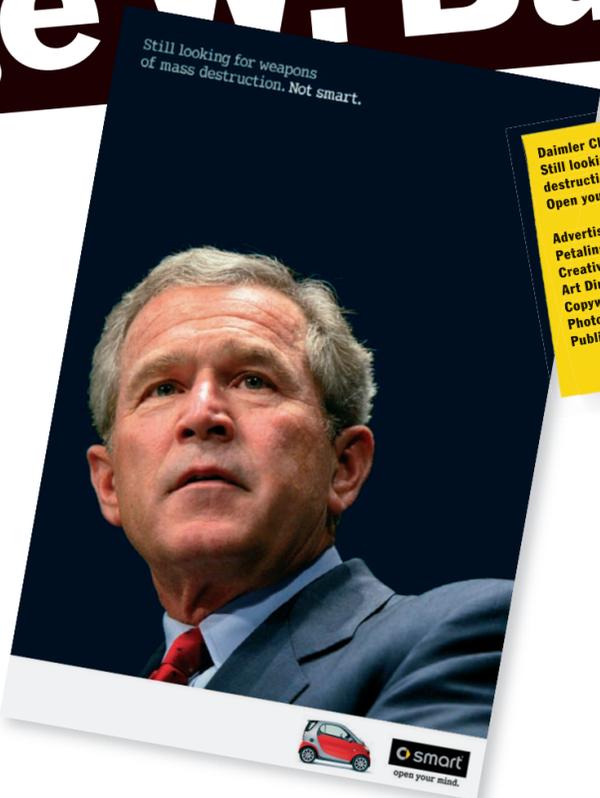


The Model President: George W. Bush Advertising Star

by Steven Heller

Still looking for weapons of mass destruction. Not smart.



Daimler Chrysler, Smart: Bush Still looking for weapons of mass destruction. Not smart. Smart. Open your mind.

Advertising Agency: Crush, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia
Creative Director: Kenneth Lim
Art Directors: Adrian Tan/Danny Thong
Copywriter: Kenneth Lim
Photography: Corbis
Published: June 2007

using advertisements to make or exploit a political statement is a relatively recent practice (Oliviero Toscani and Tibor Kalman's advertisements for Benetton in the mid-nineties took on social issues, but they never used an American president's visage). So when a company like SK Bedding advertises its 'Dreamland' mattress with a portrait of Bush collaged among photos of burned babies, flag-draped coffins and images of Abu Ghraib, under the title: 'Who Says There's No Rest for the Wicked?', the conventional rules have obviously been changed. What's more, this campaign also includes depictions of Kim Jong-il and Robert Mugabe. The idea that the leader of the free world would be ideologically lumped together with murderous dictators gives one pause. Was this just an anomaly or is this how people view the United States and its leader?

Politics and commerce are not such strange bedfellows after all. A campaign for the newspaper *Milenio* may not be such an overt condemnation of Bush as SK Bedding's, but its conceptual conceit forces critical comparisons. The campaign's big idea is based on an equation (A + B = C). For example, Fidel Castro + a mariachi band = Hugo Chavez. Another shows a gorilla + razor = Arnold Schwarzenegger. The piece de resistance shows Homer Simpson + John Wayne = (a scowling) Bush. The juxtapositions here are very revealing. Likewise ads for Paintpark, a recreational venue in Great Britain for paintball shooting, uses characters wearing Bush, Saddam and Bin Laden masks - the concept is pretty obvious. While the image is benign enough, under the headline 'War Games: Recruit your Company for a Game of Paintball', the idea that Bush is thrown together with Saddam is disturbingly humorous. Another odd one is the series of poster-like advertisements for Dogotel, a Mexican kennel, playing off the Mexican translation of the word dogotel, meaning 'low life'. Bush, Bin Laden and Castro are rendered separately in incriminating vignettes. The Bush iteration, admittedly a shoddy rendering, shows him against mushroom clouds and missiles.

