Figure 8.1  The MINI was introduced to America with one of the smallest TV budgets ever—fortunately.

BECAUSE I AM FREQUENTLY ACCUSED OF BEING OLD, I feel the need to point out that I was not a winner in—or even in attendance at—the 1902 award ceremonies for the One Show. However, since you brought it up, I believe it was a very short program. They announced winners in just two media categories—best newspaper ad and best sandwich board—and pretty much called it a night.

Times have changed, haven't they?

The other day I found myself in a meeting where somebody actually kept a straight face as he proposed making a “blog-isode.” He also wanted to create a few “content-mercials,” and a “web-inar.”

I can wrinkle my patrician Merriam-Webster nose at it all I want, but we may actually have to start inventing words for some of the new media fragments created since the whole grid reached critical mass in the late 1990s. A truncated list of what's called the new media might include banners, blogs, branded entertainment, bluecasting, buzz marketing, consumer-generated content, experiential marketing, gaming tie-ins, interactive billboards and kiosks, intranets and extranets, mobile phone texting, mobile video, PDA downloads, public relations and earned media, rich media, screen
savers, video on demand, widgets, and those funny viral videos you e-mail to friends even though their company firewalls will probably block them.

This list doesn’t count all the odd nooks and crannies now for sale as paid media. You can print your client’s good name on the stripes in between car spaces in parking lots. You can paste it under diving boards, stick it on the skins of fruit at the grocery store, and by wearing shoes soled with a client’s logo, impress their name into beaches everywhere. Citizens are even selling the space on their foreheads. And now that urinal deodorizing pucks are a hot media opportunity, it’s no longer considered curmudgeonly to grumble how a guy can’t even take a piss around here without seeing an ad. It’s crazy.

I’m reminded of a headline in the *Onion* that read “Area 14-Year-Old Collapses Under Weight of Corporate Logos.” Everything is branding, ladies and gents. It’s all for sale. We can either bemoan how we’ve become the dystopia once imagined in the opening scene of *Blade Runner* or we can decide to fill all these new spaces with stuff that’s cool, stuff that’s interesting. (Come to think of it, that *Blade Runner* scene was actually pretty interesting.) One of Wikipedia’s contributors nicely summed up the draw of new media: “Within the advertising business there is a blurring of the distinction between creative (content) and the media (the delivery of this content). New media itself is considered to be creative and the medium has indeed become the message.”

This is where the clients are spending more and more of their marketing dollars. The shift is clear; it’s away from huge TV buys and toward the new media. Roy Spence of GSD&M says we should do more than just welcome all these new opportunities; he says, “Kiss change on the lips.” I’m pretty sure he’s right. But before we start filming a “webi-sitcom” or writing ads for every flat surface we can see from our office windows, it’ll pay to first sit down and figure out a few things.

**Imagine a day in the life of your customer.**

Let’s put our ad-writing pencils down for a minute and think way upstream about our client and their customer.

How does our client’s typical customer spend a day? What does he or she do in the morning? Is the radio on while he fixes breakfast or does he grab something on the go? Does he drive to work? Does he have an iPod? Does he recycle? What blogs does he read when he’s supposed to be working? Does he run at a gym or on the streets, or does he run like me . . . into the kitchen for another Krispy Kreme?

This thinking doesn’t have to be guesswork. It’s likely that your agency colleagues have gathered all kinds of good research about the customer. So before you start work on a campaign, it’s time to sit down with the account, planning, and media team and map out a day in the life. (I *read the news today, oh boy.* ) Newspapers may indeed play a part in this person’s life, as will other common media, like television and radio. But those are the easy ones. And we’re not making a media checklist here anyway. What we’re doing is looking for insight. It’s kinda like we’re trying to see the aquarium from the inside out, to move through our customers’ world. We’re looking for contact points with customers that are unexplored. We’re looking for places where customers might even welcome a cool message from our brand. Places where the right message could be less of an ad and more like information or entertainment.

