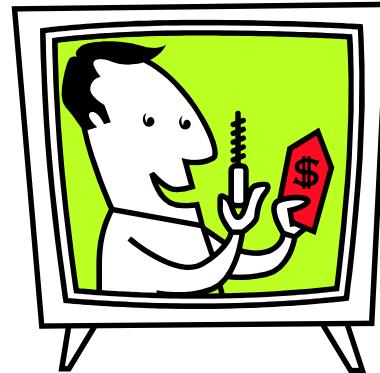


Types of Advertising Claims



To create the necessary illusion of superiority, advertisers usually resort to one or more techniques. Each is common and easy to identify.



1. The Weasel Claim

A weasel word is a modifier that practically negates the claim that follows. It is named after the egg-eating habits of weasels, which will suck out the inside of an egg, leaving it appear intact to the casual observer. Upon closer examination, the egg is discovered to be hollow. Words or claims that appear substantial upon first look but disintegrate into hollow meaninglessness on analysis are weasels.

Some commonly used weasel words include:

- "helps" (the champion weasel)
- "like" (used in a comparative sense)
- "virtual" or "virtually"
- "acts" or "works"
- "can be,"
- "up to,"
- "as much as,"
- "refreshes,"
- "comforts,"
- "tackles,"
- "fights,"
- "comes on,"
- "the feel of,"
- "the look of,"
- "looks like,"
- "fortified,"
- "enriched," and
- "strengthened."

Here are some samples of weasel claims:

- e.g. 'Helps control dandruff symptoms with regular use."

Weasels include "helps control," and possibly even "symptoms" and "regular use." The claim is not "stops dandruff."

- e.g. "Only half the price of many color sets."

"Many" is the weasel. The claim gives the impression that the set is inexpensive.

- e.g. "Leaves dishes virtually spotless."

We have seen so many ad claims that we have learned to tune out weasels. We are supposed to think "spotless" rather than "virtually spotless."

- e.g. "Listerine fights bad breath.'

"Fights", not "stops."

- e.g. 'Tests confirm one mouthwash best against mouth odor."
- e.g. "Hot Nestles cocoa is the very best."

Remember the "best" and "better" routine.

- e.g. "Bacos, the crispy garnish that tastes just like its name"

2. The Unfinished Claim

The Ad claims the product is better, or has more of something but does not finish the comparison.

- e.g. "Magnavox gives you more."

More what?

- e.g. "Anacin: Twice as much of the pain reliever doctors recommend most."

Twice as much as what pain reliever?

- e.g. "Ford LTD --700% quieter"

When the FTC asked Ford to substantiate this claim, Ford revealed that they meant the inside of the Ford was 700% quieter than the outside.

3. "We're different and unique" Claim

This claim states simply that there is nothing else quite like the product advertised. For example, if Schlitz would add pink food coloring to its beer, they could say "there's nothing like new pink Schlitz". The uniqueness claim is supposed to be interpreted as a claim to superiority.

- e.g. "There's no other mascara like it."
- e.g. "Only Doral has this unique filter system."
- e.g. "If it doesn't say Goodyear, it can't be polyglas."

Polyglas is a trade name copyrighted by Goodyear. Other tire companies could make a tire identical to the Goodyear one but couldn't call it "polyglas" - a name for fiberglass belts.

4. The "Water is Wet" Claim



This technique claims something about the product that is true for any brand in that product category, for example, "Schrank's water is really wet." This is usually a statement of fact, but not a real advantage over the competition.

- e.g. "Mobil: the detergent gasoline"

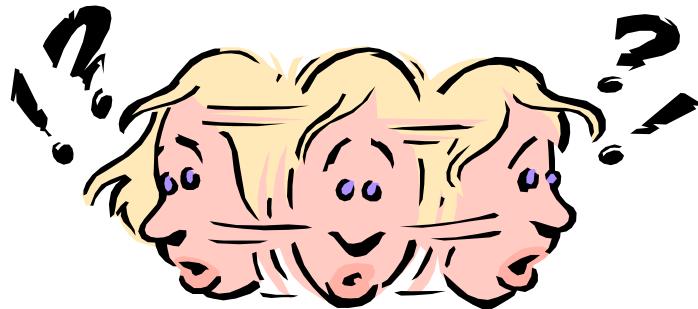
Any gasoline acts as a cleaning agent.

