz Heinz (initially received complaints from the nation's schoolteachers)	15
48	Milk Tray (chocolates)	1968	Boxes of chocolates are given as gifts or as 'thankyous'	Series of advertisements in which James Bond-type character undergoes all sorts of trials to mysteriously deliver chocolates to woman (all because she 'loves Milk Tray')	35
47	Mates Condoms	1988	Condoms are taboo, and therefore embarrassing to buy	The taboo is ridiculous	13
46	Milk	1975	Milk is good for you	(kids) 'Watch out, there's a Humphrey About' - mysterious creature comes and steals your milk if you don't drink it	35
45	One2One (mobile phone)	1996	Mobile phone services advertise on price	Who would you talk to if you had the chance (celebrities chose - MLK, Yuri Gagarin, Elvis Presley, etc)	35

44	Esso (fuel)	1964	Oil companies sell fuel	'Put a tiger in your tank' - shift analogy to powerful sounding animal	35
43	Old Spice (after-shave)	1977	-	No disruption	('the mark of a man')
42	VW Golf (automobile)	1988	Cars are advertised for men	Women buy cars too	13 4 1
41	Campari (alcoholic drink)	1977	Campari is for sophisticated drinkers	Campari is apparently for sophisticated drinkers, but the punch line reveals it is not (Campari was being re-positioned at the time) Ad; sophisticated man in sunny foreign villa 'were you truly wafed here from paradise?' Model; 'nah, Luton Airport'	13
40	Tetley Tea	1973	-	No disruption	(cute cartoon characters)
39	Foster's (beer)	1981	Beer is a men's drink, but no need to emphasise the fact	(humorously) sexist ad exaggerating 'maleness' through (already perceived to be highly sexist) Australian culture	35
38	Apple (computers)	1984	1) Directors progress from advertisements to films 2) Computers are very Orwellian	1) Ridley Scott makes ad 2) Apple represents individualism and democracy	13
37	Fry's Turkish Delight (confectionery)	1957	Chocolate is chocolate	Chocolate is 'exotic'	35
36	Fruit & Nut (chocolate)	1977	People should be sensible; eccentric people are a bit embarrassing	'Everyone is a fruit and nut case'	13
35	Martini (alcoholic drink)	1970	Alcohol advertisements are targeted at 'adults'	First UK ad recognising emergence of 30something adults as a market sector with specific needs	1
34	Pepsi (soda)	1973	Soda drinks give you sex appeal	Ad in which boy fails to get girl; provoking sympathy. (Also, 'lipsmackin-thirstquenching-acetasting-slogan became popular and was spoofed a lot by comedians, etc	13
33	John Smith's Bitter (beer)	1981	-	No disruption	(cute dog does tricks)
32	Duracell (batteries)	1975	-	No disruption (Ad picked up by Energiser after Duracell	(cute bunny with drum)

				dropped the idea, and has since spawned several sequel advertisements)	
31	Gold Blend (instant coffee)	1987	The same advertisement is used through a campaign	Romantic soap opera - makes the news	15 20 5
30	Kit-Kat (confectionery)	1989	Time passes	'Have a Break' - slow time down - a series of advertisements where this happens	19
29	Heineken (beer)	1974	Same as 88	Same as 88 - drink alcohol and something miraculous happens ('refreshes the parts other beers can't reach')	38 35
28	Hovis (bread)	1974	The world changes; change is a good thing. Also, advertising is a medium.	'As good as its always been' - selling nostalgia. Advertising as art form.	13 20
27	Milky Bar (chocolate)	1961	-	No disruption	(cute child)
26	Flake (chocolate)	1959	Chocolate is chocolate	Chocolate is a sexual symbol	35
25	Castlemaine (beer)	1986	(following Foster's ad - see No.39) - sexism is an acceptable beer advertising form	Disrupt the disruption by exaggerating the form even further	35 20
24	PG Tips (tea)	1956	Advertisements feature humans	Chimps act the role of humans	35
23	Cornetto (ice-cream)	1980	Ice-cream tastes nice. Sell sophistication.	Deliberately naff Venetian gondolier cheekily steals someone's ice-cream cornetto	13
22	Oxo (gravy)	1958	Advertisements aren't like 'real life'	'The Oxo Family' is just like yours; soap opera - there has been an Oxo family almost continuously since 1958	33 20
21	Ferrero Rocher (confectionery)	1995	Advertisements have to possess a certain degree of quality to be successful	Post-modern advertisement 'so bad it is good'	13
20	Real Fires (coal)	1988	-	No disruption	(cute animals in front of fire)
19	Andrex (toilet tissue)	1972	-	No disruption	(cute dog)
18	Shake'n'Vac	1979	Advertisements	An ad so laughably bad it	13