A day in the life of a real estate agent is gonna be different than a corporate executive’s day. A real estate agent practically lives online and his cell phone rings constantly. The executive probably has people to answer her phone and gets information by listening to podcasts at the gym or reading business pubs on the plane.

While all this different-strokes-for-different-folks stuff may seem a little obvious, it’s surprising how many agencies use the same media plan to reach every audience (“We’ll buy TV for reach, magazines for frequency, and throw in a little radio for promotions.”)

Okay, now before we start writing, there’s one other mental exercise that may be helpful.

**Imagine the buying process.**

After you’ve mapped a day in the life with your customer, switch gears. Now think through how a customer decides to buy your client’s product. Here again, agency research and insights from your colleagues can help you see the entire buying process through a customer’s eyes.

Some folks call this the *purchase funnel*, though that’s a little creepy for my money. I guess any number of visual metaphors might be helpful in visualizing the buying process. Whatever image you settle on, scribble it on a big pad and start visualizing what happens to your customer as he or she moves toward actually buying your client’s product. Think it through. How is it that a normal person can
move from a state of being perfectly happy without, say, your client's fabulous flat-screen TV—to noticing the flat screen in the sports bar—to thinking, "Geez, my old TV does kinda suck"—to swooning in front of all the brands on display at the mall—to checkin' prices online—to triumphantly swiping their VISA card through the machine at Circuit City (or swallowing hard and hitting "Buy now with one click"). As you go through the process, jot down the contact points that pop up—those times a customer might have occasion to think about a flat-screen TV, or about the whole home entertainment category in general.

As you might imagine, the consideration process is different for a flat-screen TV than, say, buying a pack of gum, or a car, or insurance. Depending on the product, the process can be short or long; the longer ones typically consist of phases. I'm sort of making up some phases here for a nonexistent product, but a customer could move from (pardon my punctuation) general awareness > shortlisting > comparison > store contact > trial. Phases such as these may be useful to keep in mind as you work on your overall idea. Different media will be in play at different parts of the purchase cycle, and each of them has its strengths.

Here's the thing to remember about this whole exercise: Your main idea may come out of one of these contact points—an idea you can then spread sideways and backward to fill in the whole campaign.

Pick a small customer contact point and then think big.

We're ready to sit down and start coming up with big honkin' ideas. Oh, one last thing. You can't do any TV or print.

When you sit down to begin work, start by imagining there are no TV commercials and no print ads. Anywhere. They're all gone.

Here's where it gets interesting. You still have to sell your client's product or service, but you have to find a new way of doing it.

What are you going to do?

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not saying TV and print are passé. What I'm saying is that when you start with TV (and its usual side orders of print-'n'-radio) you're solving problems in a prepackaged way. Ultimately, you may very well end up airing a TV spot. Great. But you don't have to start there. This advice may at first seem kinda weird, since most of this book so far has been about coming up with print ads and TV, right? Well, yes and no. We've used print and TV as starting points to talk about the craft, yes. But what we've really been talking about is thinking creatively. And now it's time to apply that creative thinking free of form.

Start with a blank piece of paper. In fact, let's not even think paper. How would you tell your brand's story around a campfire? How would you tell the story if Blackberry PDAs were your only medium? Or vending machines? What if all you had to work with was the way the store operators answered the phone? What if you made it a free download from iTunes? How would you start bloggers talking about your product? How about those flyers placed under windshield wipers? (Uh, on second thought, I hate those things. Never mind.)

As you can see, I'm exhorting you to start somewhere. You have to, obviously, but I urge you to pick one of the more intriguing customer contact points and then begin. It's sort of like that bumper sticker: "Act Locally, Think Globally." Go over the two lists you just made: a day in the life and the purchase process. What opportunities jump out at you?

