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## A Canvas Is a Canvas

By Erik Hauser



Lately I have been putting a lot of thought toward the next great marketing canvas. Sometime after my third Diet Coke I figured out that no matter what the next great canvas is, it will tragically become a commodity like radio, TV, virtual worlds, or any other medium.

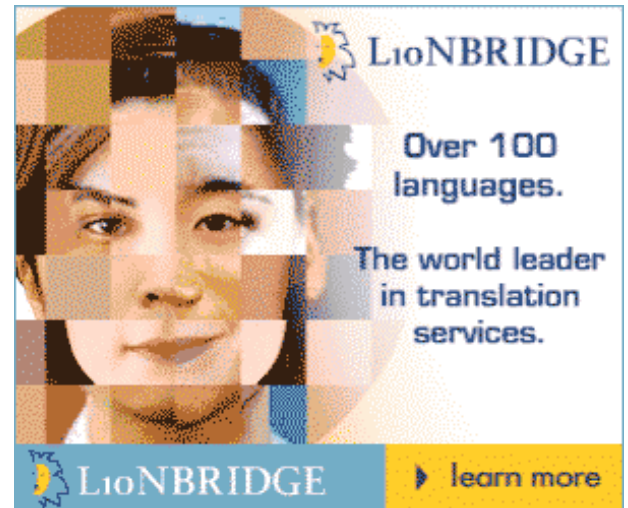
So, what in this industry isn't a commodity? What keeps these commodities still palatable? Genuine creative thought--plain and simple. I recently wrote a piece that talked about [advergaming](#) and how traditional thinkers couldn't get out of their conditioned thought patterns to use innovative thinking on this new gaming canvas. They have simply gone from billboards to virtual billboards.

Even odder to me is the way that agencies are interpreting some of the new research regarding gaming. Research indicates that billboards as in-game advertising add a sense of realism to the game. I simply think this says that advertisers have begun to clutter the virtual side of the road just as they have done every major highway in the U.S. Sense of realism? Yes, of course, one is conditioned to stare at endless billboards down the real highway--but why place them in the videogame? Why in the heck would anybody think that virtual billboards are going to make a more meaningful or relevant impression on a gamer than they have on the real-world highways?

If a brand wants to make a "real impression," it needs to imbed itself in the game theory. This requires a new kind of thinking. Unfortunately new companies are being formed daily that are more than willing to sell you virtual billboard space--buyer beware!

Truth be told it really isn't that hard to take any kind of product or service and imbed it into a game that makes sense for the brand. How can brands make it happen, and where are the opportunities? One simple example is obvious: Most racing games have no gas stations. It would be very easy for a gas company to imbed itself into a game by having gamers visit the gas station to fuel up and grab a snack at a convenience store to refuel the driver as well. What a great behavior to teach a future car buyer.

Surely a game company will read this and begin to search for a major gas company with this original thought. You see, one thing that I have learned recently is that while thought isn't a commodity, once spoken or written it



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is up for grabs in terms of who claims its authorship. So in a way, it is traded on a very different kind of market, but a market nonetheless. It seems to be happening more and more lately, but I have always been inclined to share ideas and see them framed--so I'll keep sharing in these columns, and appreciate the art for its own sake.

There will certainly be a next great canvas. There will be an even greater canvas after that. I will certainly do my best to always be the first to try to create art on these canvases for my clients. To mix metaphors a bit, it's just one big race. The first ones to use the canvas get there when there is uncharted opportunity and a blank space. Hopefully your engines are revved and you'll get out there before the rest of the herd shows up.

Best of luck in your search for the next great canvas. The world is full of them. Actually, the world is the greatest canvas of them all--just look around through the eyes of your clients and their customers and you'll see.

*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](#) and pens a biweekly column for CHIEF MARKETER.*

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