- e.g. "Great Lash greatly increases the diameter of every lash."
- e.g. "Rheingold, the natural beer"

It is made from grains and water, as are other beers

- e.g. "SKIN smells differently on everyone"

As do many perfumes



5. The "So What" Claim

This is a claim which is true, but which gives no real advantage to the product. It is similar to the "water is wet" claim, except it claims an advantage which is not shared by most of the other brands in the product category.

- e.g. "Geritol has more than twice the iron of ordinary supplements."

But is twice as much beneficial to the body?

- e.g. "Campbell's gives you tasty pieces of chicken and not one but two chicken stocks."

Do two stocks improve the taste?

- e.g. "Strong enough for a man but made for a woman."

This deodorant claim says only that the product is aimed at the female market

- In just 3 minutes, this man's hair will look a lot handsomer.

6. The Vague Claim

The vague claim is simply not clear. It uses words that are colorful but meaningless and subjective and emotional opinions that defy verification. It often overlaps with other claims.

- e.g. "Lips have never looked so luscious."

How could you prove or disprove such a claim?

- e.g. "Lipsavers are fun - they look good, smell good and feel good."

Its deep rich lather makes hair feel new again.

- e.g. "The end of meatloaf boredom."
- e.g. "Take a bite and you'll think you're eating on the Champs Elysees."
- e.g. "Winston tastes good like a cigarette should."
- e.g. "The perfect little portable for all around viewing with all the features of higher priced sets."

7. The Endorsement or Testimonial

With this technique, a celebrity or authority appears in an ad to lend his or her stellar qualities to the product. Sometimes the people will actually claim to use the product, but very often they don't.

8. The Scientific or Statistical Claim

This method uses some sort of scientific proof or experiment, very specific numbers, or an impressive mystery ingredient.

- e.g. "Wonderbread helps to build strong bodies 12 ways."

Even the weasel "helps" did not prevent the FTC from demanding this claim be withdrawn. Note that the use of the number 12 makes the claim far more believable than if it were taken out.

- e.g. "Easy off has 33% more cleaning power than another popular brand."

"Another popular brand" often translates as some other kind of oven cleaner sold elsewhere. The claim does not say Easy Off works 33% better.

- e.g. "Certs contains a sparkling drop of Retsyn."

"Retsyn" is their name for vegetable oil.

- e.g. "Special Morning -- 33% more nutrition"

Also an unfinished claim.

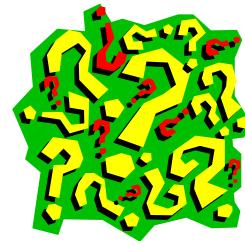
- e.g. "Sinarest. Created by a research scientist who actually gets sinus headaches."

9. The "Compliment the Consumer" Claim

This claim butters up the consumer with some form of flattery.

- e.g. "We think a cigar smoker is someone special."
- e.g. "If what you do is right for you, no matter what others do, then RC Cola is right for you."
- e.g. "The Lady has taste."
- e.g. "You pride yourself on your good home cooking..."
- e.g. "Nobody calls me baby and nobody tells me when to be baby soft."

10. The Rhetorical Question



The rhetorical question demands a response from the audience. A question is asked and the consumer is supposed to answer in such a way as to affirm the product's goodness.

- e.g. "Plymouth - isn't that the kind of car America wants?"
- e.g. "Shouldn't your family be drinking Hawaiian Punch?"
- e.g. "What do you want most from coffee? That's what you get most from Hills."
- e.g. "Touch of Sweden: Could your hands use a small miracle?"