

The good, the bad and the ugly

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A few weeks ago I entered the hallowed premises of the Groucho club courtesy of IPC Media's Lisa Batty. Lisa runs a book club and she'd invited me, and top creative Dave Dye to talk about our books. (Mine, **Tell the Truth**, was published last year. Dye's on truth in advertising is due later this year.)

Lisa opened with champagne and a warm up for the select gathering. "Tell us a hidden truth about yourself" she urged. She opened with one about herself which once heard will never be forgotten and which can't be repeated in a family blog.

This set the bar rather high for the next person - it was a tough act to follow. A couple of very funny stories did follow, then it came to Dye's turn. He fielded the challenge by observing that it was interesting that when the truth

is talked about it suggests, instantly, to many a hidden truth, an embarrassing truth, indeed a naked truth.

This set me thinking. Is truth too hard ?

Or is truth multifaceted.

There is a growing number of "truth tellers" in marketing, advertising and media. People like EA's Stuart Lang who told me "you can't get away with marketing spin any more, credibility is everything.". And marketing chief Catherine Woolfe who says that truth in marketing is one of the only ways to achieve attitude change.

The increasing band of truth marketers understand instinctively the role of truth in marketing. There are 3 categories of truth that spring to mind for many people and two of them aren't that helpful. There is the ugly truth, the spun truth and the truth that sells.

These aspects of truth apply to people as much as to products and to brands and it may help if I illustrate them as if applied to myself, meeting you for the first time at a media party. The ugly truth might be that I'm nervous and shy and frantically hoping I can manage enough small talk to get through the first meeting without being too intense. The spun truth is that I'm CSO of mega agency MediaCom, dressed up and brimming with confidence. The truth that sells ? I'm hoping to connect with you and your media wisdom and experience, (and my nice little DvF dress was picked up in the sale.)

John Grant, in his book "After Image" wrote about research he'd carried out about the ads an ice cream brand had run using sex to sell. He asked respondents what they thought the brand was trying to say to them and what they thought about it really. They replied that the brand was telling them ice cream was sexy but that really they thought it made you fat. This is the spin and the ugly. The missing truth here was the truth that sells. The authenticity of the recipe or ingredients or company heritage would take centre stage in an advert powered by the truth that sells.

I think that the truth is undeniable and I believe that the days of spin are numbered. Brands aren't left only with the ugly truth. The truth that sells is the future of great marketing.

First published [here on Sue Unerman's blog](#)

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