

Ads sell images, not products

Gimmicks make every item look like buy of the century

FRANK STANFORD
Columnist



The other day I spotted a large sign on the window of some small business. It read, "Get better grades." My initial thought was, "Hmm, must be one of those tutoring places." But upon closer scrutiny I noticed it was a martial arts academy.

A martial arts academy?! Now, we've all seen "Kung Fu" reruns, and are amazed at how powerful Eastern mental training can be. We've also seen Steven Segal open up a can of whoop-ass on four or five guys who happen to be wielding an entire set of Ginsu cutlery. This stuff is pretty impressive to say the least. But to advertise a martial arts academy like a Kaplan Graduate Exam Course is stretching it just a tad. However, we say it's just good advertising."

A current method of sending subliminal messages is found in liquor ads. Artists airbrush breasts, phallic symbols and other sexually attractive images onto a photo of booze and ice.

Well, advertising in this country has gotten so "good," or I have gotten so cynical, that every ad raises questions as to how I'm being fooled. Even when I think I made the purchase of the century, doubt plagues me until two or three friends verify my good fortune. More often than not, I'm told that whatever I bought was cheaper somewhere else. Even more frequently, I am told I didn't need it in the first place. Advertising just draws me in.

We're so surrounded by what I call, "I must be stupid" advertising gimmicks, we hardly notice most of them. I've divided them into three categories.

The first, "Subliminal messages," were big in the news a few years ago, or 10 maybe. There was a big legal stink over advertisers using them in their ads. These messages were thought to be unethical because they are pictures or directives that are below the conscious level of a person, but are strong enough to influence their actions.

For instance, in the '50s, theaters edited films and added a few random single film frames of food, soda, people eating or words like EAT! to subconsciously motivate the viewer to buy concessions. Although no one was able to detect the rapidly moving images, they bought significantly more food. This practice became illegal at some point, but is still used to a lesser degree.

One of the more current methods of sending subliminal messages is found in liquor ads. In particular, the top selling photographic periodicals - OK, "girlie books" - have often contained full page photographs of glasses of booze with ice. Because of the light refraction and the multiple distorted surface areas, artists can easily airbrush female breasts, legs, hair, phallic symbols and other sexual images onto the photo. Sometimes fruit is displayed in these ads, sliced in such a way to emulate a Georgia O'Keeffe painting (ask an art person). For some reason, that sweaty glass of vodka on the rocks just looks so-o-o-o good.

Other popular ads are a little less sneaky, but still quite powerful. Enter "bogus photograph ads." There's nothing hidden in them, but the image is a big lie.

Take pictures of hamburgers for example. Portraits of hamburgers is more accurate. They have beautiful, puffy, glistening buns with perfectly proportioned dressings and vegetables, all matched and color coordinated to make you want to eat the picture. No hamburger ever looks like that.

The meat, which is mostly pureed gristle - technically 100 percent pure beef, because of its bovine origin - is much smaller than the photo beef. The lettuce and tomato are always placed halfway off the burger, soaking the already drenched, smashed, grease-paste of a bun with even more liquids. A photographer once told me the "model" burgers' buns are rubbed with Vaseline to make them shiny. What a farce.

"Association" ads are very popular right now. My favorites are the ones for pain relievers and beer. Beer ads are the simplest. If you buy this beer you will score with beautiful women. End of message.

Drug commercials are complex in comparison. They frequently place a well-known soap opera doctor in a library to tell you that the drug is scientifically proven. Everyone knows it's Dr. Bluff Granite from the "All My Superficial Children" cast. He's never opened any of those books; he knows NOTHING about medicine - except his cocaine habit. They're paying him specifically to trick us. We're such suckers.

Other medicine ads feature a striking woman, over 35, with an extremely frumpy hairstyle and outfit. Her dress is usually a dark color with white trim high on the neck. She's not sexy. She's serious, straightforward but caring, and reminds you of Sister Mary Francis Aquinas. She would not lie.

But she might reach out of the screen and beat your hand with a ruler if you don't buy her pills.

Frank Stanford is a philosophy graduate student

THE BATTALION Editorial Board

Belinda Blancarte, Editor in chief
Mark Evans, Managing editor
Jay Robbins, Opinion editor
Jenny Magee, Assistant opinion editor

Editorials appearing in The Battalion reflect the views of the editorial board. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions of other Battalion staff members, the Texas A&M student body, regents, administration, faculty or staff.
Columns, guest columns, cartoons and letters express the opinions of the authors.
Contact the opinion editor for information on submitting guest columns.