In Laurence Minsky's book (How to Succeed in Advertising When All You Have Is Talent), Weiden's Susan Hoffman put it this way:

Think holistically. . . . [What] would you do in the store? How can you pull the iconography of the campaign right into the clothing hang tag? A coupon? Online? The best work has legs to go everywhere and puts a strong, consistent, visual imprint on every consumer touch point. It's important to bring this kind of thinking to your work. . . . Take this inventiveness and apply it to the business. But do more than just ads. Produce an album, experiment with graffiti, invent a new product, shoot a film, or write a book. 2

Think creatively about different media where your message can appear. Play out that day in the life of your customer, see where it matches up with the world of your product, and then just start screwing around with it.

For instance, the inside bottom of a paper coffee cup might be a good place to put a message about sweeteners. (Nahhh . . . the ink printing inside the cup would creep the drinker out. Anyway, you see my point.) Maybe a dingy subway car is just the place to tell a glassy-eyed commuter she needs a cruise to St. Thomas. If your client is an organization for some social issue, why not paint your idea all over the building across from city hall? (I heard an agency actually projected a provocative ad directly onto a government
Figure 8.2 Your ad doesn’t have to appear in a magazine. Some of the best ones don’t.

building.) Just go for it; maybe you can do it, maybe you can’t, but until someone makes a phone call, you don’t know.

Abbott Mead Vickers put a message from the business magazine The Economist on top of a bus that rolled through London’s financial district, the Square Mile. (See Figure 8.2.)

As for finding a startlingly effective place to put a client’s message, the most brilliant I’ve ever seen was a spot that ran on the porn channel in hotels. Virgin Atlantic wanted to tell business travelers about the nice new seats in their transatlantic flights. The team pitched—a cynically and correctly—that a day in the life of a traveling businessman might include a quick visit to the in-room “adult” channel. So that’s where they placed their commercial, smartly labeling it “Free Movie.” When you pressed “Play” you saw a 12-minute video that looked and sounded like porn but was really just a long, raunchy infomercial full of double entendres about the pleasures of flying across the Atlantic in a seat that goes all the way back. The idea was so naughty, its very existence drew tons of free media coverage.

To fully realize the possibilities of a multimedia campaign, you’re going to need to drag your main idea through each medium and start from scratch when you get there. What works in outdoor may suck as print. The challenge is to make your product look totally cool in each medium and then, at the end of the day, have your overall campaign hang together with one consistent look, one consistent message.

Bring your idea to life in one medium and then go on to the next.

Okay, we’ve talked about taking in the big picture before you write, thinking through a day in the life, considering a product’s purchase cycle, and putting a typical media buy into the blender and hitting puree. Any one of these mental exercises should help free up your thinking and take you to some new places.

Now it’s time to put it all together and use them to create a fully integrated multimedia campaign. As an example, let’s look at some work done for the American Legacy Foundation’s truth® youth smoking prevention campaign. (Strategically, the campaign was brilliant, and though I won’t go into it here, you should study the strategy behind this work. For our purposes today, we’re talkin’ tactics.)

truth® wanted to point out to teenagers that cigarettes contain ammonia. Their first idea, the basic platform, was this simple parallelism: “Cigarettes contain ammonia. So does dog poop.”

Perfect. It’s an unpleasant idea and a grotesque image. Next, after thinking for a while, they found their first execution (and it wasn’t a TV spot or a print ad).

“Hey, what if we stuck small signs directly into actual dog poop in city parks? Signs with the message: ‘Cigarettes contain ammonia. So does dog poop.’”

Boom. There’s the outdoor. (Or what some call guerrilla advertising.)

Then they took the same small sign and turned it into a print ad. The ad featured three dog poop signs, die cut and ready for the reader to deploy. Boom. Print’s done.

Then they filmed some truth volunteers at a park sticking these signs in dog poop as curious passersby looked on. Boom. TV’s done.

An entire campaign from one idea, expressed seamlessly in several media—boom, boom, boom (Figure 8.3). Man, if advertising gets cooler than this, I haven’t seen it. A warning here, though, from Saatchi’s Tony Granger: “Simply checking the boxes across every possible new media channel is no longer enough to stand out. . . . Each piece of creative should stand on its own as a great expression of the big idea.”