	(carpet freshener)		should be high quality	becomes a classic	
17	Carling Black Label (beer)	1989	Same as 88	Same as 88 - drink alcohol and something miraculous happens - revisit the idea 20 years later for a new generation	19
16	Coke (soda)	1971	Advertisements feature people that the customer can relate to	Advertisements feature <i>every</i> kind of person and they all drink the product ('I'd like to teach the world to sing')	33
15	Nike (football equipment)	1997	Wearing a particular brand of sports equipment will help you to play just like a (sponsored celebrity - Michael Jordan, etc) professional	No disruption	-
14	British Telecom	1988	Telephone advertising emphasises cost competition	Telephones are about communication	35
13	Yellow Pages	1983	Yellow pages is ubiquitous, you use it for emergencies	Yellow pages is for the good things too	13
12	Renault Clio (automobile)	1991	Car advertisements should target a specific customer sector	Car ad features father and daughter - both want the car	6 13
11	Cinzano Bianco (alcoholic drink)	1978	Drink advertisements feature people drinking	The drink is spilled (in many different ways - the series of advertisements proved durable by finding ever more inventive ways for Joan Collins to spill the drink over herself)	13 20
10	Impulse (perfume)	1998	People in advertisements are heterosexual	Not everyone is heterosexual	1
9	Walker's Crisps (confectionery)	1993	Celebrities endorse product	(Nice guy) celebrity steals crisps from small children (US owners of Walkers crisps claim to still fail to understand the psychological reason why this works as a product promotion strategy)	13
8	Hamlet (cigars)	1964	Cigar are sophisticated	Amusing ad series built on premise that the cigar will help get you through life's little traumas	35

7	R White's Lemonade	1973	Lemonade is for children	A 'secret lemonade drinker' adult sneaks down the stairs at night to raid the fridge	35
6	Levi's 501s (jeans)	1985	Music is an incidental part of an advertisement	Tie ad to classic record (I Heard It Through The Grapevine in the first of the series) ripe for re-release, re-release the record; it becomes a hit again, re-enforcing the product being advertised	5
5	Boddingtons (beer)	1996	Beer advertisements feature men	Post-modern ad featuring woman	13 4
4	Electricity Association	1990	Advertisements are 'things that happen between programmes'	Advertisements are better than the programmes (this series of advertisements featured Aardman Animations - winners of three Oscars for animated films - the series of advertisements produced for this campaign are even available for purchase on video. On the downside, many people fail to connect the advertisements to the product.	35
3	Tango (soda)	1992	Advertisements feature sound and pictures	Ad also features an action - slap in the face ('you know when you've been tango'ed')	28 (another sense)
2	Smash (instant mashed-potato)	1973	(Instant) potatoes are nutritious	Aliens joke about how earthlings make mashed potatoes the traditional way - when Smash is so much more convenient. The massive success of the ad is probably more to do with the scene of laughing aliens	35
1	Guinness (stout)	1999	Drink beer and something miraculous happens	'Good things come to those who wait' - selling to a 'spiritual'/higher emotional level	35 17

How Typical is this Level of 'Disruption'?

