



Characters in books and movies and TV shows are magical. They make us laugh and cry and hold our breath as they take us to a vivid elsewhere.

Conflicted, exaggerated, accelerated characters live in a world more interesting than our own. And it is a world we like to visit, even if it's only 30 seconds at a time.

This is why character-driven ad campaigns are outperforming logic-driven campaigns, hands down.

We quickly get tired of sales pitches, but we never get tired of being charmed.

The characters we love may change over time, but our love for characters never changes.

Best of all, character-driven ad campaigns don't have to be targeted to a specific birth cohort.

Their appeal is cross-generational.

So if you need to build a bridge to Millennials, put your hammer in the hand of a colorful, memorable, entertaining character.

Do you remember the suave, invincible James Bond of the Sean Connery/Roger Moore years? (1962 to 1985 in case you were wondering.) Take that character, sand the British off him, wrap him in Chuck Norris jokes, and you've got The Most Interesting Man in the World. He tripled the sales of Dos Equis in Canada. And while craft beers were driving the sale of other beers down across the US, sales of Dos Equis increased by 34.8%. <sup>1</sup>

Put Mayberry's wise, caring, and infinitely patient **Andy Griffith** in the passenger seat of an air-conditioning service van with an idiot-savant **Forrest Gump** in the driver's seat and you've got Mr. Jenkins and Bobby, the most successful ad campaign in the history of home service companies. When Mr. Jenkins gave Bobby \$100,000 during a 30-second ad that debuted two weeks ago and encouraged him to pursue his dream of becoming a movie star in Hollywood, social media exploded. The next morning it was front page news – above the fold – in the important *Charlotte Observer*, and a savvy outdoor advertising company asked permission to post “We’re Going to Miss You, Bobby” on all their digital billboards **for free**, and 2 major network TV affiliates treated it as major story in their newscasts, with one of them giving the story about 3 minutes, the other giving it more than 5 minutes.

Can you believe this local **service company** in Charlotte, NC, has accumulated more than 1,000 Google Reviews with a 4.7 star average? This isn't a restaurant, it's a service company. Have you ever heard of such a thing?

Only one other home services ad campaign has generated that kind of audience love and effectiveness: the relatively new “Boy with a flashlight” campaign of Goettl Air Conditioning in Los Angeles, Phoenix, Las Vegas, and Tucson. Sadie, the boy's dog, is also an important part of that campaign.

“What do a Forrest Gump idiot-savant and a boy with a flashlight and a dog have to do with air conditioning?”

“Nothing. But they have everything to do with winning the hearts and minds of customers.”

Take grubby **Oscar Madison** and uptight **Felix Unger** of *The Odd Couple* (1968,) give them each a glass of whiskey and fling them 49 years into the future (2017,) and you've got Rex and Daniel of *The Whiskey Vault*, YouTube's fastest-growing whiskey channel, adding more than 20 new subscribers every hour, 24 hours a day. They just poured the foundation of their new distillery next to the campus at Wizard Academy.

“Hello, ladies. Look at your man. Now back to me, now back at your man, now back to me. Sadly, he isn't me. But if he stopped using lady-scented body wash and switched to Old Spice, he could *smell* like he's me. Look down, back up, where are you? You're on a boat with the man your man could smell like. What's in your hand? Back at me. I have it, it's an oyster with two tickets to that thing you love. Look again, the tickets are now diamonds. Anything is possible when your man smells like Old Spice and not a lady. I'm on a horse.”

That campaign more than doubled sales and rocketed Old Spice Body Wash from its position in distant, second place to become the world's best-selling body wash.

No other beer company created an interesting character to win our time and attention. And how many air conditioning companies perform delightful antics to give customers warm feelings and happy thoughts? No other whiskey review channels on YouTube feature an entertaining odd couple, and no other soap is represented by a shirtless guy who shamelessly flirts with your wife. That's why these companies – and lots of other companies with colorful character-driven ad campaigns – are winning. And winning big.

When the customer laughs and smiles and bonds with your advertising, they now have a friend in the business. Why would they call anyone else?

So, if character-driven ads are more effective, why aren't more companies creating colorful and engaging characters to capture our attention and win our affection?

1. Short-sighted advertisers are unwilling to “waste” precious TV and radio time to develop a relationship with the customer. “I’m paying for this airtime, so we’re going to talk about ME, dammit!”
2. Not a single college or university in America requires its students to study comedy or fiction writing to get a degree in Advertising and Marketing.
3. Consequently, few advertising professionals know how to write banter and repartee.
4. So now you know why most ads are filled with Ad Speak,
5. and why everyone hates most ads.

Roy H. Williams

<sup>1</sup> Forbes.com, June 14, 2017