EDITORIAL

STRIKE - NO BALL

Fans lose more than anyone else

This fall the leaves will change in New England and kids will carve pumpkins, but there will be no World Series. Yesterday the acting commissioner of Major League baseball, Bud Selig, canceled the rest of the season, leaving it the first year since 1904 without a World Series.

This incident highlights the absurdity of the strike.

Who cares about players' salaries and owners profits if they are not even going to play the game?

Rather than accept a compromise or at least agree to table talks until after the pennant races, the players and owners have destroyed the whole season. Some desperate fans even hoped President Clinton would issue an executive order to resolve the crisis.

Ironically, this year's players and teams exhibited some of the best games and talent in decades. The opportunities to set dozens of new records are now lost permanently.

The average salary of professional baseball players is \$1.2 million. Yet, they fight against a salary cap. Players have said they will go back to playing immediately and sort the

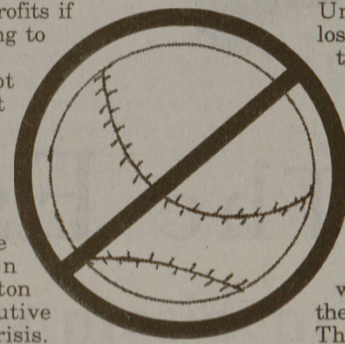
rest out later if the owners give up on the plan, but even that suggestion failed.

The owners claim 18 baseball franchises are losing money and that without a salary cap they cannot remain competitive with clubs who can afford large payrolls. Owners have backed down during the past to preserve the game, but now have chosen to stick to their demands.

Unfortunately, the real losers in the game of contract negotiations will be the fans and those who depend upon the industry to make a living. After all, the fans are the ones who truly fund the sport. Businesses in cities who do not have other professional sports teams also will suffer losses. And there are people to blame.

The players and owners are both at fault, and next year's fan appreciation day - if they are playing by then - might as well be a declaration of the clubs' hypocrisy. The owners and players have lost millions of dollars and countless unique opportunities for legendary plays.

It is anyone's guess as to how many fans the game of baseball has lost.



Crime bill builds base for inner-city social programs

So-called 'pork' provides needed opportunity for better education, decreased crime, personal excellence

LYNN BOOHER
Columnist



Imagine going to an overcrowded, underfunded public high school in the inner city. Imagine that your school barely has enough money to provide you with outdated, beat-up textbooks, much less give you anything extra, like centrifuges and chemicals for your chemistry class or art supplies or dance instructors. Imagine your reaction if the federal government were to give you all of this and more.

It has. The much-debated crime bill passed on Tuesday, bringing with it not only more law enforcement, but also some severely-needed social programs.

Opponents see no need for these programs. They are simply "pork" thrown in to appease Democratic constituents. Is prevention really wasteful spending?

I don't think so. Inner-city kids are supposedly the most at-risk to become involved in crime. What in particular makes them more susceptible than members of other neighborhoods or social groups?

It all boils down to money. Less money equals less opportunity for education. Even though everyone is provided a "free" public education, in poorer areas this education is ridiculously substandard in relation to the education provided in richer ones.

The richer kids have the chance to work in labs, sculpt clay, play instruments and participate in a huge number of other activities that go beyond the scope of the three R's.

This may not seem important on a superficial level. After all, it's just fun stuff - not as necessary to education or life as algebra, right? Who needs art class?

The fact is, we all need some sort of release from the difficulties of daily life. These kids have to risk scorn from their peers just for wanting to attend school every day. Some have to worry about whether they'll make it home okay or whether they'll get enough to eat that night.

Daily life for these kids must be very difficult. School doesn't provide an escape from their problems when there's always the fear that an armed person might make it through the metal detector that day.

Inner-city kids can't escape to a big backyard or to the local fitness center for fun like their middle-class peers. So, some become involved in illegal extracurricular activities, thus perpetuating the problem.

The new law package provides money for youth employment skills, community youth academies, gang prevention services, Boys and Girls Clubs and dozens of other groups to provide educational opportunities not available in the school system. These programs offer a way to learn how to stop the cycle of crime and to have fun in a safe environment.