This truth campaign did happen to employ some of our usual suspects (TV and print), so let’s go back to our self-imposed rule and
Of course, the creative team was across the street filming the whole thing to post on the Web. IKEA repeated the exercise for a store opening in another city, and this time someone dropped a dime to the local news and the event was covered from a helicopter overhead. Roughly 10 grand to pull off, a quarter mil of free airtime, serious buzz, and no TV commercials.

With practice, you should be able to start thinking in big honkin’ ideas like this more and more. Of course, not every job that slides across your desk will require this type of thinking—just the really fun ones, the big ones, and of course, new business pitches. However, you may be able to create something big and cool out of a small print-and-radio assignment just by finding some nugget of a concept and blowing it up way beyond what’s been asked for.

Try something naughty.

I do not mean do a pee-pee joke. (Oh lordy, please, please . . . no pee-pee jokes. No fart jokes. No scatology. Please, just stop it.)

What I am suggesting here is that you do something naughty. Maybe naughty isn’t the right word. How about controversial? My thesaurus also suggests: devilish, sneaky, disobedient, mischievous, willful, wayward, bad, or recalcitrant. Do something you’re not supposed to do. Break a rule of some kind. Come up with an idea that makes you say, “We can’t do that, can we?” That’s a sign it’s a strong idea. The other question to ask is: “Will somebody talk about this idea if we do it?”

Sticking messages into dog poop at the park qualifies, I think, on both counts. It’s a controversial sort of idea somebody might talk about.

Beaming an antigovernment message onto the side of city hall is naughty.

Airing a free video on a hotel’s adult channel is naughty.

Running a small-space ad with a headline “Fur Coat Storage Services” is naughty. Well, it is when you know the rich ladies who called the number got a recorded message from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals about the cruelty of the fur business and how they should “donate” their fur for proper burial.

In Warren Berger’s book Hoopla, CP+B’s Alex Bogusky observes, “If you’re about to spend advertising dollars on a campaign and you can’t imagine that anybody is going to write about it or talk about it, you might want to rethink it. It means you probably missed injecting a truth or social tension into it.”
Why not use radio for something besides retail? What if you mailed your posters and posted your direct mail? What if you embedded a radio spot in your transit poster? What if you used the newspaper’s classifieds to sell a thought instead of a car? What if you used a huge outdoor board to do the work of a classified ad?

If you do an ad, does it have to be a flat page?

Try a pop-up, a gatefold, a scratch and sniff, a computer chip, something, anything.

Typically, liquor companies trot out these print extravaganzas during the holiday season, spicing their inserts with talking microchips and pop-up devices. But why wait for the holidays when other advertisers might be doing it? Also, there are less expensive tricks you can try. Sequential ads. Scratch-off concepts. Die cuts. Different paper stocks, acetate film. There’s even a magnetized paper now. What can you do with the ad itself to make it more than just an ad?

Crispin Porter + Bogusky’s entire print buy for the MINI featured stunts like the one pictured here (Figure 8.5). They had to;

Try doing something counterintuitive with a medium.

This is another form of naughtiness. Use a medium “incorrectly.”

Write a 25-word outdoor board. Put your poster in exactly the wrong place, like they did with this one for the Economist (Figure 8.4).

A truth. A social tension. Now we’re getting to the nut of it. Think of truth, or social tension, or naughtiness as the bad guy in a movie. Ever notice how the bad guy is usually a movie’s most interesting character? Kids wanna be Darth Vader, not Luke. On Halloween, I’ve never seen anybody wearing a Jamie Lee Curtis mask; it’s always Michael Myers. Bad is good. The bad guy disrupts. He changes things, makes them interesting. Bad means gettin’ some “Bom Chicka Wah Wah” from the Axe Effect or doing things in Vegas that have to stay there. Bad is why the Subservient Chicken is wearing a garter belt.*

Do something devilish, disobedient, sneaky, mischievous, willful, wayward, bad, or recalcitrant. At every turn of the way, question authority.

