



Clint Eastwood and the marketing edge

- or what sort of relationship should you have with a marketing agency?

In one of his famous westerns, Clint Eastwood got the edge over the opposition by approaching the massed bad guys with the sun behind him, and so in their eyes.

Young people achieve an edge with their looks, sparkiness, raw talent, sporting ability, the latest fashion accessory, and by the mere fact of their youth, which guarantees an irritating superiority. To keep one step ahead, mature folk fall back on cars, lifestyle, money, and a vast catalogue of jokes.

If we are lucky, the need to maintain an edge in our personal lives kindly diminishes with the years. The pain of the fact that the latest hairstyle always looked better on your classmates slowly fades. But something else kicks in, which is the nagging question of how to maintain an edge in business.

And this is where the Clint Eastwood reference achieves significance. Directors contemplating how to allocate their marketing budgets are rightly concerned about being ambushed by the opposition or being outgunned by the dodgy-eyed, slick-haired ranch owner's son whose just been given the office next door. How do you keep ahead of the game? That agency down by the creek; are they quick on the draw? Are they in town to trash the saloon or defend the local farmers when the chips are down?

A marketing agency should have its ear to the ground, be able to recognise trends and buying patterns, and create winning ideas by making the most of all available resources to outsmart the bootleggers.

To extend the western analogy, a customer/agency relationship should be akin to that between Sheriff and posse. The agency must be able to ride shotgun for you. It should also know how to get the wagons in a circle quickly to prevent the arrows getting through. It must have someone in the band able to pick off a target at a distance. Also essential is the ability to communicate unfolding events with mirrors or convincing animal calls. And it is a bonus if somewhere around there is a wizened old sly dog who seems just to sit around but, crucially, gives everyone the nod at just the right moment.

Finally, the sheriff-customer should expect to be chaired back into town a hero, to loud acclaim from the locals that fuels a reputation around the county. The posse should disband quietly, go back to shooting at tin cans, and stay alert to the next threat.

The next time you enter one of those meeting rooms with the long table laid out with writing tablets, check the place names and, if need be, move yours so the louvered blinds are directly behind you. When the sun's at its zenith, just nudge them open a fraction. The ultimate *edge!*

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