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## Nike Pitches Tiger Ad: Cheap Shot or Clever Spot?

by Nancy Pekala

In an effort to get its brand out of the woods, Nike launched a new Tiger Woods commercial to coincide with the troubled golfer's first tee-off during last week's Masters Tournament.

But for marketer and consumer alike, the commercial, rather than scoring a branding hole-in-one provided ample reason to yell "fore". The 33-second, black-and-white spot shows Woods, dressed in a hat and vest bearing Nike's swoosh logo, staring somberly as a recording plays of the voice of his father, Earl Woods, who died in 2006.

The voiceover of Earl Woods has turned out to be especially questionable as it was confirmed the comments of the golfer's father were taken out of context. In fact, Earl Wood's comments were originally part of a 2004 documentary in which the senior Woods directed his advice not to his son, but to his wife, Kutilda.



Tiger, who failed to pick up a Green Jacket during his comeback tournament, stands by the ad spot, calling it "very apropos" and believing "it's what [his] dad would say" about his recent and widely reported infidelities.

Since the spot aired, industry pundits have described the unusual commercial as everything from "enigmatic" and "creepy" and "sickening." But from a strictly branding perspective, was the spot shameful or sheer genius?

Dave Schneider, Director of Client Services, [Tribal DDB Worldwide](#), argues that the controversial ad spot accomplished what all good advertising aims to do—to break through the proverbial clutter. "Just look at the blog postings and running commentary on any digital board about this spot," said. "But that said, it is an incredibly risky move for Nike, on the one hand possibly alienating its core consumer franchise all for the sake of a bit of short-term talk value. So, while it may be effective, it may simultaneously be shameful, and all the while trade on short-term talk value at the expense of long-term brand equity."

However, Schneider stressed that using Earl Woods' voiceover comments out of context was just plain wrong. "One of the fundamental principles of marketing today is to be authentic," he said. "Stealing a voiceover from Tiger's dead father that was intended for an alternative reason for the sake of shilling shoes is just wrong."

Once the novelty of the ad wears off, Schneider suggested that the spot won't move the needle much in helping to sell product or build long-term brand equity. "It's a tactic, and one

that will be discussed at length among, first, the advertising and marketing pundits, and, second, only marginally by consumers for a matter of hours or days and then will altogether be forgotten.”

He added that the biggest lesson the Nike ad may offer marketers is in the form of authenticity. “While part of the role of advertising is to connect with consumers on an emotional basis, to strengthen the relationship among a consumer target, in today’s ever-increasing transparent world, it must be done in an authentic manner, one that stays true to the essence of the brand’s very being,” Schneider said. “This spot altogether appears to have violated that principle for the sake of water cooler chatter. Shock and awe is not a long-term marketing strategy but rather a short-term burst that will hardly drive long-term consideration.”

David Mitchel, Vice President of Marketing for [Norton Mitchel Marketing Medical](#), agreed that the ad spot didn’t do much to advance Nike’s brand. “I think Nike wanted to show that he (Tiger Woods) is remorseful but the new ad doesn’t change the way people perceive the Nike brand.”

Mitchel also suggested that just as with the case of Kobe Bryant, who was under contract with Nike at the time he faced charges of sexual assault, “the passage of time healed the perception of Bryant. The same approach would have worked for Tiger Woods. Silence is golden.”

Yet, some perceive Nike’s approach as bold, strategic and savvy. Jef Loeb, a copywriter and creative director at [Brainchild Creative](#), suggested that the branding aspect of the ad is meant to be more foundational than promotional. “Nike’s core strength was, is and –most likely- will always revolve around its relationship with star athletes who symbiotically provide the brand its badge product states (and vice versa),” he explained. “By hanging with Tiger, regardless of the deployed creative, Nike plays two very smart cards. First, the company takes a solid position against his inevitable image recovery. Second, it sends a huge signal to this particular branch of the ‘always under the red hot glare of public gaze’ that Nike is no fair-weather sponsor. That’s branding, of a kind, but at a deeper level than most of us ever have to – or want to- operate.”

Paul M. Allen, owner of [PMA Technology Group](#), acknowledged that Nike’s approach was brilliant not only from a creative standpoint, but from a strategic one as well. “Visually, it’s the kind of thing that art directors see and ask themselves, ‘Why didn’t I think of that?’ It offered great copy and great timing in its release,” Allen said. He suggested it was also an ingenious way of getting “Brian Williams to run your ad on the nightly news without having to buy advertising time.”

It’s clear the ad didn’t resonate with everyone. Recent reports indicate that the ad may just have been the last straw for Woods’ wife, who reportedly considered the spot to be “cheesy” and may be looking for an exit from her marriage to the golfer.

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