*The Subservient Chicken’s a long story, well reported in many other places. Google it.

Figure 8.4  The Economist’s signature red tells the reader whose poster this is from 100 yards. And the pillars don’t get in the way. They hold the concept up.

Figure 8.5  It’s hard to see in this reprinting, but CP+B bought the center spread of Rolling Stone magazine and had the MINI slaloming around orange-colored staples. The copy: “Find out why a MINI handles the way it does at MINIUSA.com.”

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Detroit was outselling them in magazines a hundred to one. So their stunt wasn’t just a couple of one-off’s for the holidays: almost every single MINI ad was a stunt, each one basically an event held into a magazine with staples. One ad had peel-off decals to put on your MINI. Another featured a car-deodorizing pine tree. My favorite was a flattened cardboard milk carton inserted into the magazine. The copy invited you to reassure it to look like an empty milk carton, which was just the excuse you needed to get in your MINI and motor.

Emails, blogs and text messages.

I played Zombie Feeders and tried to get the proper number of living human beings to the safe zone. To get the score there, I had to make sure the people in the game are dead. But whenever more than ten people were alive, a computer on the Zombi City and the bus would hit $5 M in cash and the score goes blank. It is the worst accident or death of the game.

Dear Bus Driver,

Maybe you should drive yourself to Zombie City. And please don’t exceed the speed limit.

On the 12th level of burger street, I noticed a secret passageway under the deep fat fryer. I came to a lightning-conquest moment with the mentality that you can’t utilize your terminal职业技术. I built up these two ultra-secret devices on the control panel, but I don’t want to make any money or have a secret tool to help your business.

Dear Lemon, are you old yet?

If we just went up the path, it wouldn’t be a secret, would it? Try XYZ line. It helps us.

That should get you through people.

I got some ideas for your game. It shouldn’t be just a game; it should be an experience.

Don’t you want to make the game a lot more interesting?

There are too many controls that are not needed.

They do a lot of stuff, like, you can strike a wall, and one of those buttons, like, they do a lot of stuff, like, they do a lot of stuff, like, they do a lot of stuff.

I have been into the moment controllers since our 74 is one of those moments in the Fill, but unfortunately, the memory card won’t make it up to Boston or any other place.

Dear Wireless,

Although I sound like money is no object and you like to spend it, we’re not planning to do much in the way of new products or anything like that, maybe re-release the old one?

Dear Money Tank,

If this game, and don’t talk to your mother, tell her I’m a genius, my game is going to be hit, and she needs to give you $1,000, but she should have your own money.

I have been into the moment controllers since our 74 is one of those moments in the Fill, but unfortunately, the memory card won’t make it up to Boston or any other place.

Sweat drive, the power in Austin went out. I was replaying the musical with a flashlight, and it was so refreshing. Then 20th time the Space Clones stay in the same spot, take over the game. We’re trying to come up with things to do with those players that we haven’t done before, you can’t stay in the same spot, but we don’t want to run out of steam.

One of the best events-in-a-magazine I’ve ever seen was a little two-by-four-inch flip-picture book, pasted to the middle of a white page, with the words “The Golf TDi Diesel” printed on the cover. When you flipped the pages, you expected to see a little movie, a changing image of some kind. Instead, you saw a dashboard gas gauge with the needle staying, and staying, at “Full.” The needle never moved. This little gem from BMP DDB Needham in London was a thing of beauty.

Your stunt doesn’t always have to involve inserts. Check out this cool ad for the U.S. Air Force from GSD&M (Figure 8.6). Dummy...
editorial copy on the left side is burnt to a crisp by the afterburners on the F-15.

Remember: Do something devilish, disobedient, sneaky, mischievous, willful, wayward, bad, or recalcitrant. At every turn of the way, question authority.

