

retailing slogans as brand activators

by Pamela Lawson and Caroline Wilson

A great brand is one thing. A great brand with activating power, delivering messages that keep you engaged and loyal, is the ultimate success formula.

Look at the Tim Hortons story. How much more do you need to hear about a brand that is now among the most recognized brands in Canada, right up there with Pepsi-Cola and Crest, all of them well in excess of 90% recognition among Canadian adults? The astonishment of the Tim Hortons story is the speed at which its brand fame caught up with Pepsi-Cola and Crest, surpassing other well-known brands like Sears and Haagen Dazs.

Canadian Business magazine named Tim Hortons as Canada's "best managed brand" and "most admired corporate culture" this year. There are now over 2,500 Tim Hortons restaurants in Canada and their revenue was \$1.2 billion in 2005. On the eve of the IPO, the Canadian public was whipped into a frenzy, and the stock was considered by some analysts to have peaked before it was even available.

Tim Hortons has also reached the summit of corporate slogans, with their top of mind awareness of "R-r-r-roll up the rim to win," the tagline for a seasonal contest that runs from February to May of each year. A CorbinPartners study on the recognition of slogans revealed that in early 2006, 91% of Canadians were



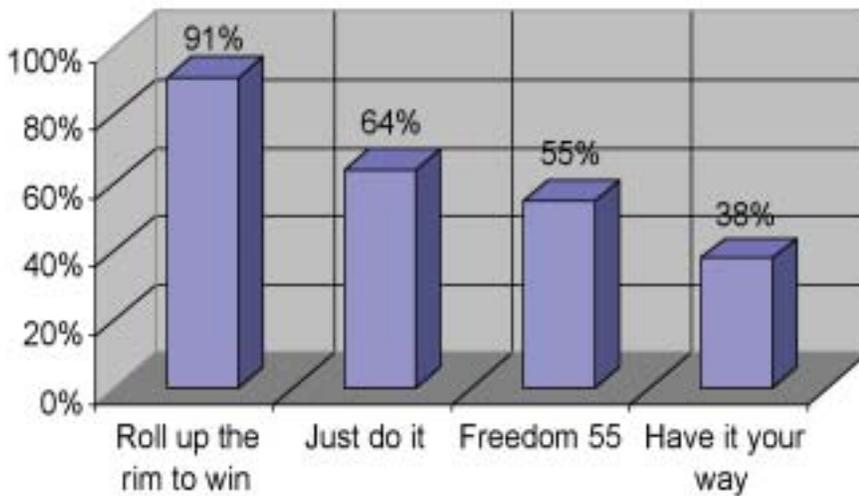
able to connect that slogan to Tim Hortons', up 6% from two years before. And remember, it's just a contest slogan—it's not even a brand name. And just a four-month contest at that.

What may come as even more of a surprise is the comparison to other famous slogans. Consider Nike's slogan "Just do it." Nike spent \$1.6 billion globally on their advertising in 2005. Only 64% of Canadians correctly identified the Nike slogan in 2006, up only 3% from two years before.

Remember "Freedom 55," the leader in Canadian slogans in the late 1990s? It became so valuable to London Life, that the company named a whole division of the company the "Freedom 55" division. The percentage of Canadians who currently know that slogan's connection to London Life is (coincidentally) 55%. "Have it your way"? Just 38%. "R-r-r-roll up the Rim to Win" reigns supreme in the slogan world.

While reveling in the upside success of their brands and slogans, companies

Recognition of famous brand slogans



need to pay attention to the risks of diluting their associations with their valuable slogans. Slogans, just like brands, suffer the risks of trademark infringement. Scott Paper had launched a contest for its Purex toilet paper brand with the slogan "Unroll to Win." According to a Scott representative quoted in *The Promotion Times Online Newsletter*, the contest "definitely achieved our sales objectives, and trade support was strong." Did the success of the contest have anything to do with the ring of cozy famil-

ilarity in the slogan? Does the slogan dilute the value of the Tim Hortons brand? In the extreme, would customers think Tim Hortons has now connected itself to a company that sells toilet paper? Lawyers for Tim Hortons are worried about just such depreciation of their client's famous slogan. In 1993, the company filed a legal objection to letting Scott Paper Company register and continue to use the slogan "Unroll to Win." The case has yet to be resolved.

Interestingly enough, London Life

also had to fight off slogan imitators when, in the mid-1990s, another insurance company began using the slogan "Freedom to Plan your Future." London Life lost that battle. Nike continues to keep all competitors at bay, having secured the rights to be the sole manufacturer of athletic gear who can use the "Just do it" call to action.

Bottom line: Great brands make you pay attention. Great brand slogans get you involved, and keep you loyal. Tim Hortons raised its profile in Canada tremendously by hitting on a gr-r-r-eat slogan. It's a lesson for forward-thinking retailers to learn from. But as with all ingenious ideas, slogan imitators and free-riders can lurk around every corner. Protecting your slogan becomes just as important as inventing and publicizing it.

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