

“John Rooks’ *More Than Promote* represents a totally fresh take on marketing. One with the potential to elevate marketing, marketers, and sustainable marketing in one fell swoop.”

—Jacquelyn Ottman, founder and president, J. Ottman Consulting and Author, *The New Rules of Green Marketing*

“More Than Promote is not just about green marketing - Rooks’ book dares us to do more. It’s about getting in the game and making a difference. It’s about making our lives and our work sustainable, honest, and real for each other and our planet, then telling our friends. Just read it and see for yourself. And go from marketing the change to being the change.”

—Glenn Croston, Author of *75 Green Businesses* and *Starting Green*, and founder of StartingUpGreen.com

“*More Than Promote* is more than a book! It teaches you how to make your company a citizen, your brand a real friend, and your work a way to help society.”

—Diego Masi, Author of *Go Green*

MORE THAN PROMOTE

a monkeywrencher's guide to authentic marketing

JOHN ROOKS

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TAMPONS AND POTHOLES

“The sole purpose of business is service. The sole purpose of advertising is explaining the service which business renders.”

—Leo Burnett

In some cases More The Promote strategies can work to activate civic and cultural value if they are off-brand. But in order to nail the trifecta (Corporate, Civic, and Cultural Value), making sure that they ooze brand identity is essential.

Let’s look at two programs, each that could claim some More Than Promote bragging rights, but one that falls short from a brand perspective: Seventh Generation’s Tamponification campaign compared to KFC’s Refresh campaign.

In 2006, Seventh Generation launched Tampontification.¹ It was a viral marketing campaign/program (one of the interesting aspects of the More Than Promote strategy is that campaigns are hard to define as either campaigns or as programs) that asked consumers to click on a link or forward an email. When that simple act was done, Seventh Generation would donate a box of tampons to a women’s shelter. Apparently, social agencies routinely support shelters with necessities for other bodily functions, but the visit from Aunt Flow is so taboo that we not only fail to support it, but feel compelled to create cute euphemisms for it (see former).

Here’s the email that started it all. No html. No heavy handed branding. In fact, the company name is only mentioned once.

Subject: Tampontification

You may have never thought of this, but women’s shelters in the U.S. go through thousands of tampons and pads monthly. Assistance agencies generally help with expenses of “everyday” necessities such as toilet paper, diapers, and clothing, but one of the most BASIC needs is overlooked—feminine hygiene products. (Who is at the helm of the funding assistance agencies anyway!?)

Seventh Generation, a green paper products and cleaning

1 Tampontification.com now redirects to SeventhGeneration.com

products company, has a do-good attitude and will donate a box of sanitary products to a women's shelter in your chosen state—just for clicking the link. Talk about easy (literally takes less than 5 seconds and they ask nothing of you). And, yes, it is legitimate!

<http://www.tamponification.com/donate.php>

Thanks for helping out.

Please pass this on.

The email was picked up on feminist websites like Feministing.com, socially responsible business sites like GOOD.com, social recommendation sites like Yelp.com, activation websites like Care2.com, along with Facebook and other social networks. More importantly, the campaign had so much emotion, importance, and what cultural theorists call “trace,” it spread virally via email. Quickly, smaller “mommy blog” sites connecting women to women around the globe helped spread the idea. If Twitter had been a viable option in 2006, this campaign would likely have had the same results in less than a quarter of the time.

The mommy blogger phenomenon was gaining real momentum in 2006. By 2007, these bloggers became an online phenomenon. And by 2009 companies had started to connect tech-savvy writer-moms to female consumers spending \$2 trillion a year on their families. According to recent statistics of mommy blogger outlets added to its media database,

Cision U.S. notes a 50 percent increase of mom blog additions between June 2008 and October 2009.² Seventh Generation was at the right place at the right time.

Providing a foundation for Tamponification's success was the fact that mommy blogs didn't only matter to the women who write and read them, but also to new media on a larger scale. Look at the corporate spin offs like NBC's TODAY'S-Mom.com (now defunct) as an example of mainstream media reaching into the playbook of the niche blogger and pulling content out. These major outlets increasingly look to smaller outlets for trends and authenticity.