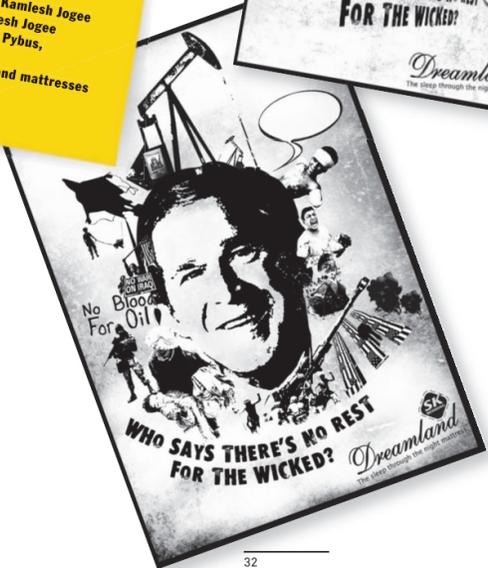
When was the last time a sitting president of the United States was a model for a commercial advertising campaign? The answer is: never! After all, there are protocols that prevent commanders-in-chief from touting products. As the leader of the capitalist free world, while in elected office, presidents are not CEOs; they are spokespersons for all American goods, and therefore ethically prevented from throwing their weight behind any single product. Other than the occasional public service announcement, presidents must be above the promotion and public relations fray. Once they are out of office, well, even then they are not free to hawk commercial wares, either. It's just not dignified. In the United States this is an unwritten regulation, yet elsewhere in the world there are no such restrictions, which is not say American expresidents supplement their retirement incomes by making commercials abroad. Still, that doesn't stop advertisers from co-opting the images of sitting or retired presidents. During George W Bush's last term (2004 - 2008), he may not (to paraphrase Lyndon B Johnson) have sought nor did he accept advertising jobs, but his image has nonetheless been employed in scores of foreign campaigns for organizations such as Amnesty International; media conglomerates, including newspapers and television stations; and even commercial products such as Lipton Tea, Arno Blenders and Daimler Chrysler's Smart Car, which features a photo of W under the headline 'Still looking for weapons of mass destruction. Not smart.'

Arguably, it is an invasion of even his high-profile life to exploit W's stature in order to pitch retail commodities (unless it is somehow done as parody or social comment). But an entirely different tenet applies when using him as a symbol. In recent years, there has been a trend, of sorts, to juxtapose W with other world symbols - or other world figures who represent a range of unsavoury policies and acts - in order to illustrate distinct points of world view, often related to his policies. Although it is common to satirize politicians in political or topical cartooning,



SK Bedding: George W. Bush

Advertising Agency: Publicis, South Africa
Executive Creative Director: Kady Winetcki
Creative Director: Kamlesh Jogee
Art Director: Kamlesh Jogee
Copywriter: Lauren Pybus,
Des Williams
Client: SK Bedding and mattresses



Dogotel: Bush We don't discriminate any kind of breed. (In Mexico 'Dog' means lowlife) Dog boarding kennel

Advertising Agency: Tanque Group, Mexico City, Mexico
Creative Directors: Veronica Flores, Oliver Meneses, Kiko Leitao
Art directors/Illustrators: Pascual Garcia, Sergio Rivera
Copywriters: Lorena Luqueno, Daniel Ortiz, Veronica Flores



Paintpark.pt: George W. Bush War games. Recruit your company for a game of paintball.

Advertising Agency: Partners, Portugal



Milenio Diario: Bush
Such a complex world needs a good explanation

Advertising Agency: Olabuenaga Chemistri, Mexico
Executive Creative Director: Ana Olabuenaga, Jorge Cuchi
Creative Director: Pablo Ferrari
Art Director: Héctor Colín, Iliana Solís, Gert Kiebooms
Copywriter: Miguel Rocha, Pablo Ferrari
Additional Credits: Stock, Héctor Colín

COMPLEJO NECESITA UNA BUENA EXPLICACIÓN.

UN MUNDO TAN COMPLEJO NECESITA UNA BUENA EXPLICACIÓN.

Other advertisements are less about being critical of Bush than exploiting his familiar face. The SIC News Channel's campaign shows various world leaders having conversations where a fly is on the nose of one of the conversers (i.e. on George W Bush) - it's hard to say what the point of that one is. In the ad for IPPU, a label printer, Bush is arm-in-arm with a smiling Fidel Castro, which, of course, is just plain silly. And speaking of silly, to promote its smaller size newspaper, the German *Welt Kompakt* campaign shows baby versions of world leaders, such as Bush, Angela Merkel and Pope Benedict, under the headline 'BIG NEWS, SMALL SIZE'. The World Association for Newspapers' campaign pairs world foes together: under 'Hide & Seek' is a collage of Bush seeking out Bin Laden.

BIG NEWS. SMALL SIZE. WELT KOMPAKT
Zeitung der Neuen Generation

Welt Kompakt: Bush
Big news. Small size. Newspaper of the new generation.