**Instead of doing an ad, change the product.**

You’re never going to be at the agency one day and get a job request saying, “Change the product.” But smart agencies are doing this more and more and are making a bunch of money for their clients in the process. Sometimes you’ll just stub your toe on an idea. And sometimes it can come out of an agency brainstorming session, as it did at GSD&M with the “DING!” product for Southwest Airlines.

Inspired by the familiar flight-cabin “ding” that Southwest uses in its TV tagline (“You’re now free to move about the country”), DING! is a downloadable program that immediately lets a customer know (with a small ding!) when a low fare is available to a favorite destination. Clicking on the message takes a customer to Southwest’s online booking. So in addition to selling seats, it encourages customers to book online, which saves the customers and Southwest money.

As you can see, DING! wasn’t an ad, but it made the client some serious money. Same thing happened at Burger King. It started with a video game developer asking Burger King if they wanted to buy some “signage” within a game. CP+B and Burger King renegotiated the deal and ended up with much more than just a BK logo way in the background of some fight scene: The King actually became a player in the game. Creative Director Bill Wright told me the success of this experiment led to bigger things: “After a year of development, three Xbox 360 games went on sale inside Burger King restaurants. So far [summer 2007], 3.2 million have been sold. And instead of just watching the King, people are playing him. Burger King has been turned into a legitimate game developer.”

These are moneymaking ideas, not ads. Changing the product can even serve as an image campaign. Consider Molson Canadian’s problem. “A beer has to signal something about who you are,” said Wright in another conversation. “And when we found out our target audience thought Molson is the beer ‘my uncle drinks in the basement when he watches hockey,’ . . . we knew we had a problem.”

To reach their younger target, creatives came up with “Molson Twin Label technology.” Molson printed an additional label on the back of their bottles with one of 200 different horn-dog, testosterone-poisoned barroom “conversation starters,” all of them certain to thrill any 20-year-old boy:

Let’s get out of these wet clothes.
I’m not wearing any underwear.

Guess where my tattoo is.

Like we said back in Chapter 3, “Saying isn’t the same as being.” Molson didn’t run an ad saying, “We’re not the beer your uncle drinks in the basement.” By changing the product, they proved they weren’t.

**Do anything but an ad.**

In a recent interview on adcritic.com, Lee Clow said, “Everything is media.” As an example, he said the Apple stores now in malls across America are “the best ads Apple’s ever done.” Similarly, Alex Bogusky said a drink cup at Burger King can have as much reach as a commercial on the Super Bowl.

Stores, cups—it’s all media, and it’s all canvas an ad person can use to paint a brand’s story. Clow might agree with my painting metaphor, given that he sees TBWA/Chiat becoming what he calls a “media arts company.” Media arts—that’s actually a pretty cool way to think about what we do. But the key word here, folks, is art. Just because some building has a flat side doesn’t mean we should put an ad there. If we do, we need to remember what Howard Glossage reminded us of back when we were discussing outdoor in Chapter 3: Our work, particularly in outdoor, must delight the people who see it. Delight them.

This is the attitude I encourage you to adopt if you ever have to create a guerrilla advertising, a term Wikipedia defines as “an unconventional way of performing promotional activities on a very low budget.” It’s a form increasingly popular with both clients and creatives, the former liking its ability to pinpoint a target segment, the latter its possibilities. When done well, like this piece for Norwegian Cruise Line, guerrilla ads delight audiences (Figure 8.7). The very environment where the ad appears affects the way people interpret it, and because their ad guard is down, it has an additional element of surprise. But if it’s missing that element of art, it could
Don’t suck, people, is basically where I’m goin’ with this. And don’t let people make you suck, particularly in regard to outdoor and guerrilla advertising. This isn’t a medium people can switch off.

