

The new psychology of marketing
by Lloyd Robertson

Important issues are discussed in Saskatchewan pubs. I can remember pot bellied bar flies sagely agreeing that U.S. beer would never sell in Canada. It tasted too much like chilled dishwater they said. They were right; maybe not about the dishwater but certainly about U.S. beer not selling well.

What about Budweiser you ask? Does this beer not command about 25% of the La Ronge market?

Despite what it says on it's label, the recipe has been changed from "the original". The alcohol content has been upped to 5%. In short, it has been "Canadianized" and is marketed by Molson's Breweries, who pay a licensing fee for the privilege of using the label.

Now, why should a Canadian beer with a U.S. label outsell most Canadian beers with Canadian labels? Big companies have the money for effective marketing but that's not the whole story. The full answer has to do with the Canadian psyche. It was once said that we have a "national inferiority complex". There is a tendency by many Canadians to think that things U.S. are better or more "chic".

I am reminded of the story of a 1960s Rosetown farmer who, after the introduction of Medicare, became convinced that health care was better south of the border. He went to the famous Mayo Clinic who, in turn, brought in a leading North American specialist for the man's condition. The surgeon came from Saskatoon. The farmer paid in U.S. dollars.

I have been debating a group of supporters of the Reform Party on the Internet about our health care system. They are of the opinion that our health care system should be given over to private companies as it is in the United States. An oil executive, who lived in Texas for eight years, received faster, and in his opinion, more complete service there than in Calgary. He said that he paid \$12,500 (U.S.) yearly for his medical insurance. At that price he should get prompt service. Cheaper insurance gives you less coverage. 40 million Yankees have no medical insurance whatsoever.

My general practitioner ex father-in-law used to donate one day a week for "charity cases". Many of his Oklahoma colleagues viewed him as being quite eccentric. On the other hand, many U.S. "states" have laws stating that pregnant women will not be denied medical care due to lack of insurance. It was the opinion of the Reform Party oil executive that this stifles initiative.

The World Health Organization studied the Canadian, Cuban and U.S. health care systems in 1991. In their opinion we have superior health care. The U.S., despite spending far more per capita than either Canada or Cuba, came last in terms of providing effective health care for it's citizens. Yet, despite the evidence, numerous members of right wing political parties continue to insist that the U.S way is the better way. I'll bet they also drink Bud.

It used to be that politicians would hire polling companies so that they could tell voters what they wanted to hear. Some politicians got into trouble for telling voters one thing in Ontario and another thing in the West.

Then, using a battery of psychologists, Ronald Reagan's Republican handlers in the U.S. of A. began using sophisticated polling so that they could manipulate public opinion to accept their right-wing agenda. Reagan's handlers trained former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney so that he could bring in what they called free trade. Remember when Mulroney said that free trade was a non-issue during and after his first election? Had he admitted his true intentions at the time the opposition to free trade would have overwhelmed him. The memetic method involves controlling and manipulating information so that memes that are attractive to the product being sold are implanted in the minds of people before the sale is ever suggested. In time the sale comes to appear "inevitable", just like the cutbacks to our social safety net. There is now a growing number of memetically trained psychologists who are hiring themselves out to private companies, finding new ways of making you buy their toothpaste, detergent and beer.

The memetic campaign to sell free trade included an undermining of our belief in Canadian independence, an undermining of our self-confidence, a glorification of things U.S. and an identification with "bigness". In this culture it is easier to sell Budweiser than Brewhouse.

Is there hope for Canada? There is always hope. But we need to become inoculated from suggestion, glib advertising and clever marketing.