

Nicole Piper – Article sample

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Lessons Learned From The “F” Word And Near Demise Of Nickelodeon

I learned important lessons in business development during the 12 years I worked at MTV Networks. Perhaps the most important was how a well-defined brand identity leads a business to extraordinary growth.

What I wasn't expecting was how much it would center on the “F” word.

Let me explain.

One of my main roles with the company was working with the Nickelodeon division. I developed consumer products programs that tapped into the emotional connection our target audience, kids, had

with Nickelodeon and our TV shows (Ren & Stimpy, Rugrats, SpongeBob SquarePants, etc.)

At that time (I started in 1993), the network was undergoing extraordinary growth. We were consistently the #1 kids network in the US. And we were rapidly expanding overseas, too.

But Nick had a very bumpy start... In fact, if the network hadn't taken a good look at its brand identity, it wouldn't have survived.

When Nick launched in the '80s, the goal was to be a safe place for kids to watch TV. It was a "family-friendly educational network" with no programs showing violence, profanity, nudity, and no commercials for feminine hygiene products. Parents didn't have to think twice about letting their kids tune in.

Sounds exciting, right?

Uh, no.

And the ratings proved it.

The network was trying to educate and "inspire kids to greatness" by airing shows of exemplary students and child prodigies. (We eventually referred to that time as the "green vegetable days of television.")

The Nick execs knew they wanted to serve kids, but they were bombing.

That's when some really smart folks decided to find out what kids wanted and what was important to them.

So they asked.

And what came back were things like this:

"I want to laugh."

"I want to have fun."

“There’s a lot of pressure to fit in at school. I want a place where I fit in just being me.”

Wow. Time to jettison the 9-year old virtuosos and chess prodigies.

The channel re-defined the brand and re-thought its strategy. The revamped network would focus on 2 main things:

First, they made Nick a place where every kid felt like a winner. And ever since, kids rule at Nick. Just think of their longtime hit awards show, Kids’ Choice Awards. Every year kids vote on their favorite shows, movies, and singers.

Second, they would connect to kids through humor. *Kid’s* humor. That meant the grossness of Ren & Stimpy and not being afraid to use the “F” word (polite company please look away)... Farts.

And the result was outstanding! Nickelodeon skyrocketed in the ratings and went on to sell their programing around the world. That allowed me to start consumer products businesses in over 30 countries.

But our American ways weren’t always appreciated in other markets...

The British had no idea what to make of us. Imagine the historical references that came up in my meetings... things like, “this is why we didn’t fight harder to keep you in the Commonwealth.”

They knew the programing was striking a chord but they had a hard time embracing what made Nick “Nick.” The British execs were visibly uncomfortable in our meetings when farts came up. And they simply couldn’t say the word. The best they could do was say “bottom burp.”

At least it was a start...

Eventually, the wants, needs and desires of kids won over the international TV execs (especially when they recognized the profit potential). Nickelodeon programing is now in 158 countries around the globe.

What does this mean for your business? It means that **developing a brand that resonates with your customer on an emotional level will create a platform for rapid growth.** This is true no matter what size your business is now.

That's because *emotion creates connection.*

It's smart to take the time to craft your brand message and stay true to it in everything you do.

There's a brand behind your product and business, whether it's by design or by default.

Make it by design.

About the author: I'm a global brand strategist and loyalty marketer turned copywriter. I write copy for natural health, beauty and wellness companies. And I help business owners understand and clarify their brand. Before launching Piper Marketing Solutions, I built multi-million dollar businesses in over 30 countries for numerous high-profile properties including MTV, Nickelodeon, The Sharper Image, and Pokémon. Want help with your brand? Grab my eBook, **Brand Magnetism – 3 simple steps to attracting customers... and keep them coming back for more.** It's FREE.