One last thing: Unless you have something really important to tell me, please stay out of my bathroom stalls and off of my urinal pucks. Stuff like that—really any media being marketed by a vendor—has probably already lost its element of surprise anyway. The whole bathroom advertising gig reminds me of when my boys were little; they’d bring their fight to the outside of my bathroom door demanding that I immediately render judgment. Through the door I’d say, “Boys, can’t this wait?”

Through the door I ask again today, can’t the wheels of capitalism wait long enough for me to take care of business here? Lordy.

Don’t even do an ad. Create an event instead.

Getting good PR for your client is one of the very best things you can do. Some of the most fantastic selling concepts I’ve ever seen weren’t ads per se; they were events.

One was for Mothers Against Drunk Driving. To make their “ad,” they parked the wreckage of an actual car on the back of a flatbed truck and put it on display on a busy downtown sidewalk. It was a police car, one in which a Minnesota sheriff died because of a drunken driver. Below the wreckage was a plaque with a description of the accident and the name of the law officer, a family man dead at the age of 36. No snappy headline. Just the ugly facts. And the car with its driver’s side door punched in three feet. Nobody in that car could have lived. You could see it for yourself, and you walked away mad.

Another example that comes to mind is Diesel’s insane idea for marketing its Intimate Collection. I would love to have been in the conference room when they presented this idea.

“Okay, basically, what we’re suggesting is we’re gonna have two pretty girls—both of whom we’ll name ‘Heidie’—and these two girls, they’re gonna steal a bunch of this new underwear you got, kidnap one of your sales managers, and then lock themselves in a hotel for five days. Consumers will be able to talk to the Heidies by phone and online. And we’ll broadcast the whole thing live on the Web.”

Man . . . I’ve been in meetings where suggesting “Let’s run two newspaper ads” would put the account into review. But in this case, Diesel said yes, and their servers nearly melted down as customers jammed the lines trying to interact with the Heidies.
“Can you say my name on the air, Heidie?”

“Heidie, will you please play my favorite song?”

Everybody was in on the joke, and the entire promotion garnered massive PR because of its intelligent parodying of reality TV, MySpace, and the global fever dream of being famous for a Warholian 15 minutes. It was incredible.*

Half of creating an event is the event itself; the other half is leveraging it for all the public relations mojo you can get. Most of the ideas you’ve read about in this section were followed with a strong PR effort by the agency or the client’s PR firm. The thing is, when your ideas are this cool, they’re just as interesting as news as they are as advertising. For instance, I personally never saw the Starbucks coffee-cup-on-a-car-roof promotion; I only read about it later in the newspapers. Starbucks paid drivers to drive around town with one of their cups attached to their roof, and when passersby tried to alert the driver, they were handed a coupon for a free drink. The idea was cool, the event was cool, and, finally, just hearing about it was cool.

Create something so cool you don’t have to pay people to watch it.

The other day at a parent-teacher conference I overheard this nice lady describing a problem with her teen daughter.

“Well, I went into her room—without knocking—and I caught her and her friends on the Internet looking at a video where a nice man in a suit talked about Verizon’s terrific variety of affordable calling plans and the nation’s widest coverage.”

Okay, I’m kiddin’. Didn’t happen.

The point is, people don’t go on the Internet looking for boring stuff. And if you think it’s difficult to get people to look at your spot on TV, it’s even tougher to get them to look at your viral spot on the Internet. Viral advertising is generally any Internet-driven promotion in the form of video clips, interactive Flash games, or SMS text messages. The really good ones get passed along from one person to another and spread like global infection. Which is why I find it kind of funny whenever I hear someone say, “Oh, when we’re done makin’ this commercial, we’re gonna have it go viral.” You decide to go viral about as much as the Beatles decided to “go famous.” Before anything viral happens, somebody has to do something extremely cool.

I first saw Honda’s famous “Cog” commercial (Figure 5.5) through a link in an e-mail, as did millions of others. Same with Burger King’s “Subservient Chicken.”