Rumors started flying that perhaps Tamponification was a hoax. And, culturally, when something reaches "too good to be true" (hoax status), it has arrived. "Too good to be true, but true" should be the goal of all marketers.

Urban legend debunker, Snopes.com profiled the campaign and deemed it to be true. In this sense, the campaign itself became part Internet and company lore, challenging women to prove it real. It begged them to believe in itself. Its delivery was a simple viral email campaign. But it was the thematic, mystery, simplicity, and authentic "why" that kept it alive.

As grassroots as the campaign may have appeared, there's some serious marketing going on here. The program wasn't mere philanthropy. Look at the delivery of the tampons

2 Marevska, Anna. "The Mommy Blog Phenomenon." *Cision Navigator*. October 29, 2009. www.cisiontweets.com/The_Mommy_Blog_Phenomenon.aspx

as engineered by Seventh Generation. Seventh Generation's "Mission Fairies"³ delivered the tampons in a newly graphic wrapped Prius called the Tampon Mobile.⁴ It is a nice bit of transmedia, experiential brand promotion, and sampling.

And it's ok that it was marketing. In fact, that's the point. Too often in the sustainability space, marketing and messaging are the problem. But it is not the problem. Nor is it, however, yet, part of the solution. Marketing that does good is good marketing.

Measuring this campaign from a corporate perspective, let's look first to web traffic.

From the Seventh Generation Blog:

...tampontification.com logged 131,181 visitors in a single day—that's more visitors in one day than we get in two months on seventhgeneration.com. In one week's time, hits topped out at 657,213 (compared to 21,409 visitors on seventhgeneration.com during the same time frame). By March 13th, donations had skyrocketed from 30,000 to 675,000--prompting more emails and calls to SVG requesting confirmation that the initiative wasn't a hoax.⁵

3 Mission Fairies is a great bit of copywriting. It keeps the intent at the front and adds a bit of mythology to it. It recalls the buzz of the program. Fairies aren't real, are they? Organic tampons aren't real, are they? Look, there's one there standing next to the hybrid.

4 It's not lost that Tampon Mobiles assume a nicely feminine parallax to the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile.

5 "A Very Intense Period." 7 Gen Blog. March 27, 2007. www.seventhgeneration.com/learn/blog/a_very_intense_period

The response was overwhelmingly positive, forcing Seventh Generation to discontinue the program. It is not a social service agency, but it clearly has an ability to make a huge contribution to society, even through mere promotion.

Treehugger.com reported on the campaign, focusing on the cultural aspects. It pulled out language from the campaign's dictionary.⁶ Look at the language Seventh Generation uses:

.....
Let's not beat around the bush here. People still pussy-foot around the "forbidden" subject of menstruation. Tampons and pads just don't tend to surface in conversation at cocktail parties or tailgates or even at PTA meetings as often as we hope they might. That can make it really tough to get people talking about choosing safer alternatives to conventional feminine care products. We'd like to change that, so we've opted to go beyond the flow...⁷
.....

They are challenging the conversation that our mothers' mothers had about menstruation and bringing it to the modernity of cultural intellect; new conversations are arising. The mocking of out-dated dialogue is good for culture and

.....
6 It's actually unlikely that Tamponsification had an actual campaign dictionary. They are rare.

7 Grover, Sami. "Tamponsification: Seventh Generation Go 'Beyond the Flow.'" *Treehugger*. April 24, 2007. www.treehugger.com/files/2007/04/tamponsification.php

good for Seventh Generation’s business.⁸ They know that if you can’t talk about something, then your language is hobbled, and so is the likelihood of attracting a customer from a competitor. Divergence from the norm needs stimulus. In an open, honest discussion about tampons and their impact on health and the environment, the smart money is on Seventh Generation. Through promotion, it has broadened this campaign into this frank dialogue at letstalkperiod.com. And therein is the Cultural Return on Intention.

And, while comments on Treehugger.com often touted the benefits of competitive and arguably environmentally better products such as the DivaCup, Mooncup, Keeper, or Luna Pads, there was a general consensus summed up by [coraliebluebus](#):

.....

