


Selling Semiotics in North America

Or: Bringing Culture to The New World

Charles Leech, ABM
Sarah Johnson, Athena

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The market for
commercial
semiotics in
North America
has remained
flat

for
15+
years



**There are a
number of
reasons for
this...**



Clients Who Embrace Semiotics Use it in a Limited Number of Contexts

- At odds with predictability of quant research or even focus groups
- Difficult to show relevance or ROI



Clients Who Try it
Just Because It's

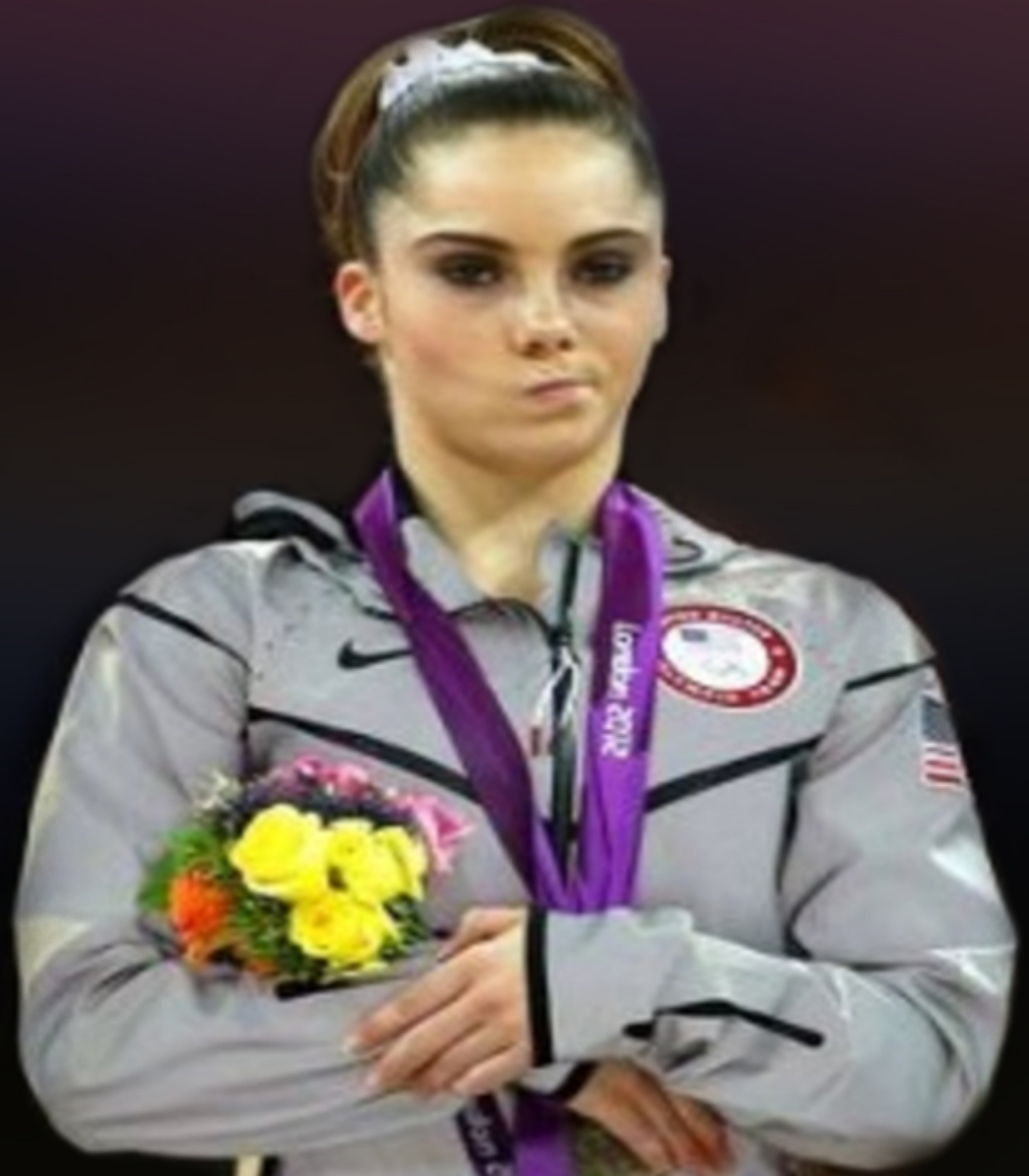
"Cool"

Can Go Off It
Very Quickly



“Virgin” clients are a tough sell


- Unfamiliar with cultural theory
- Intimidated by academic language
- Challenging to sell it up the line



The Challenge With ALL Clients:

- they're under enormous pressure
- they have no time to think
they have less money to spend
- most **just want to be told the answer**





There remains a great
divide between business
and academia in North
America



It's the same problem we've been facing since 1983

when our discipline was introduced
to market research.



So:

How do we frame
commercial semiotics for
North American clients?

A Two Pronged Approach

- 1 Create Buzz so they will appreciate it when they get it
- 2 Find ways to slip Semiotics in without the hard sell



Why Create Buzz?



