

The Competitive and Combative Toilet Tissue Campaign Teaching Notes

What Are the Relevant Facts?

1. Clyde, product manager for Wonderwipe toilet tissue, a new brand, suggests that Peg, copywriter for F&A advertising agency, write comparison advertising for Wonderwipes, positioning it as being superior to Myrtle's, the market leader, along the design (color and graphics) attribute. Wonderwipes does, in fact, come in five appealing shades not used by the competition, and its graphics are preferred by consumers two to one.
2. Toilet paper is usually bought on the basis of one or more of the following criteria: brand name, price, package size (sheets per roll), texture, design, and strength.
3. Wonderwipes is inferior to Myrtle's along the following dimensions: package size, texture, and strength. Yet, between 80 and 90 percent of consumers cannot distinguish Wonderwipe's inferiority along these criteria.
4. Clyde wants Peg's advertising to spoof Myrtle's as being boring and old-fashioned in print and TV ads that are lightly humorous yet bashing in nature.
5. Clyde does not want the advertising to mention the dimensions along which Wonderwipes is inferior.
6. Peg personally dislikes competitive advertising, finding it to be nasty and unprofessional.
7. Peg suspects that consumers share her low opinion of brands that do comparison advertising.
8. Peg believes that the suggested incomplete and possibly irrelevant comparison would amount to misrepresentation.
9. It is not clear how effective comparison advertising is.
10. Some research evidence Peg has seen suggests that a competitive brand might win public sympathy as a victim and that consumers are confused by comparison advertising.
11. Ray, art director at F&A, believes that the FTC supports comparative ads as a useful way to help consumers make informed decisions.
12. Comparative claims are legal as long as they can be substantiated, and this is clearly the case with Wonderwipes.

13. Comparative claims are believed to be especially effective for marketers of little known brands competing against better-known brands (e.g., Wonderwipes vs. Myrtle's).
14. Comparative ads might have the effect of encouraging competition, thereby leading to higher quality in the product category.

What Are the Ethical Issues?

1. Is comparison advertising inherently unethical? Does it hit below the belt? Is it unprofessional?
2. Is it unethical to market a product which is inferior on most salient attributes?
3. Is it wrong to poke fun at a competitor's brand?
4. Is it deceptive to withhold important negative information about one's brand? Does the marketer have a duty to provide such potentially damaging information?
5. Does an incomplete and possibly irrelevant comparison constitute misrepresentation?
6. Because the proposed ads would be legal, does that mean they would be ethical?
7. Does the fact that many others (possibly including Wonderwipe's competitors) do comparison advertising make it morally justifiable?
8. Does the fact that Wonderwipes is just starting out as a small brand against a large, entrenched competitor justify making the suggested comparison?
9. Does the possibility of annoying and/or confusing consumers cause comparison advertising to be unethical?
10. Does a copywriter have the right to overrule the client's ideas?

Who Are the Primary Stakeholders?

1. What is the appropriate level of analysis (systemic, corporate, individual) to use in identifying the primary stakeholders?
2. Who are the primary stakeholders?
 - Peg
 - Clyde
 - Ray (assuming he will be involved in artistic direction on the account)

- Wonderwipe company
- Toilet tissue consumers
- Myrtle's toilet tissue and other competitive brands
- F&A Advertising

What Are the Possible Alternatives?

1. Peg could create a comparison campaign in accordance with Clyde's wishes.
2. Peg could try to persuade Clyde that the proposed comparison campaign would be ineffective and/or immoral.
3. Peg could develop copy focusing solely on the positive virtues of Wonderwipes and hope that this will please Clyde.
4. Peg could ask her superior to take her off the account since doing the suggested work would conflict with her personal values.
5. Peg could suggest that Clyde improve the quality of the product.
6. Peg could suggest doing the proposed campaign but not mentioning the competitor by name (the "Brand X" or "leading brand" approach).
7. Peg could suggest doing the comparison while including affirmative disclosure of the brand's negative features.

What Are the Ethics of the Alternatives?

- Ask questions based on a "utilitarian" perspective. For example:
 1. Which possible alternative would offer the greatest benefit to the greatest number?
 2. How would costs be measured in this situation?
 3. Do the benefits of being consistent with your personal values outweigh the probable costs of doing less effective advertising or of potentially displeasing the client?
- Ask questions based on a "rights" perspective. For example:

1. What does each stakeholder have a right to expect?
 2. Which alternative(s) would you not want imposed on you if you were Peg? Clyde? Ray? A consumer? Myrtle's?
 3. What are Clyde's rights as a client?
 4. Does Peg have a right to protest?
- Ask questions based on a "justice" perspective. For example:
 1. Which alternative distributes the benefits and burdens most equitably among the stakeholders?
 2. Which stakeholders bear the greatest burden if Peg refuses to work on the campaign as Clyde proposes?
 3. Which alternative(s) demonstrate a fair process? A fair outcome?

What Are the Practical Constraints?

1. Clyde might have his mind firmly made up.
2. Resigning from the account might not be possible for Peg to do without jeopardizing her job and, perhaps, even her career.
3. If Peg refuses to go along with Clyde, another copywriter might be assigned to do the advertising anyway.
4. Improving the product while still earning a satisfactory return might not be feasible for Wonderwipes.
5. Affirmative disclosure would probably be highly ineffective.

What Actions Should Be Taken?

1. What action steps should Peg take?
2. Which alternative(s) would you choose if you were in Peg's position? Why?
3. Which ethical theories (utilitarian, rights, justice) make the most sense as they relate to this situation? Why?