I too am with the other girls, I use a Diva Cup and cloth pads that my mum made and I would not go back. It is so convenient and it is MUCH CHEAPER!!! I just wash the pads with my son’s cloth nappies.Simple.It’s time for this topic to be talked about, it is something that most women choose to ignore and it is a huge waste issue both with the products and the packaging. It is great that someone is “going beyond the flow” to get this out into the public arena. Well Done.⁹

.....

.....

8 I think that the mocking of green (parody and mimicry) is good for our culture too. It pushes us beyond the visual stimulation of a feel good color.

9 Grover, Sami, “Tampontification: Seventh Generation Go ‘Beyond the Flow.’” April 24, 2007. www.treehugger.com/files/2007/04/tampontification.php

The linguistic strategy that Seventh Generation have adopted is the same that Stephen Colbert employs to poke fun at the right wing. Parody. Playing with a parody of the discomfort of talking about periods; calling it out by exaggerating it, without beating around the bush.

While classic parody tends to celebrate the very object that it ridicules, this kind of satire is using the form of the euphemism to exploit that the euphemism exists at all. It is a stunningly sophisticated (and simple) trick to exploit a weakness. And, it is way underutilized in marketing today. Parody is a kind of double-voiced discourse exemplifying the need for more genuine two-perspective dialogue. It provides a safe and hidden “counter”; in this case, about a culture afraid to openly engage in a conversation about menstruation.

Tamponification, in short, is promotion that is not only culturally relevant, but culture changing (for the good of the culture and the good of the brand). In a woman-on-the-street video captured as part of the promotion, there is an opening of the dialogue that happens about tampon transparency, health, and feminine hygiene. CEO Jefferey Hollender even has videos on YouTube called Let’s Talk Period where he and his two daughters are discussing the benefits of the new product line. It doesn’t come off as necessarily exploitive either; it’s refreshingly innocent.

The cultural elements that are at play (or risk) here for Seventh Generation are Health and Community. Both of

these are integral to the Seventh Generation brand and are equally integral to the Tamponification promotion. The difference between program and promotion is perfectly bent here by Seventh Generation.

Let's look at another promotion that is clearly just that and not much more. It reeks of promotion because the company stretched its brand so far out of shape to fit it into a good idea for a good cause. That, and the fact that in press releases the company refers to it as part of its "A Pothole-Filling Advertising Legacy."

The Refresh Campaign launched in 2009 was one of KFC's civil service promotions. It started with a letter to a few strategically selected mayors.

.....
Dear Mayor:

It is estimated that U.S. roads are riddled with more than 350 million potholes nationwide—that's one for every man, woman and child in America! Because of long, harsh winters and heavy traffic, cities everywhere are left with more potholes than ever. Add in the fact that asphalt is an expensive product, and the cost of those repairs is higher than ever.

.....

Because of the financially tough times, many cities are delaying construction projects because they need to spend money patching these potholes instead. Some cities are even being forced to cut back on road services and maintenance crews. We at KFC understand that filling every one of these potholes is important and we're here to help!

In honor of our "Fresh Tastes Best" campaign, we want to come and Re-"Fresh" your roads! The Colonel and his crew are on a mission to help out America and sponsor your city's "Fresh"ly repaired roads. Every patched pothole comes with the Colonel's very own stamp of approval.

KFC has been bringing communities together over buckets of chicken for more than 50 years. We invite you and your city to become a part of a new tradition and accept our offer to Re-"Fresh" your roads. Together, we can give your community a much needed break and help keep America moving.

Sincerely,
Roger Eaton, President of KFC¹⁰

KFC was looking for mayors to sanction KFC road crews to put their logos on city streets. Where once there was a hole, now there is valuable ad space.¹¹ In return, the mayor got the potholes fixed by a professional crew and an actor dressed as Colonel Sanders.

The campaign called “RE-‘FRESH’ AMERICA’S POT-HOLE STRICKEN ROADWAYS” was a thinly veiled attempt at subvertising. It used the tool of culture-jamming (stencils and spray paint) in an attempt to appear authentic. Ultimately, it was a form of co-option—using another culture’s language to try to market to them. KFC fixed the potholes and then branded them using a stencil that read “Re-Freshed by KFC.”

