

Commentary

Addressing Product Placement Concerns: How Important Is Resolution in Product Placement?

by Raymond Pettit, Tuesday, Apr 12, 2005 7:00 AM EST

ANYONE ABLE TO VIEW THE recent TBS series on 'Product Placement in the Movies' was most likely struck by one thing: How naturally and seamlessly the placements fit into the flow of the stories. These terrific slices of everyday life resonated with us because they involved the use of real products and brands, illuminated warm, funny, or emotional stories and experiences we could easily relate to, and they were memorable. The question is: How can we capture that satisfying purity in today's world, but still achieve the business goals and objectives we are after?

Suzanne Langer, a philosopher and academic, established the concept that signs, symbols (brands are symbols), stories, and myths by their nature are very efficient communicators. She pre-dated current 'right brain-left brain' thinking with her discussion of discursive (cognitive) and presentational (emotional) forms. In simple terms, she proves, within philosophical parameters, that human beings are constantly carrying on a process of 'symbolic transformation of experience.' What this means, in relation to product placement, is that products are seen and felt (rationally and emotionally) as signs or symbols (brands), but a stronger impression is achieved when the products are embedded in a story, or, are designed to trace (or be associated with) a basic artistic form, such as a scene's introduction, tension, and resolution.

Resolution Is Key The power of the closed form, as Langer would describe it, is found in the tension/resolution of an artistic work. But we can think of it in more down-to-earth scenarios. What do we lose when we miss the exciting final touchdown in a football game, or the last act of a play, or even the last inning of a close World Series baseball game? We miss the resolution, that important piece that

provides closure, satisfaction, and meaning to the experience.

This is the great strength of product placement -- creating a memorable impression in a viewer via an association within an artistic 'wrapper' that includes a strong, recognizable resolution. Of course other factors are at work, but this resolution attribute contributes heavily to the 'impact factor' that determines the quality of the product placement effort. And as we achieve maturity and experience in building embedded placements, we would do well to keep resolution in mind to help guide the creation of better placements and more accurate value assessments.