



Slipstreaming Events.

By Max Sutherland

Dr. Max Sutherland's column is published monthly and posted on the web at www.sutherlandsurvey.com. Receive an advance copy by email - [free subscription](#). Max Sutherland is author of the book '[Advertising & the Mind of the Consumer](#)' (published in 8 languages) and is a registered psychologist. He works as an independent marketing consultant in Australia and USA and is also Adjunct Professor at Bond University. Contact msutherland@adandmind.com.

A few years ago I wrote a paper on Slipstream Marketing with Stephen Holden from Bond University (Journal of Brand Management, June 1997). Slipstream marketing is a means of achieving a bigger bang without necessarily having the biggest buck

The idea is to be constantly on the look out for opportunities - to hitch a ride on the marketing activities of others in order to drive your brand and your budget further. In this column I point out how we can also slipstream current events and hitch a free ride, using timely, tactical, tie-in advertising.

Slipstream Marketing



Topical Events

One of the best examples of this was an ad that drove right in behind the highly publicized coup attempt, in Russia when Gorbachov was in power. The coup failed and Gorbachov was restored to power. A beer brand seized the opportunity to slipstream the media attention. They ran a newspaper ad with a photo of Mikhail Gorbachov under the headline:
'It's always nice to have a Redback.' Redback beer.

Such slipstreaming of highly topical events, almost guarantees that the ad will capture an inordinately high level of attention for the brand – provided the brand is well integrated. Topical events that capture media attention day after day are ideal because a high degree of involvement and interest is built up around the event you are going to hitch to.

During the US presidential elections last year, a huge amount of media attention focused on the voting form in Florida that confused voters and threw into question whether Bush or Gore was the legitimate winner. At the height of this controversy, a clever, graphic design company ran an ad in the New York Times with an illustration of the voting form under the headline:

"Perhaps the first vote should have been for a better design."
Graham Clifford Design

It was a nice example of how a timely, tactical ad can capture attention, by slipstreaming controversial issues of the day.

Rare

We see tactical ads in political campaigns and occasionally in company takeover battles but all too rarely in brand advertising. Why?

One answer is that it is hard enough to produce a creative idea when you have substantial lead-time. To produce an idea *and* execute it, in such a tight time frame, well that's difficult. Clients need to be prepared to pay extra for the extra effort involved. Paying for results is not unheard of these days, so with it, should come greater use of this.

Extended Events

The events don't have to be controversial as much as topical. The key thing is that they are already salient in peoples' minds because of the media attention. When they continue over a substantial period, there is more time to prepare a slipstream ad... and it can have a longer 'shelf life'.

For example, when Tony Locket, otherwise known as 'Plugger', was playing for the Sydney Swans, Mazda slipstreamed his constant media attention by running a simple ad with the line:

'A stronger body than Plugger' Mazda MPV.

Note not the attention boost but how it also slipstreams the legendary, Locket characteristic of body strength, thereby reinforcing a key aspect of the MPV brand image.

Recurring Events

Recurring events can also offer opportunity. But unfortunately there are too many bad attempts at this, so it demands unique creativity to make it work.

For example, J&B Scotch whisky does a nice job of slipstreaming Xmas with the ad shown on this page. Under the headline 'Ingle ells, Ingle ells', it slides the brand into the slipstream with the line: *'The holidays aren't the same without J&B'*.

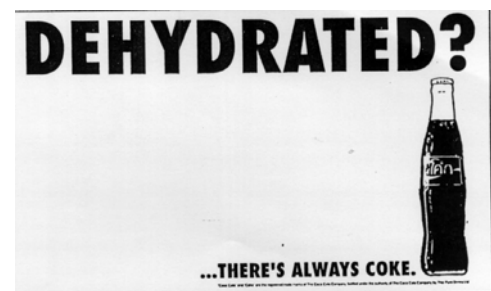
The tie-in has to be extra clever and the brand well integrated.



Devastating

The most devastating example of event slipstreaming I have seen, was a half page newspaper ad in the Bangkok Post in Thailand. It not only grabbed the attention of everyone in Bangkok but also made the international news wire services.

You have to understand this in the context of Bangkok's traffic, which is notorious, and way beyond the city's ability to cope. A 20-minute drive across the city could take anything up to 3 hours. Special events, like a Michael Jackson concert could bring the whole metropolis to gridlock, which is exactly what happened when he was booked for 3 nights back in 1993.



Fans threw themselves into the traffic at 2 PM in an

attempt to get there by 7pm. Bangkok became progressively snarled so by the time of the commute home from work, no one was going anywhere. The next night, people were trying in vain again, to get home from work and their anger levels were peaking. Their car radios told them it was all for nothing as Jackson failed to appear on stage because of **dehydration** - after performing in the Bangkok heat the previous night. The concert was rescheduled for the following night but *again* Jackson gridlocked the city and *again* he failed to appear and *again* the reason was dehydration.

Coke seized the opportunity running a half page, newspaper ad the next morning. It consisted of only 4 words (see illustration):

'Dehydrated? There's always Coke.'

No mention of the concerts but the ad slipstreamed this event that was by then 'top of mind' of an entire city. Moreover, it devastatingly focused attention on the cause of all this useless, traffic chaos – dehydration; devastating because *Pepsi* was the Jackson tour-sponsor. How anomalous for someone sponsored by a soft drink company to suffer from dehydration? Doesn't he drink the sponsor's product?

Coke cleverly publicized its brand and powerfully reinforced its traditional positioning as the tried and true original brand – steadfast - always there - 'the 'real thing' - not a song-and-dance pretender.

All this in a 4-word ad!

It shows how, slipstreaming, by hitching a ride on topical events or the marketing activities of others, can be a great way to go. After all, a key part of marketing success is getting the greatest effect from a limited marketing budget.