KFC stretched to connect filling potholes to its brand by stating that, “For more than half a century, KFC has ‘filled up’ its fans with the Colonel’s world famous, freshly prepared fried chicken.” The pun on “filled up” is horrid on so many lev-

11 It’s a campaign eerily reminiscent of the Talking Heads song (nothing but) Flowers:

Once there were parking lots
 Now It’s a peaceful oasis
 you got it, you got it

This was a Pizza Hut
 Now It’s all covered with daisies
 you got it, you got it

David Byrne is a prophet.

els. Re-“fresh” is even more awkward given its association with re-heating. But the use of quotes around the word “Fresh” is our first clue. Quotes are typically a dead giveaway that there is something more going on. Conversationally, the rabbit ears are used to visibly demark exaggeration or parody.

Clearly, that is the case here as well. But they also use them to call attention to their operative word in a desperate attempt to connect their “fresh” food with the promotion. Anyway, no one says “re-fresh” a pothole, or even “fill up” a pothole. The phrase normally associated with repair is to “fill in” a pothole. Clearly, this was just a good deed and idea that they tried to shoehorn into an already clumsy brand.

It’s so bad in fact they had to explain it step-by-step: “Today, in a marketing first, KFC is celebrating its continued dedication to freshness by launching a pilot infrastructure renewal program, becoming the first-ever corporate sponsor of ‘freshly filled up’ potholes in up to five major cities across the U.S.”¹² First ever? Is that a good thing in this case? We shouldn’t ignore KFC’s concept of “infrastructure renewal program” and will return to its frightening implications shortly.

KFC’s attempted play on words is specifically curious due to recent controversy in the United Kingdom. A KFC ad created by Bartle Bogle Hegarty implied that they use fresh food that was delivered daily to each franchise. The ad has been taken off-air by the Advertising Standards Authority, the

12 KFC Corporate Press Release, March 25, 2009.

UK's independent regulator of advertising to ensure that the ads are legal, decent, honest, and truthful.¹³

Of course, parody news source *The Onion* took it to its logical conclusion:

.....

“KFC’s claim that its fried offerings have ‘that taste you’ll just love to eat’ is in direct violation of federal regulations,” acting FCC chairman Michael Copps said. “The word ‘eat’ is legally permissible only in reference to substances appropriate for human consumption. Any implication that a consumer could or should ‘enjoy’ a KFC Crispy Strip fails to meet these standards, and presents an unlawful deception to consumers.”¹⁴

.....

Javier Benito, Executive Vice President of Marketing and Food Innovation for KFC said that the program is a “perfect example of that rare and optimal occurrence when a company can creatively market itself and help local governments and everyday Americans across the country.”¹⁵

Optimal seems like a strong word here.

KFC does not shy away or try to hide from the fact that

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13 Nymark, Hadassah. “Ad Regulator Bans KFC ‘Fresh Food’ Ad.” *Campaign*. July 15, 2009.

14 “KFC No Longer Permitted to Use Word ‘Eat’ in Advertisements.” *The Onion*, May 26, 2009. www.theonion.com/content/news/kfc_no_longer_permitted_to_use

15 KFC Corporate Press Release, March 25, 2009.

this is marketing, not philanthropy, and while the honesty is, err...refreshing, it really doesn't have a choice, so can't get any credit for it. It's too transparent to not call it what it is. But to be fair, KFC never claimed that this was anything more than a clever advertising stunt that also had some civic value.

"Everyone could use a little help during these tough economic times and this initiative—like our commitment to provide affordable, freshly prepared chicken—is our way of carrying on Colonel Sanders' legacy."¹⁶ And while KFC works to cement this legacy by petitioning the U.S. Postal Service to create a postage stamp in honor of the Colonel, there is a forced narrative that it creates for itself. For each point KFC makes, it has to return us to the corollary brand attribute it is struggling to allude to.

Even KFC's Fill 'Er Up For The Fourth promotion had a forced narrative. Look at the parenthetical reminder in the headline from the press release.

"KFC Tops Off Gas Tanks (And Stomachs) This Holiday Weekend To Introduce The New KFC® \$5 Fill-Up Box"¹⁷

Not surprisingly, KFC can't help but plug a new product along the way. Its strategy is to do good and through the public attention given to the deed, use that created space to launch a product. Compare this to Tampontification's barely there reference to Seventh Generation. Seventh Generation

16 Ibid.

17 KFC Corporate Press Release, July 1, 2009.

knows that it is better to be caught doing good than to broadcast it.

