

# ADWEEK

## 'The Wiggles' Lesson

What the children's program, chaos theory can teach marketers

The more relaxed pace of summer recently allowed me the time to watch *The Wiggles* with my 2-year-old son and, more to the point, observe his reactions as a budding consumer.

For anyone not familiar with the Australian children's entertainment phenomenon, it consists of four guys, each with a different color shirt and different attributes (a magician, a food lover, a sleep lover and a guitar player), along with a rose-eating dinosaur, a feather-sword-waving pirate, a dog, an octopus, a police officer, a chef and a bunch of side-kick dancers—usually all on screen together. This highly successful ensemble, with an empire of CDs, DVDs, a Playhouse Disney series and an annual worldwide concert tour, sometimes spends its time dancing, sometimes just talking, sometimes running around, sometimes singing, and other times driving in its Big Red Car.

To me, it was chaos. However, what I observed in my son was total understanding, engagement and responsiveness—not to mention a “parental mind-numbing” loyalty. What more would a brand want from its audience?

As marketers, we have long known we must first understand *why* people buy before we focus on *how* we reach them and ultimately influence them to buy. That is, we ensure we have devel-



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But it is the latter—the restriction of the “how”—that *The Wiggles* got me thinking about. When we do actually get the brand idea right, why in so many cases does it still not grow wings beyond a :30 ad?

Look back to *The Wiggles* for a success story that counters this. They have their brand idea—wiggling/dancing—and, while in and of itself it isn't differentiated, they have used unrestricted expression (the “how”) in order to differentiate. They use brand expression as a way to make them different, not simply as vehicles to say they're different.

So what are we afraid of? Why do we treat our brand ideas as restrictive filters rather than springboards of creative freedom? How can we overcome this?

Enter chaos theory. A quick read on chaos theory will tell you it's reflective of the human desire and ability to find the underlying order in apparently random data—which was what my son was doing. So on one hand, when we automatically go to tried-and-true media, we are underestimating our audience's ability to find order themselves. Moreover though, chaos theory offers a new way for us to think about the role of the brand idea. Consider one analogy I read: A fern's DNA encodes not exactly where the leaves grow, but simply and loosely guides their distribution. We need to allow our brand ideas the same latitude. We (and our clients) need to work toward a less restrictive organizing principle when we navigate the brand idea. Brands must be confident enough in their own DNA (the brand idea) to allow themselves to give up some control and embrace the chaos of today's fragmented media.

Consider another example—Crispin Porter + Bogusky's Mini campaign has long been heralded as one of the best concepts in brand idea navigation and not dissimilar to *The Wiggles*. They took the brand idea of “driving is fun” and let it live beyond a person actually driving a car having fun. The media was fun (*Playboy* centerfolds, cornering publication staples, etc.), the sales experience was fun (events with local artists painting a person's ideal Mini to hang on the wall at home) and the tagline was fun (“Let's motor”). Perhaps unknowingly, they adopted chaos theory to live the brand. Like *The Wiggles*, they didn't use brand expression to say they were different, but as a way to actually be different and let customers find the pattern.

Chaos theory and *The Wiggles* tell us we need to loosen up. Audiences will find order—as long as the “why” is smart and compelling, and we don't divert too far from it within the “how.”

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**Brands must be confident enough in their own DNA to give up some control and embrace chaos.**

oped a clear understanding of a smart, audience-driven insight (let's call it the “brand idea” or the “why”) before we get to the brand expression (creative/execution/media ideas—the “how”). We know we need the best possible “why” to generate the most inspired and effective “how.”

However, in today's chaotic media landscape, with “integration” flying off everyone's tongue, one of two things is happening: brands are focusing on the “how” before the “why,” or they are getting the “why” right, but restricting the “how.”

Regarding the former, there are many examples in the last decade of the need for smarter audience psychology-driven platforms to spur inspired expression, and the consequences of skipping this step. Think Pets.com: lots of seed money and a sock puppet people seemed to love ... but oops, there wasn't an understanding of why people with pets actually buy, was there? What did the sock puppet mean? As we know, not much.