

Seven deadly sins. Seven dandy marketing tools.

Part one: The big three—lust, gluttony, and greed.



The seven deadly sins are more than guidelines of behaviors to avoid. They're also very effective marketing communications tools.

In fact, before there was an official deadly sin list, one of them, lust, was the subject of the oldest advertisement still in existence. An ad for a bordello was uncovered on a sidewalk in Pompeii after more than sixteen centuries under ash from the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

From that date – and probably long before – to the present, the seven deadly sins have played key roles in turning prospects into customers. Not surprising, since none of these peccadilloes would have made it to the top seven if they weren't really popular.

The deadly seven have gone through some changes in their climb to the all-star team of bad behavior. Four of them – lust, greed, anger and pride – appeared on Evagrius of Pontus' list of eight evil thoughts in the fourth century. In the sixth century Pope Gregory (the first one) cut the list to seven and made some substitutions. Extravagance replaced lust in the lineup, and gluttony, sloth and envy joined the team. Eventually, lust won its place back from extravagance, and the big seven were firmly established for more than a millennium – and still counting.

This week's article looks at the first three sins and some of their appearances in advertising:

Lust: Lust is, of course, used to sell lust-related products. It was a prominent feature of Victoria's Secret TV commercials. Though it does seem a little odd that the spots seem designed to kindle lust in men, while women are the brand's principal purchasers.

Any number of jeans spots seem to base their appeal on lust. The then teenaged Brooke Shields' line "Want to know what gets between me and my Calvins? Nothing," in a Calvin Klein jeans commercial caused a minor scandal in 1981. (Donna Rice caused some buzz as spokesperson for No Excuses jeans from 1984 to 1988. (Remember the photo of Ms. Rice and Gary Hart on the good ship Monkey Business that sunk the senator's run for the presidential nomination?) Marla Maples followed Ms. Rice, and the titillation trend has continued unabated ever since. There was a recent flurry of salacious tongue-wagging over the Bartle Bogle Hegarty commercial for Levi's 501 jeans that was edited two ways, one for straight and one for gay male audiences. The guy

to manage it for maximum return. The approach was a light, sophisticated take on greed. The headline was direct, but the visual was a *New Yorker* style cartoon illustrating the point in a tongue-in-cheek way. The campaign met its first year's response objective in just three months. Sales aids we developed helped the bank close 80% of prospects. Overall, the campaign quadrupled the program's target goals. Yep, as Gekko said, "Greed is good."

We're not advocating the seven deadly sins as lifestyle choices. But even a marketer who practices the Seven Virtues which are the sins' opposite numbers (chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, kindness, patience and humility) would be derelict to ignore the persuasive power of seven of humanity's favorite foibles.

To learn more about principles and best practices of marketing communications, visit our website or call BrainPosse at 865-330-0033.

Next week Part 2 – the final four: Sloth, Wrath Envy and Pride

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