Continuing to look at language, more trouble arises for the Fill ‘er Up campaign, including filling up customers’ stomachs and “getting gas.” But this is not carried out tongue in cheek. Not even a wink. They try to pull it off straight-faced and it fails. It allows us to find the irony too easily. But of course, we are reminded in the press release, “Colonel Sanders was no stranger to the gas pump.” Benito points out that the Colonel perfected his secret blend of 11 herbs and spices, “in the small front room of a gas station.” Nothing says freshness like the front room of a gas station. The jokes come easily, but the point is that KFC struggles with promotion that is cause-related and well branded.¹⁸

Some mayors jumped at the offer to have their potholes filled. “Budgets are tight for cities across the country, and finding funding for needed road repairs is a continuing challenge,” said Louisville’s Mayor, Jerry Abramson. “It’s great to have a concerned corporation like KFC create innovative private/public partnerships like this pothole refresh program.”

Of course, KFC the Corporation has a deeper philanthropic side that this campaign belies. The critique is of the

18 KFC tries again with the Bucket for a Cure campaign (bucketforacure.com) as it raises money to help fight cancer, one giant bucket of chicken at a time. KFC seems to forget that obesity and cancer have been linked. The splash page even promotes its controversial Double Down product.

campaign, not the company. The Colonel Harland Sanders Trust and Colonel Harland Sanders Charitable Organization continue to support charities and fund scholarships. Parent company Yum! Brands (parent of KFC, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell) launched its World Hunger Relief campaign to help stop world hunger. According to Yum!, World Hunger Relief is the world's largest private sector hunger relief effort, spanning 110 countries, 36,000 restaurants, and over one million employees, to raise awareness, volunteerism, and funds for the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and other hunger relief agencies.

The effort that has raised \$36 million for the World Food Programme and other hunger relief organizations is helping to provide approximately 160 million meals and save the lives of about four million people in remote corners of the world. Yum! and its brands have been fighting hunger for more than a decade by donating over \$46 million of prepared food annually to the underprivileged in the United States. Since the company went public in 1997, it has donated more than \$550 million of food to hunger relief agencies in the United States.

Yum!'s civic philanthropy promotion brings its own materiality to the forefront in the 2009 Day of Closing Campaign (at noon, during the lunch rush) where KFC properties converted restaurants to "World Hunger Relief Kitchens" to raise money and awareness for the issue of global hunger. During

the closure, employees of each closed store helped serve free Kentucky Grilled Chicken™ meals to hundreds of residents from area shelters.

“While KFC feeds the hungry every day, closing restaurants is a bold step in helping to raise money and awareness of world hunger,” explained KFC President, Roger Eaton. Socioeconomic demographics aside, literally, yes, KFC feeds “the hungry” every day. But that really isn’t the implication of the statement. The “hungry” in Eaton’s statement implies a more marginalized “other” as opposed to hungry customers with some money looking to purchase a high-calorie, low-cost product. “From employees to customers, KFC is passionate about motivating and educating everyone who is in a position to help the more than one billion undernourished people in the world today.”¹⁹

In the end, the campaigning is the common occurrence of bad promotion as corporate philanthropy, or vice versa. No matter. There are a few hours of civic value and almost no cultural value.

A more authentic promotion would have been to take on one of Yum!’s operational materiality points—packaging waste. Turn it into a promotional, civic, and cultural moment. A lot of the fast-food industry’s marketing impressions come from litter. Yum! was listed as one of the “Eleven Fast Food Junkies” by the Dogwood Alliance. A well-engineered promo-

¹⁹ “Feeding hungry people everyday” reminds me of Soylent Green.

tion around its iconic bucket (although they are playing with “think beyond the bucket” concept for new packaging) could have a significant Triple ROI if framed wisely.

KFC’s encore to the pothole promotion is reported to include a more permanent fixture: replacing fire hydrants and hoses for city fire departments. Of course, the KFC logo will appear on the hydrants themselves. It’s cleverly on-brand this time, however, as the ads will be bringing attention to KFC’s new Fiery Chicken Wings. Still, I imagine the language to be no less clichéd, but infinitely less forced.

