

SURPRISE! 4 LESSONS TO LEARN FROM GAME OF THRONES AND MAD MEN

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HOW UNPREDICTABLE ARE YOU?



Whether on TV or via streaming services – TV shows are booming. HBO's Game of Thrones is at the forefront of the booming business of producing series for both classic TV and streaming channels. Six years since the series, which is set in a fictional medieval world, first went on air, the US private channel's show is the most successful TV production of all times. GoT has long gone viral and dominates conversations on social media, in the family home and at watercoolers.

Game of Thrones and shows such as Mad Men utilize – and break – some basic storytelling principles in order to achieve marketing success, providing marketers with some valuable lessons.

We all love a good story, whether for entertainment or marketing reasons. While viral hits can neither be planned nor forced, shows such as Game of Thrones or cult hit Mad Men, which follows the ups and downs of an advertising agency in 60s New York, built their word-of-mouth success on 4 factors which can also help you create your successful product marketing plan.

The Game of Thrones, Mad Men & Co principle





4 PRINCIPLES FOR BETTER MARKETING FROM GAME OF THRONES; MAD MEN & CO.

1. Offer something to identify with

GoT's medieval fantasy-universe seems to be miles from Mad Men's sleek Madison Avenue setting. While bloody battles for the Iron Throne don't seem to share anything with a pitch for Coca Cola's advertising budget, both narratives deliver universal topics which most people can identify with: the struggle for power and social status; the underdog prevailing against all odds; gender roles and their shifts. Characters who can believably channel these issues, touch us deeply and keep us at the edge of our seats while we root for them.

That's why you should always harness your marketing strategy along the following questions: Where is the potential for identification in your product or company narrative? Where can your target group „latch on“ emotionally?

2. Stay relevant

Mad Men and Game of Thrones are pure fiction. However, both shows' marketing managed to brilliantly bridge the gap between fiction and the reality of viewers' everyday lives, thus becoming relevant. While Mad Men achieved its relevance by referencing events still alive in audiences' memories (Cuba crisis, moon landing), HBO created a fictional campaign for some Game of Thrones protagonists to give viewers a break from the real presidential campaign in 2016. People could support their favorite character's „election video“ by sharing or making a purchase at the amazon online store. Media portals picked up on the promotion, resulting in 1.5 million votes being cast.

Questions to ask yourself about your own marketing strategy: How can you incorporate current or relevant topics into your campaign in a meaningful way?

3. Create suspense *Careful, Spoilers!*

Don Draper is a false identity! Incest among siblings! A morally sound and sympathetic character literally loses his head before the end of season one! Both Game of Thrones and Mad Men are willfully at odds with usual conventions of their genre. Heros and their dogs fall, villains prevail, beloved characters display their unusually dark side or take morally shocking decisions. Anything can happen at any time. That's what keeps audiences captivated and at the edge of their seats, while also providing plenty to talk about during that next lunch break.

For your own communication strategy, keep in mind: Provide suspense to your target group, with unexpected promotions, surprising content and conscious twists which will lead them to view your brand in (positively) new ways.

4. Make them laugh

No matter how cynical (Mad Men) or savage (Game of Thrones) the world is in which the serial characters live: There's always enough time for some comic relief between all the drama, provided by an ironic scene, a quirky side character or one of Tyrion Lannister's sarcastic lines. While humor is an ingredient better added sparsely and selectively, taking oneself and life not too seriously makes you sympathetic and memorable – there's space for a smile in nearly every communication strategy.

For an example of the long-term success of a "lateral thinker," read the following success story.



Case study – dm drugstore chain

Here I can be myself, here I like to shop. An extremely successful slogan, inseparably linked to German drugstore chain dm. 45 years after its foundation, the company has a network of 3,500 stores in 13 countries with almost 60,000 employees. And despite stiff competition from Rossmann, Müller and others, dm is selected again and again as one of Germany's most popular brands, the last time in 2017. Here are some of the most important success factors of a truly sustainable company.



Götz Werner opened his first dm drugstore in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 1973. Selling toiletries in a specialized supermarket at reasonable prices turned out to be hugely popular in a price-conscious country like Germany, and the economic upswing of the 1970s also helped. As early as 1976 dm expanded into Austria, and in 1986 the company introduced its own private brands which are still extremely successful today. Now, the total turnover generated by the dm subsidiaries in 13 countries amounts to 10 billion euros and sales growth between 4 and 8 percent. (Source: dm website)

Trust through authenticity of a "lateral thinker"

Götz Werner, the dm founder, was known as a "contrary philanthropist" and an avid follower of Rudolf Steiner's spiritual anthroposophy. He made this philosophy an important part of how he ran the company, and even after him stepping back from the business in 2008 it continues to be an important pillar for the company's management team, including his son Christoph Werner. This authenticity and stability are honoured by dm customers, despite the occasional bad press because of openly fighting competitor Rossmann or outsourcing the production of cloth bags from Germany to India.

Employees: Satisfaction catches on

A good work environment is more important than profitability. This creed made the founder of dm one of the pioneers of modern corporate culture in the 1990s. Personal responsibility, flat hierarchies and employee participation are of greatest importance. Theatre workshops as part of your training? Employees deciding on hiring new colleagues? More often than not, Götz was ridiculed as an ineffective "Waldorf manager". However, success proves him right: dm regularly occupies top positions in employer rankings. While the retail industry as a whole feels a sore lack of junior employees, dm is inundated with 150,000 applications each year according to an article in the magazine *Wirtschaftswoche*. A pleasant



work environment and friendly employees naturally have an effect on the customers who are happy to spend time in the stores and love coming back, not just because of cost-effectiveness.

Own brands: stay flexible

As early as 1986, dm came out with its first own brands. Balea, Alverde and roughly 20 other private labels are not only inexpensive but have also become high-quality alternative products. Product Management invests a lot in confidence building and bringing an emotional element to the brands and lets customers vote on developments through the company's social media channels. New products of third-party brands are quickly incorporated into its own product line in order to participate in trends.

Marketing: Innovation with influencers, social media and others

dm invests a lot in bringing an emotional element to its brands. It does this with innovative and modern marketing strategies. Customers can vote on the next "Limited Edition" of the body care brand Balea and give feedback about products through social media. And almost from the beginning, the company has invested in cooperations with influencers. Whether it is about female bloggers choosing products in stylish packaging or about providing YouTube influencer BibisBeautyPlace with her own brand: dm demonstrate marketing skills and a willingness to experiment with new trends. A sure way to become the brand of choice for the next generation of dm fans.

Conclusion

Game of Thrones and Mad Men, two of the most successful contemporary TV shows and streaming channels make it happen: Storytelling booms, and marketers can learn a lot for their own strategies:

- Work out the identification potential of the product / brand and communicate pointedly
- Make an emotional connection between the product and the target group with references to current or timelessly relevant topics
- Remain positively unpredictable – through surprising content and deliberate breakups
- Do not lose the ease and humor - life is serious enough

Further links on this topic

<https://www.demandgenreport.com/resources/infographics/content-marketing-lessons-from-the-game-of-thrones>

<https://www.inc.com/bill-murphy-jr/12-important-things-you-should-have-learned-from-mad-men-especially-the-series-f.html>

<https://www.polygon.com/2017/7/31/16067828/game-of-thrones-season-7-episode-3-best-death>



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