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## Brandanimation: Gene Simmons Knows Best -- At Least Certainly Better Than Kodak

By Erik Hauser

Today I'm going to share how one of my guilty pleasures intersected with possibly the worst ever product placement in a TV show. Kodak wins what can only be deemed the "antithesis effect" award for what transpired on "The Apprentice."

And just to be clear, "The Apprentice" isn't my guilty pleasure – it's Gene Simmons. While watching an episode of his reality show "Family Jewels" on A&E, I realized that the lead singer of KISS isn't just a tongue-wagging rock star—he's a marketing genius.

This might seem like an odd statement to the casual observer. But look at the history of KISS and you'll see a finely crafted marketing machine, built by a band that was different from anything else in the marketplace. To this day, KISS merchandise flies off of the shelves. And Simmons is even a partner in a brand consultancy, Simmons Abramson Marketing.

One recent snowy weekend, I was stuck in a hotel room looking for something to watch on TV. As I channel surfed, I came across Simmons on "The Apprentice." In this episode, the teams were tasked to sell the new Kodak ink printer. They had to construct a live marketing campaign – front to back – that they felt would effectively communicate the Kodak message and sell the printers.

Both teams met with top Kodak execs to find out about the product and the company's goals. The Kodak honchos made it clear that they wanted to ditch the old, stodgy brand identity and start an "ink revolution."

This is where it gets good. The two teams immediately began to take different paths. One came up with a tagline that was pathetic, playing on the idea that the new printers were a "knockout," and using images of fighters that had been knocked out. It was going to be an ugly presentation, to say the least.

Meanwhile, Gene's team was put in the position of having to listen to Gene. Why? Because that's how Gene operates. Gene immediately constructed an extremely broadbrand vision statement by asserting, "It's a Kodak world – Welcome." Essentially, he was putting Kodak on top, and he was going to demonstrate that Kodak was back and better than ever with their new product lines. The use of the word "welcome" was also key because it opened the door for everyone to enter this new Kodak world.



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As the show unfolded the teams began to execute their strategy. Gene's group was flawless as the other team fumbled around, even spilling coffee on their computer. Gene's team was showing the new Kodak world, while the other team was embarrassingly screaming offers for half-off printers. What better way to launch the new revolutionary Kodak brand than by screaming 50% off – ouch!

Without question, it was pretty clear to me Gene's team had won. However, when they sat down in the boardroom a very different story unfolded. The Kodak execs thought that the other team was more on message than Gene's team, and that they had hands down done a better job. It was at that point Gene Simmons really became one of my heroes.

"I sell emotion," Gene said. "We were making this a Kodak world, and everybody was welcome". He then went into a pretty profound explanation of why he was right and why the Kodak execs were wrong.

He was right on target. And he stood his ground, so firmly that it wound up getting him fired.

In the end the Kodak execs picked a team of hacks, ignoring the fact that Gene was thinking both short and long term. The man had an idea for an epic foundation from which to build an entire campaign to change the perception of their brand. Kodak failed to see that, and that's their loss.

*Erik Hauser is creative director/founder of San Francisco-based marketing firm Swivel Media and founder of IXMA, the International Experiential Marketing Association. He also moderates the Experiential Marketing Forum.*

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