

INTEGRATED MARKETING Magazine

Volume 1

*A small Florida real estate concern ventured north, joined forces with Laura Ashley, turned potential failure into a roaring success and even raised money for charity.
All because of one big, bold idea.*

By B. Joseph Vincent

Any marketing professional worth his or her salt certainly understands the importance of branding. With literally thousands of images and brand impressions assaulting every man, woman and child every hour of every day, it is more important than ever to create a brand marketing program that will leave a burning impression in the minds of your customers . . . One-2-OneSM.

The question is why so many brands, so many campaigns and so many marketing professionals fail to rise above the fray and create that lasting image that everyone strives to fashion.

There may, in fact, be an endless number of reasons. Yet, I believe there is one overriding factor that stands above the rest.

Thinking small.

In what has become a cautious corporate environment, when budget line focus is stronger than ever and single-tailed campaigns are the difference between a major promotion and the unemployment line, most marketers are afraid to embrace, promote and champion the 'big idea.'

By 'the big idea,' I mean the one notion that shakes the roof from its foundations, lays competitors to waste and sears your brand into the memories of your 'ideal' buyer or customer or consumer for decades to come. Examples of the big idea abound.

Goodyear wasn't satisfied with conventional advertising; it went above the media pollution with a blimp.

Marketers for the latest epic movie Godzilla bought television ad spots on New Year's Eve broadcasts that showed the Japanese monster trash-

ing Times Square during the New Year's Eve countdown -- months before the movie's release.

Disney has every victorious Super Bowl MVP endorse its theme park just seconds after their big victories with billions of TV viewers looking on.

The real message here is that any company can reach out of the box of conventional thinking and create a splash . . . if it thinks big. While a marketing budget with lots of zeros helps, ingenuity, imagination, creativity and vertical integration are the real keys to success in the big idea marketplace.

Consider this One-2-One vertical integrated marketing promotion I helped direct in the early 1980s for LaBonte Diversified Development, a Florida luxury real estate developer. A family business, the LaBontes developed communities that homes ranging in price from \$200,000 to \$5 million, including The Sanctuary in Boca Raton, Florida where in 1982 single family homes started at \$600,000 -- on a dry lot.

The LaBontes sought to take their exclusive affluent consumer, up-market concept to the Northeast and purchased a piece of property on Cape Cod Bay in Massachusetts. The plan was to build a private, self-contained luxury country club community reminiscent of their successful south Florida projects. In turn, they designed and developed a community called White Cliffs on Cape Cod Bay.

During the land planning cycle, the LaBontes were wise enough to conduct local consumer market research and developed 'ideal' buyer SWOT (Strength/Weakness/Opportunities/Threats) analysis. The SWOT analysis exposed several critical weaknesses, but none was more threatening than zero brand identity, recognition or local market reputation.

There were second, third and fourth weakness to face as well: location, location and location. The fact was, Cape Cod Bay was not 'Cape Cod' and everyone in Massachusetts and Greater Boston understood that subtle difference. While 'the' Cape had a high prestige and valuation factor, Cape Cod Bay was perceived as a poor stepchild -- an area in the shadow of, and trying to emulate, the more prestigious Cape Cod.

Challenged by the SWOT analysis, I started thinking about our target market or 'ideal' home buyer and what would appeal to them (actually 'her'). During the early '80s, Laura



White Cliffs on
Cape Cod Bay
Showhouse

Ashley's English country designs, fashions, home furnishings catalog and retail stores were among the hottest in the country. Laura Ashley's style defined the casual lifestyle concept of old as well as contemporary New England living.

Pondering these circumstances, we saw the opportunity for co-branding that would lend Laura Ashley's international prestige to the somewhat unknown identity of White Cliffs on Cape Cod Bay. Equally important, the target buyer profile for White Cliffs was demographically aligned with Laura Ashley. So the association would verify the credibility of what was a low profile developer making its first foray into New England, and shoot the LaBontes up the image ladder to a national platform.

