

## EXTRA WURST JUNE 2004: NATIONAL PRIDE

I was interested to read recently that, 20 years after Audi introduced their *Vorsprung durch Technik* claim to the unsuspecting British public, that Volkswagen plan to introduce their German slogan 'Aus Liebe zum Automobil' or 'For the love of cars' in the UK. It will be interesting to see how this claim fares for VW; will it be understood? Will it generate the same sort of positive brand associations and image improvement as Audi built with their German claim? Or will it fall flat on its face in the light of the current overdose of Love, Lovin' it, *Amour*, *Liebe* and whatever other manifestations of lovey-doveyness are flooding the world of marketing and advertising at the moment. Because, when it comes to it, Boris Becker and his broom cupboard exploits aside, Germans are not really known for their prowess in matters love and romance. Audi really hit on one of the key German strengths with *Vorsprung durch Technik* ('progress through Technology'). A lot of the British public were not too sure what it meant but it certainly sounded impressive.

Of course, the Germans always have to be a little careful when playing on their national strengths abroad. I remember reading a rather alarming piece during the 1996 European Football Championship (I am sure no England supporter needs reminding of how that ended for the England team) of how the pharmaceutical and chemicals giant Bayer had advertised a fly spray product in Latin America with a line that translated as 'Sudden death is a German speciality'. A somewhat unfortunate choice of headline, I feel. And that is a big problem for German marketers- because of the past, marketing any product, event or service on the basis of nationalism or national strengths inevitably lands one in rather deep water.

The problem is, of course, that the Nazis may not have been the master race, but they were certainly masters of propaganda or marketing, as it would be called today. Almost every time one looks for values, myths, archetypes or even fairy stories to support a German brand, we see that someone else got there first, probably in the 1930s. Want to use a stirring piece of Wagner as background for your brand's TV spot? Forget it. How about a nice dynamic logo in red, black and white? No chance. What about an advertising campaign that associates the brand with mythical or historical characters, in the same way we might use the Knights of the Round Table in the UK? Err...not today, Siegfried. How about a spectacular TV spot for Lufthansa (as in British Airways) with lots of people waving flags and forming patterns? A bit too reminiscent of Nürnberg, I'm afraid. Is it any wonder that much German advertising shies away from the symbolic and emotional and concerns itself only with fact and product performance? Not only does the devil get the best tunes- in Germany, he has certainly spoilt a lot of good advertising and marketing ideas for anyone else.

The wariness of the German people in showing any kind of national pride is particularly apparent at the moment, during Euro 2004. While it may well all be over for the German football team tonight, the lead-up to Euro 2004 has been very low-key here- extraordinary when you think that, through luck, skill or sheer determination, they were the runners up in the World Cup. From a marketing and sponsoring viewpoint you would hardly know that it is on. Apart from a few TV spots from an alcohol-free beer sponsoring the team, a few footballs and children's football kit (choice of Portugal, Turkey, Italy or Germany) on special offer in Aldi and Burger King offering something called a King Kahn Burger, there is precious little going on. Contrast that with the St George flag hysteria in England where you can't move for flags, shirts, tie-ins, sponsorships, promotions, events and all the rest.

One way that German brands, particularly in the food and drink categories, can capitalise on their authenticity and history without getting too bogged down in desirable associations is by

using their regional, rather than national provenance, which makes a lot of sense, given that Germany has only really existed for less than 150 years. Many products such as beers, sausages or cheese position themselves on the town or region from which they come. To some extent this can provide differentiation and positive association but there is also the danger of losing oneself in the standard, nostalgic-but-not-too-specific-as-to when- it-was, rural idealised village worlds that many of these products employ in their advertising.

For technical and financial brands, such as Audi, Siemens, Lufthansa or Deutsche Bank, it is more difficult. Not only does it make sense for such brands to want a positioning for today and the future rather than harking back to the past but many of these brands really do have associations from the past that they would rather not dwell on - just think of the beginnings of Volkswagen, for example. Thus the most fruitful area is to take an accepted German strength such as technical expertise, engineering competence or financial acumen and exploit that.

One area where going back to the past is not fraught with difficulty is the more recent past. There is a real wave of nostalgia here for former DDR brands and whole websites where these brands are discussed, bought and sold, such as [www.ossiladen.de](http://www.ossiladen.de) . Many brands from this time are being successfully revived and marketed with the sort of fervour of 70s revived brands in the UK.

We will have to see how the Volkswagen line '*Aus Liebe zum Automobil*' will work. Perhaps it will be a step to adding some emotion to the cold, robotic image of German companies. After all, at least Germans do love their cars and Volkswagen has produced some of the most 'lovable' character cars of all time. Perhaps, if the Czechs really want to let Germany through tonight rather than Holland then we might even see a few German flags hanging out of Volkswagens as football fans drive over to Burger King to grab their King Kahn burgers.

Sue Imgrund 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2004