True to form, KFC misses some of the subtle opportunities by still framing it as promotion. From the corporate press release,

.....
To help cities pay for needed fire safety repairs and improvements during difficult economic times, KFC unveiled an advertising campaign to bring the brand’s iconic logo to neighborhood fire hydrants and fire extinguishers in public buildings. Designed to launch KFC’s new Fiery Grilled Wings, this first-of-its-kind advertising program supports the important issue of fire prevention and safety.”

“With January being the peak month for residential fires, KFC wanted to raise awareness about this important issue and launch our new KFC Fiery Grilled Wings by supporting local fire departments nationwide,” said Javier Benito, Executive Vice President of Marketing and Food Innovation for KFC. “This unique marketing concept will help pay for new fire extinguishers and fire hydrants in
.....

cities in exchange for branding the equipment with Fiery Grilled Wings logos.”²⁰

There’s no arguing the civic value. The pilot campaign in Brazil, Indiana, included repairs to 85 fire hydrants that the city couldn’t afford due to budget constraints. Newly fixed hydrants branded with the KFC and Fiery Grilled Wings logos started dotting the city.

From the corporate press release again about the civic/corporate partnership with our nation’s fire departments:

“We are always looking for outside-the-bucket marketing ideas,” Benito added. “Much like our “re-Freshed by KFC” pothole repair program that promoted our fresh chicken, this partnership was tailor-made for our new Fiery Grilled Wings.”

“New Fiery Grilled Wing lovers take note: If you play with fire then KFC’s new Fiery Grilled Wings are for you! These wings are slow grilled to seal in the juicy, fiery heat and marinated in a unique blend of chili peppers and covered in flavorful spices for a delicious, one-of-a-kind flavor. This meaty, bone-in wing will make you ‘Un-Think’ the way you think about wings.”

I wonder how the nation’s fire departments feel about

promotional copy alluding to fire bugs who like playing with fire?

KFC's approach to civic engagement through promotion is both painful and fun to watch. In effect, this kind of promotion is tantamount to sponsoring venues, like Gillette Stadium, Applebee's Park, Coors Field, or PetCo Park. These perform some social context value (the sponsoring and therefore enabling of space), but are clearly corporate purchases to secure impressions.

Some of these examples are providing services that the government might normally be responsible for (hygiene products to women's shelters, filling of potholes, feeding the hungry, working municipal safety equipment). It's kind of like Marxism without the middleman of the government redistributing corporate wealth to social services, a voluntary capitalistic socialism, if you will. But this doesn't address the issue of the "sponsored lives" concept that can be troublesome. How far do we want civic sponsoring to go? Our football stadiums are fine. But what about our high schools? Of course, Nike and Gatorade and snacks are already sponsoring our school system. What if Target sponsored social studies texts? How about a Fuji municipal water system? Within the spectacle, there is no such thing as a public option. Public options are just opportunities for sponsorship that have not been monetized yet.

Of course, this is already happening.

Let's face it. We are all corporate-sponsored creatures. From birth, our lives are "brought to you by" something. Ian MacKaye, frontman for the punk band Fugazi, sums it up. "I am, of course, disgusted by mass marketing to children. You can imagine my horror when I discovered that it's virtually impossible to buy a diaper—which is essentially a shit bag—without a goddamn corporate cartoon figure on it. It's deeply disturbing."²¹ Clothes, cars, computers, they are all extensions of our personal brands; a slippery slope to some odd breed of corporate sponsored socialism.

As defined by Marx and Engles, socialism was where everyone would share on the benefits of an industrialized society. KFC provides road crew maintenance; Seventh Generation provides tampons. They are distributing social services, much like a political socialist system would.

Let's return to KFC's concept of its advertising being, "an infrastructure renewal program." It sounds remarkably like a government program that Fox News would call part of a socialist agenda. Perhaps this offers us a distinction. Which is better, government-run socialism or corporate-run socialism? A single system of power (the government or the corporation) providing social services is a close definition of communism.