Advertising Agency: Jung von Matt, Germany

The ad for Arno blenders may not be as biting as this but is decidedly humiliating. It shows a photo of President George Bush I in a blender with a picture of Alfred E Neuman; next to the blender, presumably after it was blended, is a glass with a photo of George Bush (in all fairness, they also have a similar one with Bill Clinton). The Marmite Squeezy syrup ad shows a chocolate portrait of W with the tagline 'You either love it or hate it' (meaning the syrup, of course). That's pretty benign, but the Lipton Tea advertisements, however, are surprisingly impertinent: in its parody of a newspaper front page (titled *The Daily Focus*) a lead story with a photograph of Bush drinking water sits next to the headline 'George W Bush successfully names all 50 US states'. A similarly goofy photograph of Kim Jong-il as a Pee-Wee Herman lookalike accompanies the headline 'Kim Jong-il Chooses not to Spank His Dog'. While these stories are more silly than offensive, the idea that Bush has parity with Kim is of interest. Conversely, the ad for *Cape Times* newspaper lands a more directly offensive blow. Its papier-mâché effigy of W under the heading 'Public enemy No. 1?' is a pretty strong indictment. While *Egoista* magazine's 'Bushit' advertisement simply takes a swat, showing W with a splat of pigeon poop on his shoulder with the caption 'Since 1945 there have been only 26 days of peace in the world.'

The most damning ads are predictably from the political advocacy organizations, such as Amnesty International, which for one campaign produced a series of enlarged commemorative stamps attacking torture in dictatorial regimes - including those in Myanmar, Iran and Zimbabwe - with portraits of their leaders. The last stamp in the series, to 'Stamp out torture', includes President Bush. Another Amnesty campaign, for the 'Make Some Noise for Human Rights' concert, includes photographs of world leaders - including Bush, Kim Jong-il and Mugabe - holding their ears. And in Amnesty's 'The Power of Your Voice' campaign, Bush is linked to Presidents Putin and Ahmadinejad. Never before in the history of advertising has an American president been used so recurrently and portrayed in this kind of advertising (even going back to the nineteenth century). One reason may be the increase in 'social commentary' ads by companies such as Benetton, Kenneth Cole, Ben & Jerry's, and others. Maybe another reason is that, as a form of entertainment, advertising is taking more rule-busting chances. Still, one wonders if US policy had not lost its long-held positive stature, and President Bush were more popular elsewhere in the world, would this trend be happening today? What's most telling is that advertising reflects what the masses know and understand: in this crop of campaigns, apparently, the world seems to hold this leader of the free world in fairly low esteem.

Egoista Magazine: Bushit
Since 1945 there have been only 26 days of peace in the world. (PEACE, December special issue)

Advertising Agency: Y&R Portugal
Creative Directors: Pedro Ferreira, Judite Mota
Art Directors: Pedro Ferreira, Tico Moraes
Copywriter: Judite Mota
Photography: Archive
Post-production: Tico Moraes
Published: December 2006

Sic news: One Fly on the wall means that we have privileged access to information.

Advertising Agency: MSTF Partners, Portugal

HIDE & SEEK

World Association of Newspapers:
Hide & Seek
Where history plays out daily.

Advertising Agency: The Jupiter Drawing Room, South Africa
Creative Directors: Graham Warsaw, Michael Blore
Art Directors: Liam Wielopolski, Joseph Makwela, Heath Geddes
Copywriters: Gavin Stradi, Darren Kilfoil

MAKE SOME NOISE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
CONCERT
Danube bank in front of the Parliament. 13.June@1PM

Amnesty International:
Make some noise for human rights.
Amnesty International.
Concert Danube bank in front of the Parliament. 13.June@1PM

Advertising Agency: DDB, Budapest, Hungary
Creative Director: Milos Ilic
Art Director: Lukasz Brzozowski
Copywriters: Milos Ilic, Lukasz Brzozowski
Photographer: Gabor Mate
Published: June 2007

SIC NEWS CHANNEL

GUANTANAMO BAY

Amnesty International: Bush
Petaling Jaya
Creative Director: Steve Hough, Andy Greenaway
Art Director: Joel Clement, Steve Hough
Copywriter: Steve Hough, Joel Clement
Photographer: Lee Kong How, Xpose
Illustrator: Aston Choong, Saw Beng Hong
Typographer: Joel Clement