
The Peculiar Power of Cacophony: Why Discord Might Be Your Brand's Best Friend

Description

There's something rather marvellous about cacophony, isn't there? That glorious clash of sounds that makes your neighbours wonder if you're hosting an experimental jazz ensemble or perhaps torturing a choir of tone-deaf cats.

But here's the thing: we've got it all wrong about noise. For decades, marketers have been obsessed with harmony, consistency, and what they pompously call "brand consonance." What utter tosh.

Consider the London Underground. The screech of the Northern Line as it rounds that bend at Bank station is possibly the most ear-splitting sound known to humanity. Yet Transport for London hasn't spent millions trying to eliminate it. Why? Because that horrific sound has become part of the authentic London experience. Tourists actually wait to record it on their phones, for heaven's sake!

This is what I call "beneficial discord" – when something theoretically unpleasant becomes a distinctive asset precisely because it shouldn't work. It's the marketing equivalent of how British people queue for hours in the rain for a pop-up restaurant, not despite the queue, but because of it.

Take the sound of a Harley Davidson motorcycle. The company once tried to patent its distinctive engine noise – that loud, irregular "potato-potato-potato" rumble that annoys everyone except Harley owners. Engineers could easily make it quieter and smoother. But that would be missing the point entirely. The noise isn't a bug; it's a feature. It's the acoustic equivalent of a peacock's tail – beautifully, purposefully inefficient.

The same principle applies beyond sound. Look at British tea-making. Any efficiency expert would tell you that the electric kettle is a ridiculously wasteful way to heat water for a single cup of tea. But suggest to a Brit that they microwave their water instead (as some misguided Americans do), and watch them recoil in horror. The inefficiency is part of the ritual, the ceremony, the very Britishness of it all.

This is where most brands go wrong. They're so terrified of any form of discord that they sand down every rough edge until they're left with something so smooth it's essentially invisible. They forget that memory and attention are triggered by contrast, by the unexpected, by the things that make you go "hang on a minute."

I'm not suggesting you should make your next advertising campaign sound like a fox caught in industrial machinery (although, come to think of it...). But perhaps we should start thinking about controlled cacophony as a tool rather than a problem. After all, in a world where everyone's trying to create perfect harmony, sometimes the best way to be heard is to be slightly out of tune.

Consider the humble local pub. The slightly sticky floors, the ancient carpet of questionable pattern, the mismatched furniture – these "imperfections" create an atmosphere that no amount of corporate design

could replicate. It's the cacophony of design that makes it feel real, lived-in, authentic.

The next time someone in a marketing meeting suggests "smoothing out the rough edges" or "maintaining brand consistency," perhaps we should ask whether we're actually smoothing away our distinctiveness. In the grand orchestra of commerce, perhaps it's better to be the slightly out-of-tune trumpet that everyone remembers than the perfectly pitched violin that nobody notices.

Because here's the real secret: in a world of algorithmic perfection and AI-generated harmony, our human roughness – our cacophony – might just be our greatest asset. It's time to embrace the discord, cherish the clatter, and celebrate the chaos.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm off to appreciate the symphonic discord of my local tube station. There's a particularly magnificent screech coming up at 3:15.

CATEGORY

1. On Rhetoric and Literary Devices

POST TAG

1. Cacophony

Category

1. On Rhetoric and Literary Devices

Tags

1. Cacophony

Date

21/11/2024

Date Created

18/11/2024