Perhaps the most controversial provision of the crime bill is the proposal

for a midnight basketball program. Critics say that it's silly because no good kids would be out at midnight, and those who are don't deserve any special favors and should be kept in by a curfew. If curfews were as effective as the detractors of the bill would lead the public to believe, we would already have seen a significant decrease in crime.

President Bush visited a midnight basketball league in 1991 and gave his seal of approval. "The last thing midnight basketball is about is basketball," he said at the time. "It's about providing opportunities for young adults to escape drugs and the streets and get on with their lives. It's not coincidental that the [area] crime rate is down 60 percent since the program began."

Time reporter Margaret Carlson argues that the reason midnight sports came under

No one is forced to be a criminal, but it takes a strong person to live in an environment that contains gang warfare, drug dealers and poverty, and not become mentally trapped.

Republican fire is that "they realized that they could recapture the law-and-order issue for themselves by stalling the bill." This may be a valid point. After all, President George Bush had no problem giving midnight basketball the Republican seal of approval.

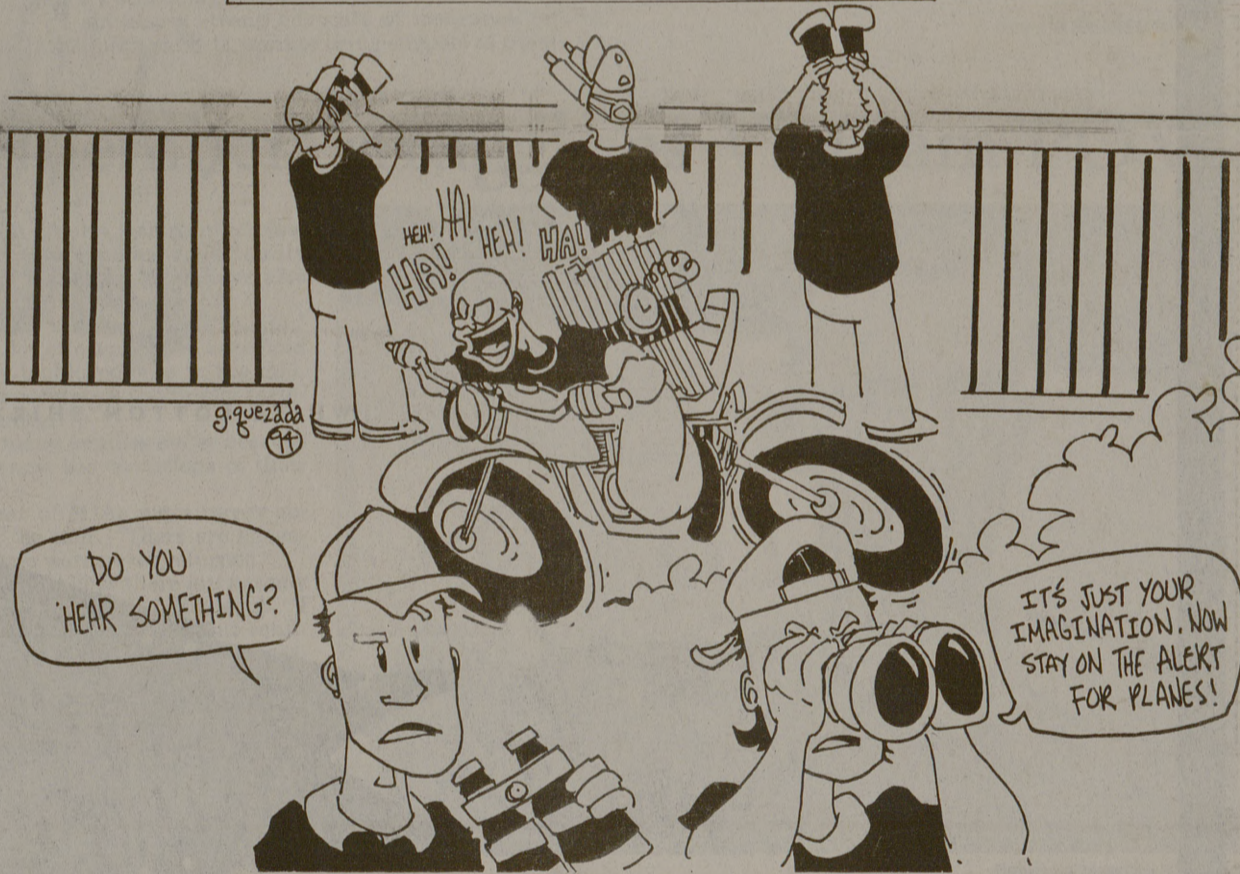
Critics have argued that the crime bill is too costly to taxpayers. It's too costly to fund these social programs, especially when the beneficiaries are just a bunch of punks who probably belong in jail.

