

reading bank

From joke to cake

- You are going to read about the rebranding of Skoda. Have you seen any of the television ads for Skoda cars? If so, what do you think the advertisements are trying to 'say' about the brand?
- Read the article quickly and choose the main point from options a-c.
 - To encourage companies to adopt aggressive marketing strategies
 - To 'advertise' the 'Skoda product'
 - To highlight the impact of 'image' on a product
- Look at the advertising ideas mentioned in the article. Then put them in the correct order from oldest to most recent.
 - a large cake
 - it really is a Skoda
 - highlighting the cars' abilities
 - customers with a problem
- Answer the questions.
 - How did people regard the Skoda in the 1980s?
 - What two factors caused this opinion to change?
 - What can be the danger of a company using 'aggressive marketing'?
 - What have been the results of the marketing campaign?
- Find words or phrases in the article that match the following definitions.
 - to emphasize sth or make it more noticeable (paragraph 1)
 - caused sth to develop or be produced (paragraph 2)
 - very comfortable; expensive and of good quality (paragraph 4)
 - to start to do sth new or difficult (paragraph 5)
 - to remain valid even when tested, examined closely, etc. (paragraph 5)
 - to move to the side of the road in order to stop or let sth pass (paragraph 6)
 - to put people or things together, especially in order to show a contrast or a new relationship between them (paragraph 7)
 - be the most surprising (or annoying) thing that has happened or that sb has done (paragraph 8)

Over to you

- In what ways is advertising cars different than advertising any other kind of product?
- What kind of car do you drive? What does that 'say' about you, and do you care?

Answer key

- Students own answers
- It shows how a product has gone from being a joke to a best-selling brand by changing its image.
- 1 D 2 C 3 C 4 A
4 1. It was considered as an inferior product, being cheap and unreliable.
- 2 The change in advertising strategy and becoming a carman-made car.
- 3 It opens the product up to being looked at very closely, with people trying hard to find things wrong with it.
- 4 An increase in sales and rewards for the car.
- 5 1. accelerated
2. spawned
3. pain
4. ended
5. stand up to
6. put over
7. improve
8. lose the focus

From joke to cake

1 One of the golden rules of advertising has always been not to mention the disadvantages of your product. Advertising campaigns need a positive spin - accentuate the positives, eliminate the negatives. But that was before Skoda came along.

2 Skoda has probably had one of the worst image problems in the history of marketing. Thanks to its cheap price and lack of reliability in the 1980s, the Skoda spawned a series of jokes and even now there are websites dedicated to the Skoda joke such as: 'How do you double the price of a Skoda? Throw a Euro in it.' Even its name seems to mock itself - in Czech skoda literally means 'shame', and to je skoda translates into English as 'It's a pity'.

3 So how has this 'joke' become one of the success stories of the noughties, becoming the third best-selling brand in Germany and the UK, and winning Car of the Year 2007? The answer is an aggressive advertising campaign that met the image problems head on, breaking all the rules of conventional advertising as it went.

4 The first step in the transformation was the 'It's a Skoda, honest' series of adverts. The most memorable showed an employee at the Skoda factory putting the Skoda badge on finished vehicles. When a new batch of plush cars come along, the employee stands back thinking there's no way they can be Skodas, but of course they are.

5 Addressing an image problem in such a forthright way is a high-risk strategy but one which Skoda felt was worth the gamble. As industry specialist Gideon Riley explains: 'If you're going to embark on an

advertising campaign that challenges the normal rules of the industry, you have to have a product that will stand up to intense scrutiny. Skoda felt that they had reliable cars that would challenge the old perception of their product and surprise a good many people. Of course, they were now being built to German specifications, having become part of the Volkswagen group in 1991.'

6 Skoda didn't stop there - their next campaign featured a man being taken for a test drive in a Skoda. When the showroom employee pulls over to let the customer drive the car for himself, the customer runs off into the woods. The slogan was 'It's a Skoda, which is still a problem for some.'

7 Since then they have changed direction a little but still emphasize the surprising nature of their cars. One advert claims that we all copy each other and encourages us to be different by choosing to drive a Skoda, while a recent campaign hardly featured the car at all - in one, a huge gymnast

tumbles on a mat, and in another a James Bond-style secretary dramatically jumps onto a moving train in the pouring rain, trying to locate her boss who has forgotten an important document. The slogans 'Big and agile - you don't see that very often' and 'Practical and exciting - you don't see that very often' juxtapose the qualities of their cars.

8 Skoda's latest advert, though, might just 'take the biscuit' - or more precisely the cake. It features a life-sized cake version of the new Skoda Fabia. The cake took four days and sixteen people to bake, but the final effect is astounding. 'This is Skoda moving away from its image problems and making eye-catching adverts that have had workers gossiping during their coffee breaks for the last few years,' explains Riley 'and their marketing people have worked wonders. Over 37,000 people have visited the Fabia website to see the clip.'

9 So just how do you overcome an image problem? Well ... it's a piece of cake.



Glossary

mock to show no respect for sth

the noughties (BrE) the years from 2000 to 2009

tumbles performs acrobatics on the floor

astounding so surprising that it is difficult to believe

a piece of cake (informal) a thing that is very easy to do