21 Dapier, Jarrett & Gantz, Jeremy. "The Margin Walker." *In These Times*, December 5, 2008. http://inthesetimes.com/article/4073/the_margin_walker

So the impact of some Cause-Related Marketing providing social services where the current system fails us culturally is both a bountiful thing and a cultural moment of a ruling class trying to maintain its hegemony. Neither, it seems, is a model system. What happens, for instance, when next year the fire department does not include hydrant maintenance in the budget because KFC has it covered? And then, when KFC changes its marketing strategy? Speaking of a model system to provide more services to more people, Žizek claims we need to invent some totally new form of collective activity that will be neither market nor state bureaucracy.

Cultural hegemony, the concept originated by Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci, states that a culturally diverse society can be ruled or dominated by one of its social classes. This is the way our current culture is. The ideas of the ruling class are seen to become the norm, with a set of seemingly universal ideologies driving the culture. There is an inherent political argument in the concept, but for our purposes, we will stay focused on the cultural aspect manifested through marketing. In the hegemony, these universal ideologies are perceived to benefit everyone while only really benefiting the ruling class.

In many cases, our cultural hegemony is driven by the spectacle portrayed by Hollywood. Using pop culture (and popular sub-cultures) as a lens to study, say, sustainability, is a

very effective analysis tool.²² A culture's ideologies and direction are clearly revealed in the manufactured realities of films and advertising (micro-films).

Consider the Corporation as a kind of Celebrity. Never mind the charismatic CEOs as the corporate rock stars these days. This is about the entirety of the company. People emulate companies, dress like them, and listen to them. Having a Mac is like having a piece of that celebrity. Of course, celebrities are also corporations spinning off perfumes, sneakers, and consumables. And, moreover, they are engaging in Cause Marketing. We see that the distinctions between Corporation and Celebrity are really very few from a marketing perspective. As Bob Sugar said in *Ferry Maguire*, "It's not show friends, it's show business."

Studying culture through entertainment lenses reveals an interesting perspective on a kind of ecohegemony²³ that is "happening to" our culture. In the Ecohegemon, we begin to see a perverted view of ecology and justice. The ideology of the ruling class here is part of the "go green, make green" narrative. It permits the "alternative energy as a business opportunity" dialogue. It supports the spectacle of going green without culture change. I contend this is impossible.

22 See studies using lenses ranging from zombies, fashion, punk rock, super heroes, Zen, and other cultural creations at www.thesoapgroup.com

23 Read more on this concept at www.ecohegemony.com

But this is the way it is, not the way it is going to be. In the next stage of the Ecohegemon, the ruling class dynamics will shift. Consumption will no longer be the preferred way to go green or be socially responsible. Once the savings from lighting retrofits and the 10-year payback on solar arrays have come and gone, for sustainability to be sustainable, we will need to strip the ideological power away from the current purveyors and claim a new ideology, not of anti-consumption, mind you, but of a kind of consumption that is in line with a new approach to living an authentic life. Zizek challenges Debord and puts our current state like this, “ecology is a new opium for the masses.”²⁴

The opportunity is to view promotion as the linchpin in fostering the new ecohegemony. We can be the point on the fulcrum that enables a continued control of promoting consumption as the solution to climate change, a way of life, and the way to happiness—or we can use it to assist sustainability in becoming the cultural norm.

24 Zizek, Slavoj. “Censorship Today: Violence, or Ecology as a New Opium for the Masses” www.lacan.com/zizecology1.htm

This book deconstructs two oft-competing concepts: “promotion” of consumption and the act of “sustainability.” Through this deconstruction, a new concept emerges: a strategy and methodology of promotion that is, simultaneously, both sustainability and strategic marketing.

Ultimately, this is a book about meaning making and management in the face of sustainability, green marketing, and conscious consumerism. It is about the significance of meaning—and significant meaning.

It asks each of us a question: In addition to promote, what more can my promotion do?

Take the pledge:

**“Wherever and whenever possible
I will develop promotion that has social
significance. I will architect campaigns that
have corporate, civic, and cultural value.”**



JOHN ROOKS is the father of two and husband to one. He founded The SOAP Group to merge environmentalism and marketing into one discipline. He’s got experience, an advanced degree, and nerds out on zombie movies. There’s more at his blog: www.ecohegemony.com.