The real cost is to human life, whether victimized by crime or denied the same educational opportunities as peer groups. No one is forced to be a criminal, but it takes an extremely strong person to live every day in an environment that contains drive-by shootings, gang warfare, drug dealers and poverty, and not become mentally trapped. It's hard to believe that the average middle-class kid, caught in a similar environment, would have the mental strength to survive, much less excel.

Perhaps with the new programs, more average inner-city kids will find that inner strength. Their success would be priceless.

Lynn Booher is a junior English and psychology major

BEEFING UP SECURITY AT THE WHITE HOUSE.



MAIL CALL

Bonfire builders have rights, too

It has become fashionable, in these modern times, to have a cause and rail against it as a perceived injustice. That we have lowered the standards as to what is an "injustice," and therefore cheapened the word itself, seems to have been ignored in the rush to attack traditions, and the status quo. What was once considered our "personal freedoms" has now been replaced with the more nebulous "Rights," and these rights have apparently now been changed to read, "Anything that annoys me or inconveniences me in any way, or I find contrary to my wishes, is not to be allowed." Such intolerance is self-betitting and crass.

Bonfire. It seems that just to say the word is tantamount to asking its foes to attack you verbally and through the administration. I will never forget a meeting last year about Bonfire Wake-Up policy, in which a man stated, "I party Friday nights, and I come home drunk at two in the morning and ready to crash, and like you guys getting up and stuff wakes me up. I got rights man." Incredulously I asked if he was going to go watch it burn; at his answer (yes) I asked if 20 minutes of noise on a Saturday was too much for him to give to the effort of building it. He didn't answer. But another gentleman did say he wasn't going to watch it and wanted nothing to do with it, therefore he shouldn't be annoyed by us going to "screw" around. "Fine," I said, "so what you are telling me is since you aren't going, the other 450 of us shouldn't."

I thought that this year would be a bit easier - after all, we had already hashed out our problems with the administration, hadn't we? Not so. That the building of Bonfire is sanctioned and encouraged by A&M is well known; but

to the local area housing offices, it is a pain in the neck.

When we return, our boots are muddy and we smell like trees. Sweating and bleeding and blistered and loud, we make our way to the cafeterias and talk endlessly about how big this log was or who broke an axe. Trails of dirt and wood chips in our wake, we hang our "Grodes" to dry outside, sing ribald songs and look forward to next weekend when we will do it all over again. Friendship, hard-ship, determination, and Aggie spirit, it's all there. So, unfortunately, is the mess. The offices of the administration don't see it, but our housing coordinators do, and they are not amused. When you add to this the vocal minority of students who disapprove, you have an area office more than willing to bend over backwards to place restrictions upon Bonfire, to ensure the rights of others. (Read that as also alleviating the mess and headache they go through).

Gentlemen, and ladies, I say enough! Suck it up! We will cut the trees; you can watch Saturday cartoons. We will load the logs; you can watch "Roseanne." We will stack the logs, you can sleep far from the Tag-lines. We will build it ... you will watch. We do not mind, we are happy to do these things and proud to be a part of a glorious tradition. Just don't place further obstacles in our way. Our aching backs, our sleepless nights, our blistered palms and weary arms are enough.

Notice one thing, however: the tired but self satisfied smiles on our faces as it burns, tears on the faces of best friends who were once strangers, and the little guy who said he wouldn't have anything to do with Bonfire and shouldn't be bothered, wearing a Bonfire shirt, and watching it fall. (Bet you thought nobody would notice - we did. We were proud to have you there friend, we are all Aggies, and look at what we have ALL done.)

Wayne (Pops) White
Class of '87 and '89

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor and will print as many as space allows. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class, and phone number.
We reserve the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy.
Address letters to:
The Battalion - Mail Call
013 Reed McDonald
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX
77843-1111
Fax: (409) 845-2647
E-mail: Batt@tamv1.tamu.edu