

Kevin Wolff

11 January 2013

ALLSTATE INSURANCE Campaign Rhetoric

Considering the vast majority of tragedies that can occur at any moment in our lives, there is nothing more comforting than having an insurance plan which covers the set-backs life throws at us. While there are several possibilities of disaster as a young person just starting out with their first automobile, a glut of health issues and extra property to protect tag along with the true adult/older generations such as natural disasters destroying homes, death passing on loans and obligations, hospital care costs, retirement preparation, and much more. Because of these differences in additional risk, insurance companies such as Allstate have recognized this market need and are effectively targeting their advertisements across the board to take advantage of this demographic. After my initial viewing of the first Allstate: Back to Basics commercial, I greatly appreciated the subconscious and psychological ploys conveyed through the company's pathos and logos rhetorical appeals. For someone like me who works with and enjoys the disciplines of marketing and advertisement, this specific series struck me as genius.

From the very beginning, Allstate immediately cut straight through the crowd with their consoling hands logo displaying two hands cupping each other almost like a safety net for you. Subliminally, a logo such as this instantly brings the brand into the consumer's mind as a good place to entrust their most precious belongings with. Four years ago in 2009, Allstate Insurance Company released an advertisement series deliberately pursuing the adult and family market



with their “Back to Basics” campaign. This specific promotion featured 58 year-old African American actor Dennis Haysbert – a tall, handsome, deeply spoken and physically brawny man who narrated each commercial and appeared on every marketing outlet the business pursued.

Everything about this particular actor screams, “You’re in Good Hands” for a few very clear reasons. From a psychological standpoint, Haysbert’s handsome and well-built visage naturally instills a trust vibe, as a big man can protect and support the insured. Moreover, this man’s voice is nothing short of a deep, friendly and wholesome air; every word he speaks sounds genuine and caring so that prospective clients will feel connected with and listen to what he has to say (“Celebrity Database”). Finally, Haysbert is in the relevant age group of his employer’s target demographic, always appearing in Allstate media wearing a traditional grey suit paired with blue dress shirt. Behind the scenes, marketers specifically chose Haysbert because he represented the age set of the people he would be selling insurance to: baby boomer parents and the elderly. As for the attire Haysbert wore, the grey suit was typical “back-when” and combined with the color blue (a professional, relaxing tone), the firm’s “Back to Basics” campaign was well on its way to getting into the psyche of exactly who needed insurance most (Gloth). This way, when Allstate’s commercials aired, all the right people would pay attention and relate to the speaker through a time-tested concept called “self-congruity.” The idea explains how “consumers prefer products and brands whose images closely correspond to their own self-concepts”. In this scenario, Allstate set Haysbert as their listeners’ perfect self-reflection (Barone, Shimp and Sprott 75-86).

From the content standpoint, Allstate's campaign was effective due to the fact that their message was delivered using powerful emotional appeals during a time of sadness and fear. Consistent with the book Principles of Marketing, "Emotional appeals attempt to stir up either negative or positive emotions that can motivate purchase. These include ... positive emotional appeals such as love, humor, pride and joy" (Kotler and Armstrong 468). Each announcement developed a combination of familiar or poignant historical moments alongside photographs and narrative that naturally trigger emotions of connection to one's own life and familial ties. Street photographs of the homeless and huddled families in need are faded into precious shots of children hopping into a summer pool and a group of people celebrating a birthday. As Haysbert explains during one campaign presentation, once Allstate opened their doors during the recession, customers "notice that once the fear subsides, a funny thing happens, people start enjoying the small things in life: a home-cooked meal, time with loved ones -- appreciating the things we do have, the things we can count on. It's back to basics." Using nostalgic rhetoric and emotionally charged imagery that transitions from vintage depression photographs to vibrant and colorful family pictures throughout Allstate's campaign drives home the point that under their protection, you too as a client can begin to appreciate those small but ever so important things in your *own* life again and stop worrying about what could happen ("Back to Basics").



In late 2008, a massive yet gradual recession settled in like a looming black cloud over the United States, converting us all into a mass of utterly terrified citizens who would do anything to protect the individuals and properties we loved. Even though the majority of Americans knew that our economic situation would improve had we not panicked, consumers looked to cut back on luxuries while continuing to spend more on quality investments such as insurance policies for the event of an emergency. In response to this demand, Allstate Insurance launched their new advertisement series on television to fulfill the public's wishes for security and frugality with a mixture of empathy and helpfulness. As Haysbert puts it in the commercial, "You don't have to feel alone in these tough times... Living well now means living within our means." At the same time, this specific series' presence on TV as a moving picture provided both a visually stimulating message, proved to be more effective than other media formats, as well as the proper outlet to reach a market of home-bound jobless adults in the recession (Ansari and Joloudar).

The previously explained rhetorical choices brought on a huge revenue spike seen during the opening of the 2009 fiscal year ("YCharts"), proving that Allstate had succeeded at creating a



proper argument with added value that their opponent corporations did not think of. Typically, insurance companies flood the market with crusades all about price discounts, saving under new plans, trial periods and more saving all at the cost of snipping corners off where you notice least;

that is, up until the point when you need those corners the most. Allstate's competition during the recession continued on a path of sale-based, low-cost hawking that just doesn't hold water in a time period full of completely scared individuals; times like those require a relationship with more than the impersonal utilitarian service and Allstate provided that with their community-centric attitude and reassuring "good hands" refrain (O'Leary).

Works Cited

- "Allstate Corporation Chart." *YCharts* n.pag. *Revenue Quarterly*. Web. 12 Jan 2013.
 <[http://ycharts.com/companies/ALL/chart#series=calc%3Arevenues%2Ctype%3Acompany%2Cid%3AALL&format=real&recessions=true&zoom=5&startDate=&endDate=>](http://ycharts.com/companies/ALL/chart#series=calc%3Arevenues%2Ctype%3Acompany%2Cid%3AALL&format=real&recessions=true&zoom=5&startDate=&endDate=).
- Ansari, Mohammad Esmaeil, and Seyyed Yaser Ebrahimian Joloudar. "An Investigation of TV Advertisement Effects on Customers' Purchasing and their Satisfaction." *International Journal of Marketing Studies* 3.4 (2011): 175-81. Web. 13 Jan. 2013.
- Back to Basics*. 2009. Film. 12 Jan 2013. <<http://youtu.be/6HnkqffU3Cc>>.
- Barone, Michael, Terrence Shimp, and David Sprott. "Product Ownership as a Moderator of Self-Congruity Effects." *Marketing Letters*. 10.1 (1999): 75-86. Web. 13 Jan. 2013.
 <<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1008091225061?LI=true>
- "Dennis Haysbert." *Actor Database* n.pag. *IMDb*. Web. 11 Jan 2013.
 <<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0371660/>>.
- Gloth, Anna. "Connecting With Color." *Marketing & Technology*. Lyquix, 28 Aug 2012. Web.
 Web. 13 Jan. 2013. <<http://www.lyquix.com/blog-and-news/connecting-with-color>>.
- Kotler, Philip, and Gary Armstrong. *Principles of Marketing*. 6th ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1994. Print.
- O'Leary, Noreen. "Allstate Speaks to Troubled Times." *AdWeek*. 15 Jan 2009: n. page. Web. 12 Jan. 2013. <<http://www.adweek.com/news/advertising-branding/allstate-speaks-troubled-times-98058>>.
- The Best Things in Life*. 2009. Film. 12 Jan 2013. <<http://youtu.be/TscHTLOL9bY>>.