

## A timeless masterpiece



The Patek Philippe ad is a compositional masterpiece. It deals with at least three layers of meaning aimed at creating the necessary 'signal' to cut through the human defence mechanisms and strike a deeper, more subconscious note.

By Dr Kay Brügge 17 Feb 2005



The first, and perhaps least obvious to the consumer, revolves around reducing what is termed 'cognitive dissonance'. Expensive purchases (as these types of watches certainly are) easily give rise to a sense of dissonance or psychological unease / guilt. This is particularly the case if the price is bought into relation with other imperatives, e.g. maintaining the house, paying for kids' tuition, etc. The most commonsensical approach to reduce this dissonance is by selectively suppressing information, which fuels dissonance and focusing on or even 'selling' information supportive of the expensive purchase to meaningful others (e.g. the wife).

This is where the ad 'assists' greatly: "You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the next generation..." (yeah, sure!). This means that hubby can convince 'the wife' that tens of thousands of Rands for a watch is justifiable since he actually only has it in 'safe-keeping' for the son, and is actually not personally interested in it. At least two people will thus wear the watch over time, thus justifying the capital 'layout'.

The second layer of meaning behind the ad revolves around that of 'traditions'. Certain 'truths', customs or traditions are usually conveyed to the next generation as a means to keep them 'alive' but also to instil a set of desirable values and life-skills in the children to equip them to manage their lives after the elders have passed on. The Patek Philippe Watch Company tries to convince us that passing-on a very expensive watch to the next generation is at least as worthy a legacy as certain abstract values, or worse still, a proxy for them.

The fine-print, "begin your own tradition" is extremely clever. It makes it 'okay' for the consumer with the financial means to pass-on an expensive watch, without needing to feel 'socially insensitive' in an environment where the amount spent can buy at least two low-income homes. Moreover, the notion of "...your own tradition" has an additional important objective: It fosters a sense of wholesome individuality and exclusivity and mitigates any guilt feelings in a society that is increasingly becoming aware of the psychological consequences of blindly pursuing quantitative, material values and tokens.

The third layer is more relational and process orientated, but no less persuasive, subliminally speaking. The ad shows a father and son leaving the house. They are on their own 'mission'- the watch (and the son's knowledge that he will own it someday) serving as a necessary and sufficient catalyst for their relationship (the identical clothing convincing us that they are 'two of a kind'). They have their backs turned away from the camera - running - which makes them unreachable and inaccessible to the influences (and needs) of the rest of the family.

These compositional aspects of the ad are critical to position the brand exclusively toward males and more specifically to the father-son 'team'. This relational element and not their faces is key. The strategic intent probably is to limit other influences and psychological projections by the reader, which may have diluted the

clear and unambiguous targeting of the product at all 'father-and-son' dads, period. The black-and-white presentation is also not arbitrary - it reinforces the myth at the centre of the ad, namely that fathers have for centuries bought Patek Philippe watches primarily to pass them on to their sons.

## ABOUT DR KAY BRÜGGE

Dr Kay Brügge is a life- design practitioner with post-graduate qualifications in psychology and neuro-psychology, specialising in qualitative research and project management, driving market and social research projects, including methodology development and focus group facilitation. With a PhD in neuro-psychology and special interest in Neuro Linguistic Programm (NLP), he is interested in the analysis of subliminal messages in advertising and the subconscious influences of the retail environment on the consumer. He can be reached on email: [lifecoach@polka.co.za](mailto:lifecoach@polka.co.za).

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