Then there was Ogilvy Toronto’s marvelous “Evolution” commercial for Dove, which rode a wave of mass Internet interest all the way to the top prize at Cannes (Figure 8.8). In this simple commercial, we see an ordinary-looking woman sit down in front of a camera. From the sides come the hands of makeup artists, which begin to touch her up, to groom her. The hairstylist’s hands follow; the lighting is similarly fussed over. A minute or so into it, this ordinary-looking woman is approaching cover girl material, and that’s when her image is transferred to computer. Here, even more radical makeovers morph her into the totally fake “10” we see up on a billboard and then the video ends. Two supers come quietly onscreen with the message “No wonder our perception of beauty is distorted. Take part in the Dove Real Beauty Workshop for Girls. Visit campaignforrealbeauty.ca.”

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*Just so you know the conclusion, the siege came to an end when the son of Diesel founder Renzo Rosso cut a deal with the Heidies and freed the salesperson. The deal—which pulled the idea into other media—was to use the Heidies in a Diesel print campaign.
The whole thing was set to a great piano track and, except for the words at the end, could have passed for a cool MTV video.

Janet Kestin, Creative Director at Ogilvy Toronto, assured me they did not “decide” to go viral.

“We really had no idea it was going to do what it did,” she said in an interview. “It started with the art director/writer, Tim Piper, posting it on YouTube and at the same time Dove sent out an e-mail blast. A couple of days was all it took before it was on everything from CNN.com to BBC, even talk shows in Korea. It was starting to get momentum, but the posting on YouTube and the PR push were the real catalysts.”

It would seem we’re back to what Bogusky said earlier: “If you’re about to spend advertising dollars on a campaign and you can’t imagine that anybody is going to write about it or talk about it, you might want to rethink it. It means you probably missed injecting a truth or social tension into it.”

Dove’s “Evolution” had both of those. Kestin’s partner, Nancy Vonk, adds: “As a society, we’re so celebrity-obsessed and appearance-obsessed. Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty came at the moment when people were asking themselves, ‘Have we gone too far?’ It didn’t hurt that it was released right when it was Fashion Week in New York City and there were lots of news stories about too-skinny models and all of that. To use Gladwell’s phrase, it really did seem like a tipping point.*

“Evolution” indeed had a truth and social tension built into it. It also had pretty much everything else we’ve been talking about through this entire book. A quick look back at all the things we’ve talked about so far convinces at least me that Dove’s “Evolution” was a big honkin’ idea that hit on every cylinder.

Say something believable. Say something relevant. Be simple. Try not to look like an ad. Open strong. Have one theme. Show, don’t tell. Make sure your idea works fast. Reduce your number of moving parts. Find a villain. Tell the truth and run. Be provocative. Use simple language. Entertain throughout the spot. Leave a picture in the listener’s mind. End dramatically. Don’t suck. And create something so cool you don’t have to pay people to see it.

“Evolution” did all of those things and more. What’s not in “Evolution” is also important: There’s no spokesperson telling you

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*Malcolm Gladwell’s best seller *The Tipping Point* is good reading.
KFC ran a TV spot with a promotional code buried in a single frame. Meanwhile, in a separate print and Web campaign, they told viewers to play back the spot frame by frame on their digital video recorders to find the code and its accompanying coupon. (The fact that viewers actually went through all this trouble to save a few pennies on something called a “KFC Snacker” probably says less about the penury of today’s youth than it does about the potency of modern hydroponically grown marijuana.)

**PARTING THOUGHTS.**

The days of solving business problems by doing an ad or shooting a spot are over. In an interview, Rob Schwartz of TBWA/Chiat agreed and encouraged ad students to start seeing assignments on a much larger scale: “It’s not just ‘I can do one good print ad.’ It’s ‘I can do a holistic, fully integrated, major, big chunky thought that is media infinite.’ It can run on TV, it can run in print, it can run in someone’s dinner conversation, the public relations people can work with it.”

In closing, I give the advice Mark Fenske offers: “If you are near a big idea, get out of its way. Lay flat.”