The analysis of the '100 Greatest Ads' revealed an apparently very high proportion (85%) of advertisements featuring a disruptive content. In order to check whether this 'high' figure was in fact typical, the author spent several days monitoring advertisements on the three terrestrial national UK TV channels. In all around 100 advertisements were observed. The number of advertisements featuring a disruption was found to be four;

- Pot Noodle - a snack product with a reputation as being low quality is presented as a product that emphasises and exaggerates this feature ('only dirty people eat Pot Noodle')

- Toyota Corolla - more a disruption in the story than the means of advertising - monkeys in game parks have a reputation for damaging the cars that drive through; here the monkeys get out cleaning equipment and begin polishing the car.
- Lillets - a tampon advertisement with a man in it.
- Fosters - latest in the series of 'drink alcohol and something miraculous happens' series - a man returns home to find his new domestic robot in bed with the microwave oven.

Ideally this type of experiment would last for longer to ensure the day monitored was a 'typical' one, but nevertheless the difference between 85% and 4% is felt to be significant enough to justify a comment that there is a definite and strong link between the presence of a disruption and a resultant positive effect on the viewer.

A similar experiment was commenced observing ads in the US, but time problems have thus far prevented acquisition of statistically significant findings. No ads featuring disruptions, however, were observed during the period of the experiment. Perhaps someone in the US may care to explore the subject further at some time in the future.

Conclusions

1. Based on this assessment of 100 TV advertisements, there is a very strong correlation between convention disruption and popularity of an ad - with 85 of the 100 most popular advertisements in the UK featuring a contradiction-breaking disruptive shift of some kind. This finding is highly consistent with the theme and recommendations of the Dru book (Reference 2) that prompted the investigation.
2. All 85 of the disruptive advertisements observed employed one or more of the known Inventive Principles contained within TRIZ - i.e. none of the disruptive advertisements featured a strategy that was derived from outside the known 40 Principles.
3. As is the case with humour (Reference 3), a very large proportion of the disruptive advertisements are built on Principles The Other Way Around (30 examples) and Parameter Changes (31 examples). In all 17 of the 40 Principles were used in the 100 advertisements featured. In descending order of frequency these were:-

Principle	Number of Occurrences
35, Parameter Changes	31
13, Other Way Around	30
5, Merging	10
20, Continuity of Action	8
28, 'Another Sense'	5
4, Asymmetry	4
1, Segmentation	3
15, Dynamics	3
17, Another Dimension	3
24, Intermediary	3
19, Periodic Action	2
33, Homogeneity	2
38, 'Enriched Atmosphere'	2
2, Taking Out	1

6, Universality	1
7, Nested Doll	1
25, Self-Service	1

In very general terms, it seems very apparent from the extensive use of Principles 13 and 35, and the preceding descriptions of the convention disruptions achieved by the 100 advertisements analysed was that the perhaps paradoxical fact that 'successful' advertisements tended to appear to be selling something other than the featured product

4. There was no significant correlation between the age of an advertisement and the likelihood of it being disruptive. Similarly, there was no significant pattern between the age of an ad and the Inventive Principle used to create the disruption.
5. One of the key features involved in creating disruptive advertisements appears to be the successful identification of prevailing conventions. While it has been relatively easy to reconstruct these conventions for this article, it seems clear that this is a task much more easily done in hindsight than looking forward. This 'convention-finding' (read; problem definition) task may turn out to be the most significant factor determining the success or otherwise of this type of advertising campaign.
6. In hopefully not a true reflection of the British psyche, alcohol and confectionery collectively accounted for over a third of the most popular advertisements. Animals were the subject or played a dominant role in 20% of the featured advertisements. A successful advertisement that did not feature a disruption, was highly likely to feature a cute animal.

Future Work

We believe that there is significant untapped opportunity to use TRIZ to create stronger disruptive marketing opportunities - as the analysis here shows, less than half of the available 40 strategies currently appear to be being used. Our next job will involve looking at marketing strategy from a broader perspective in order to create a '40 Inventive (Market Strategy) Principles' article to complement existing field-specific data. We would welcome examples from anyone either working in the field, or who simply happens across an example of contradiction challenging advertisements/marketing ideas that they would like to share. Our target is to publish an article in January 2003.

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