

Communicating the Centenary – companies play it safe

Only a few brands stood out in the way they communicated the most important event Romania has celebrated in recent years – its Centenary. Although many brands did activations or associated their name in one way or another with the milestone event, experts say the creativity fell short of what one would have expected from a country with Romania's reputation.

By Romanita Oprea



Miruna Smeureanu, Coca-Cola Romania

Heist Industries created and developed the non-ATL experiential and PR campaign for the brand ROM Autentic, during #doartricolor, a campaign built around the Centenary. Starting from the campaign's ATL concept, Heist Industries took the idea further in real life and created The Tricolor Museum, in which stories about the tricolor flag, gathered on the platform doar-tricolor.ro, received an emotional artistic interpretation. The campaign started with a symbolic gesture in which ROM dropped the usual branding on its packaging, therefore becoming the bar that wears #doartricolor (#justtricolor). Moreover, the agency challenged Romanians to share their stories about the tricolor on the website doar-tricolor.ro,

100 of which were exhibited in the Tricolor Museum and three were reinterpreted artistically.

Also dropping its usual packaging was Ardealul, a pate brand that decided to change its name to Romania, as a gesture of honor. For Razvan Matasel, partner & strategy director at Arsenoaiei & Matasel, 2018 was a year full of briefs for the association of different brands with the Centenary. Some of them, the strategist notes, did not even have anything "Romanian" in their DNA. But a brief from the brand Ardealul, asking for the building of this type of association and in an "ownable" manner, was truly an appropriate and "challenging" brief. And that because, accordingly to Matasel, the most important positioning

tool is the name of a product and because, in Ardealul's case, it was directly connected to the Centenary celebration.

SPECIAL BOTTLES

Another international name, and one of the most iconic and biggest "Lovemarks" in the world, Coca-Cola, also decided to launch a special, limited edition of bottles, designed by young people. The theme for the contest, launched last summer, was the creation of a design inspired by one of the three values associated with Romania's flag. The Original Taste bottle bore diverse symbols associated with Romania, while Zero Sugar had traditional motifs and Lime illustrated "romanii/societatea secolului următor" (Romanians/the society of the next century).

"As a brand that has won the hearts of millions of Romanians, we wanted to take part in the celebration in the best way Coca-Cola could. Our campaigns are targeted at teenagers and young adults - those who lay the foundation for the years to come. This is why we thought that the best way we could celebrate Romania was to offer young people a way of expressing their creativity. And we did it the Coca-Cola way - we transformed the package of their favorite beverage into their drawing board. In the first phase of the campaign, we asked young Romanians from all over the country to enter a competition in which they could imagine the design of a limited edition, Centenary-inspired Coca-Cola bottle. And from the thousands of proposals received, three designs were selected as winners," explained Miruna Smeureanu, marketing director at Coca-Cola Romania.

A few months later, once the limited edition bottles were out on the market, the



Alina Damaschin, Rogalski Damaschin Public Relation



Razvan Matasel, Arsenoaiei @ Matasel

company took the campaign further by challenging teens to create a common story about how they envision the next 100 years. They submitted their “chapters” on the campaign’s website and offline - at collection points in Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca and Constanta.

A PEEK INTO THE FUTURE AND REAL TIME REACTIONS

Another special project was launched by Lidl and The Embassy of Sustainability in Romania - “100 Romanians”, a radiography-project of Romanian society. Wanting to answer questions such as “If Romania were a community of 100 people, who would they be?”, “How educated or how poor?”, “What would their lives look like?”, “What is good and what is bad in Romania at 100 years old?”, the project is supported by the Romanian government’s Department for Durable Development and contains a collection of 100 infographics, with static data connected with the United Nations’ (UN) durable development objectives and divided into relevant categories for Romanian society.

Other brands decided to focus on the future and how Romania could and should look. For instance, Kaufland developed a campaign under the tagline “Cunoscând trecutul, scriem următorii 100 de ani” (Knowing the past, we write the next 100 years), recalling important figures from Romania’s history, such as Iuliu Maniu, Alexandru Vaida-Voievod, Ecaterina Teodoroiu, King Ferdinand I, and Ion IC Bratianu. Moreover, the brand had an activation which claimed a Guinness World Record for the Biggest Map

of a Country formed by people, and which featured the number 100 and the colors of the Romanian flag.

But probably the most surprising and popular reaction was the real-time marketing campaigns by KFC and McDonald’s, the biggest fast food rivals in Romania, which took a funny, smart and good-humored approach to suggest how they could combine Romanians’ favorite products of theirs. Their social media response came in the meeting of the PressOne campaign #TraiascaCapraVecinului.

EXPERT VIEW

But how was this communication seen by experts? Did the companies start to communicate at the right

time? Should they have done more? “Brands’ actions were mostly concentrated in the last few months. At the beginning of the year, companies were in the process of understanding if and how much to link their plans to the moment and many initiatives were expected. In reality, they decided to adopt a balanced approach and, in general, I would say, we had no big surprises: some brands invested in the moment and created new means to understand what people really feel, expect or desire for the next century and even

created benchmarks to be measured against in the future; others followed their authentic voices and just tactically adapted them to the Centenary; still others intervened in the conversation a bit abruptly, trying more to take advantage of the moment than to give something real in return,” commented Alina Damaschin, creative leader & head of consumer PR at Rogalski Damaschin Public Relations. “Some brand initiatives were just visible, but without ‘bringing a present’, anything new; others had more substance and were less visible. In general, brands took the centenary year seriously and tried to

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remain relevant, while adapting to the social ‘temperature’. There are brands that are almost the same age as Romania. Others are even ‘older’. I still hope these wise ones will not only mark the moment, but also create something new, a product, a service, a new connection with the people, for the next 100 years,” added Damaschin. In other words, the communication was sporadic and did not seem to be part of a bigger, more cohesive plan, mostly because there were no big public interest projects to communicate for.