

MARKETING

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Plus ça Change

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Bell might have a splashy new ad campaign, but it hasn't done much to help its brand, says ANDRIS PONE

Last month, my friend Martin moved into a new house in Toronto. Bell Canada moved his phone line. But in a story most Canadians can unfortunately relate to, Bell hooked up his service—Internet and all—to the credit card and debit terminal of an antique shop down the street. Martin, who has a home-based business, was without service for five days. Using the landline of a neighbour, it took Martin almost seven hours with 310-BELL to finally get service restored.

Yet Bell gave all of us reason to believe such a nightmare couldn't happen. I mean, just in August, it introduced a new logo, a new tag line, "Today just got Better," and new advertising that

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featured iterations of the "er" in "better." Surely these initiatives should have prevented the overturning

of my buddy's life. Bell's new campaign was acclaimed by a columnist in this very magazine as "a slick, bold and extraordinarily impressive brand strategy that uses a clean wordmark with a powerful voice."

Except that this belief—that a logo is in fact a brand strategy—is false. It's a falsehood deeply ingrained in the creative and marketer communities—and consumers suffer for it.

On those long days without e-mail, cut off from his customers, you might have dropped by Martin's new digs to ask if the new Bell logo was giving him solace. If you knew his neighbour's number, you might have called Martin to cheerily ask: "Did today just get better?"

The reality is that a brand is what people think of you. It's the sum total of every experience ever had with your organization. So a brand strategy is not an ad agency's creative output, but rather a carefully orchestrated effort—that includes creative—to positively affect each and every stakeholder experience.

Bell recently aligned its new tag line with a 100-day plan to improve customer service (apparently Martin had the audacity to move too soon). If this new brand promise is to be more than an empty shell, Bell's people must obviously be coached on how to deliver it. In other words, brands are built from the inside out. Rick Seifeddine, Bell's senior vice-president, brand strategy, seems to appreciate this, saying in these pages: "This is a significant rebrand from the basement up."

I decided to test his contention by calling three 310-BELL agents in a miniaturized version of our company's proprietary brand audit process. Have Bell's front-line people, frequently the only point of contact the company has with its millions of



customers, been coached on how to deliver "Today just got Better?"

I asked each agent what Bell's new ad campaign—"the one with the 'er's in it," as I put it—meant. First call: "Good question: I have been asking, too!" Second call: "I'd like to help you, but I'm in the billing department, so we don't know what the ads mean." Third call: "I haven't heard of it...I haven't watched TV lately." She put me on hold to ask her colleagues, coming back with "They say it's something Bell is using to catch people's attention."

Clearly these crucial employees have not been given an ounce of training on their new "brand." So there are good reasons to believe that the extent of Bell's new "brand strategy" is indeed a logo and four meaningless words.

Why on earth did Bell bother spending untold millions on this campaign, on everything from advertising, to retooling its retail outlets, to repainting its fleet of vans? Because Bell confused a new logo with a new brand strategy. And because it's playing out the time-honoured vignette of a brand's "new friends," epitomized by freshly-minted executives and the new ad agencies they hire.

New Bell CEO George Cope could have mandated that the vacuous but instantly recognizable spokesbeavers, Frank and Gordon, of Cossette Communication-Marketing, finally be infused with some meaning—some meaning that included a commitment to customer service. But the *raison d'être* of new friends on the marketer side is to put their personal stamp on the company, which can't be done by merely evolving a predecessor's campaign—even if it does, by maintaining consistency, leverage brand awareness and save millions.

New friends on the agency side—in this case, Leo Burnett, LG2 and Zulu Alpha Kilo, all hired by Cope—exist to create new, not consistent. The aspirations of many are awards, which can't be won by finessing a pre-existing idea.

At precisely this moment, Bell needs to be sharper than ever on the branding front. Several new players have just paid more than \$4 billion for wireless licences across the country and will give the big three—Bell, Telus and Rogers—a level of competition they've never experienced. Who on this transformed landscape will best understand the true nature of brand and brand strategy?

A nation of Martins awaits.

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