

# The Red Letter



## I Give You My Words

Volume 2, Issue 10  
October 2005

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### Waste Not, Want A Lot

Many advertisers want to skimp on ad production costs while trying to build a top-of-category brand perception. Extra design or production trickery won't enhance my message, they reason, so why should I spend the money? A study by Tim Ambler, senior fellow at the London Business School, and E. Ann Hollier, president of the Cogent Consortium, shows that maybe they should.

"The Waste in Advertising is the Part That Works," published in the *Journal of Advertising Research* in December 2004, shows that perception of extravagance, or waste, in an ad influences the perception of brand quality and, ultimately, the purchase decision. When consumers in the study believed a brand had spent more on an ad, it enhanced their perception of the brand, its health and strength. There is, the researchers wrote, a "relationship between the perception of advertising expenditure and the perception of brand quality."

They went on to say that higher production values do not enhance advertising functionality (communication and persuasion), but there is a link between perceived waste and an advertisement's overall impact: "If the 'waste' of higher perceived advertising expense creates an impression of greater brand quality, and if brand quality...is a significant driver of purchase decisions, then there is strong support for the interpretation that lavish advertising works..."

This concept is especially important in categories in which there is little difference between brands. The company that puts out better ads is perceived to offer the better, more reliable product or service.

How do you want your brand to be perceived? Next time you're building your advertising budget, think about it.

### A Writer's Half Dozen

I'm often asked, "Which references should I keep on hand?" The answer varies depending on the writer, but I couldn't get by without:

1. Dictionary – Obviously.
2. *Associated Press Stylebook* – Most news organizations in this region adhere to AP, so I use it nearly every day.
3. *Gregg Reference Manual* – Handy for anything not in AP.
4. *The Elements of Grammar* by Margaret Shertzer
5. *The Elements of Editing* by Arthur Plotnik
6. *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White.

Of course, you'll never get your hands on my secret weapon, my one indispensable reference. A tough, no-nonsense editor, she never hesitates to tell when something sucks. And that's a valuable quality to have in a wife. Thanks, Cassi.

*The pure and simple truth is rarely pure and never simple. – Oscar Wilde*

*The Good Word*

### This Column Is Definitely Not Fortuitous

A great way to look like a pompous fool is to misuse fancy words instead of correctly using common ones.

A good example is using "fortuitous" when "fortunate" is correct.

*Fortunate* means "lucky," while *fortuitous* means "by chance." Something that is fortuitous can also be fortunate, but if it didn't happen by chance, it was merely fortunate.

Example: "It was fortunate that

the plane had enough fuel to reach the alternate landing field. The pilot's choice was fortuitous; the other fields were damaged."

So, if you're a regular reader you're just fortunate. If you're reading this by chance, it's both fortunate and fortuitous. And I'm the only fool pompous enough to say so.