How to Create Buzz

- 1 Pitch “Semiotics Salvation Stories” to publications your clients read (AdWeek, Campaign etc.)
- 2 Speak at conferences that have nothing to do with Semiotics
- 3 Get a gig teaching Semiotics at your local business school



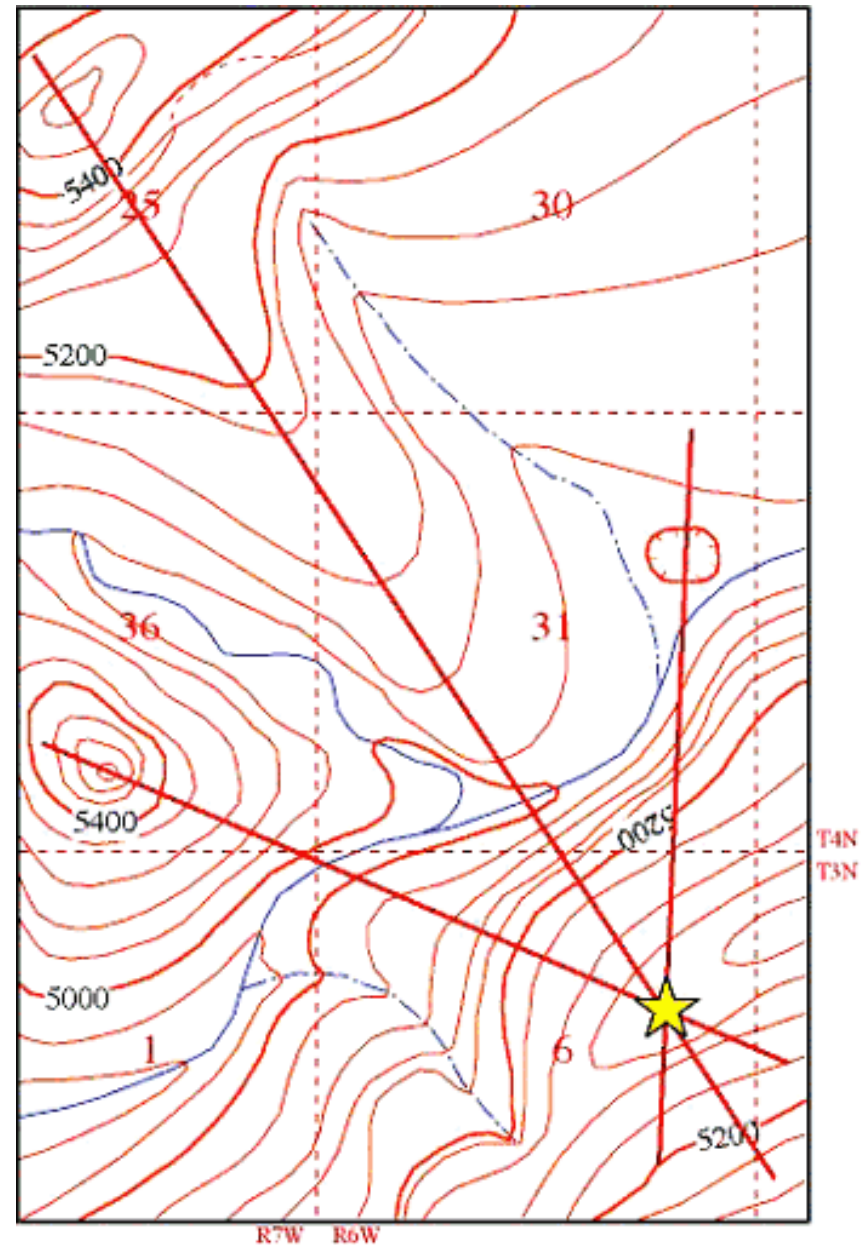


Sneaking Semiotics In:

- 1 triangulation
- 2 value-add
- 3 black box

1. Triangulation

- Like in physical science, 'truth' [insight] in market research is best sought by approaching the issue from 2 – 3 different vantage points . . . not just one
- Semiotics is best used as a component to a multi-methodology design, alongside focus groups, ethnography, etc.
- A typical project: Pop Cultural analysis to provide context for brand/consumer study





Why not on its own?

- Semiotics can identify possible interpretations, but *not which interpretations are most relevant* to a target consumer
- Combining semiotics with consumer validation brings relevance to clients, as well as reassurance . . .
 - . . . since semiotics is vulnerable to accusations of personal bias (however unfounded!)

2.Value-add

(the first taste is free!)

As a *pro-bono* value-add to an existing project on packaging or logos, semiotics can sometimes be the compelling point of difference in competitive bids – especially if the client has heard rumors about it

A typical project: Analysis of advertising, packaging, retail environments to provide counterpoint for consumer responses



The danger of *pro-bono* introductory semiotics is

devaluation

It's important to invoice your clients for the full value of a semiotic analysis and then show a courtesy reduction for that same value



3. Semiotics as a Black Box

Not really 'framing' semiotics, but framing the semiotic *deliverable*: smart, strategic, thoughtful consulting on marketing issues



3. Semiotics as a Black Box

This approach uses semiotic qualifications as an on-demand RTB for consulting services

It recognizes that many North American clients don't want to know *why*, they just need to know what to do next



KEEP
CALM
I
am
GENIUS



One More Thought: Walk the Walk

Why are we disclosing
sales approaches to
you, potential
competitors?

ELEVATION.

Let's all go up together.



THANK YOU

(Special shout-out to
J. Duncan Berry and **Joshua Glenn**
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