Next, I contacted Laura Ashley management and discussions ensued. They culminated in the creation of 'The Laura Ashley Designer Showcase Home' at White Cliffs on Cape Cod Bay. Ms. Ashley would personally be involved in the design process, including but not limited to approval of all architectural, landscaping, interiors, furnishings, fixtures, fabrics, even the potpourri aroma in the showcase.

The house would be a living monument to the epitome of New England country lifestyle, with architecture and interior designs chronicling five generations from 1700 through 1800.

Moreover, we would create the grand opening of the house as a huge national, regional and Greater Boston media event, including the presence of Ms. Ashley herself. She would personally provide a guided home tour for invited guests: dignitaries, VIPs and, of course, White Cliff's 'ideal' prospects, all identified from a direct mail list.

Now we had our big idea. The Ashley people loved it. We even flew to Chateau de Remainsnil, north of Paris, to meet with Laura and her husband, Sir Bernard Ashley. They were both genuinely enthusiastic and excited by the untapped vertical integrated marketing concept of our brand leverage showcase home.

While momentum was building and the magnitude of our enterprise was assured, we also wanted to create more local focus and goodwill to make the community really feel like stakeholders in this high-profile event. Our goal was to find a charity



Laura Ashley
2005 Collection



Laura Ashley
2005 Collection

partner for the showcase event. Our search led us to a theater in the heart of Boston, the Wang Center for the Performing Arts, which had been saved from demolition by the generosity of computer pioneer Dr. An Wang.

Next, we developed a One-2-One 'by invitation only' black tie gala showcase opening and contributed the proceeds to the Wang Theater. After the gala, the Laura Ashley Showcase would be open for 30 days for public tours, with a modest entrance fee donated to the Wang Center for the Performing Arts. The not-for-profit Wang Center recognized the manifold publicity, public relations and financial benefits of this strategic alliance and gladly signed on as our charitable partner.

In the days leading up to the White Cliffs event, we received more positive publicity than we could ever have dreamed of . . . had we not have created a brand leverage big idea. In addition, we developed an integrated marketing and promotion with the three Laura Ashley retail stores in Boston, including point of purchase displays, store window treatments and showcase tour ticket counter sales.

In addition, we used the Ashley retail and New England catalog customer list to develop target, ideal consumer, One-2-One direct mail efforts focused on our buyer profile. This integrated approach, coupled with the unparalleled media publicity interest, enabled us to minimize traditional paid space advertising. However, we did support the overall showcase



launch with limited printed ads as well as one outdoor advertising board that was used for directional reinforcement.

As you probably have concluded by now, the event was a phenomenal success. People turned out in droves to tour the Laura Ashley showcase house, generating priceless exposure and focused positioning for the community of White Cliffs . . . and eliminating the initial objections that swirled about the Cape Cod Bay Address. There was even an additional bonus: the Ashley showcase house itself drew a buyer contract on the evening of the gala event.

After the Laura Ashley Showcase, sales of homes at White Cliffs on Cape Cod Bay moved briskly and the complex sold well ahead of projections . . . all because we weren't afraid to pursue the big idea and to reach out for a global brand to elevate the identity of a new real estate project and lift the credentials of a small Florida developer.

Though you'd never guess to look at him, Joe Vincent has nearly 40 years of corporate experience in management and marketing sciences as a lecturer, published columnist, 'strategist,' and executive. He currently serves as chief strategist and vice chairman of the board of AIMS Worldwide, Inc. Mr. Vincent may be reached at 703-621-3875 or jvincent@aimsworldwide.com.

"Think Big" first appeared in Integrated Marketing & Promotion magazine where Joe Vincent was a featured columnist. Current Laura Ashley products may be viewed at lauraashley.com.

The lesson this example offers is obvious: Companies and their marketers should never be intimidated about thinking 'above their station.' You can never lose by thinking too big, only by thinking small.

Marketing Channels

Integrated marketing was unheard of at the time, but that's what LaBonte Diversified Development practiced when it began doing business in New England in 1982.

The channels included:

- 1**
Advertising (print & outdoor)
- 2**
Cause marketing
- 3**
Co-marketing
- 4**
Direct mail
- 5**
Events
- 6**
In-store
- 7**
Point of purchase
- 8**
Public relations
- 9**
Retail stores
- 10**
Sponsorships