

gkv

**welcome to gkv**  
communications for challenger brands



## celebrating over 28 years

of creating advertising, direct marketing, branding, interactive and public relations campaigns that have succeeded in the marketplace and drawn acclaim from our industry. Our success is rooted in our ability to create and execute breakthrough strategies for brands that are out-spent in their categories. gkv and its clients succeed by challenging the category status quo.



## our mission

**Identify and support organizations that believe marketing/advertising is a key component to their success.**

We have had the same mission since we opened our doors in 1981 — it doesn't matter what product or service category a company is in or where it is located.

If you want a partner, not just a vendor, we're in. If you believe the way to sales leadership is through thought leadership, we're in.

To shorten the distance between goals and results, we insist on senior-level relationships. A gkv principal holds the "partner-in-charge" position for every client on our roster.

Our mission and our partner-in-charge philosophy have created productive, long-term relationships with our clients for more than 28 years.

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challenger philosophy



- > Are you a smaller brand, threatened by the superior positions of larger, better-funded competitors?
- > Are you facing a situation where style, social conscience, popular culture or a seismic shift in demographics will make growth more difficult?
- > Are you a brand in a rapidly changing category?



If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are a Challenger Brand. You are unlike the category leader in position, perception and resources. You cannot succeed simply by trying to re-create the relationship the category leader enjoys with the consumer.

To compete and win, a Challenger Brand must change the criteria by which it is evaluated by the consumer.

gkv believes the following four brand behaviors are critical to short-circuiting the status quo of consumer awareness, preference and purchase habits created by the category leaders and helping Challenger Brands win on their own terms.



## create strong symbols of re-evaluation

By necessity, Challenger Brands are brands in a hurry. Success depends on affecting change fast. That change hinges on making a visible break with the past and establishing symbols — icons, ads, events, new products, innovative communication strategies — designed specifically to prompt quick re-evaluation by consumers and enhance their view of the brand.

Some examples of successful symbols of re-evaluation are the Progressive Auto Insurance Web site listing competitor pricing, Jared's Subway® diet, and gkv's use of celebs like Dennis Miller to record their own versions of Independence Air's in-flight safety announcements.



## create an emotional connection

A Challenger Brand does not succeed — especially in a mature category — by selling quality or experience, or even convenience. Those are rational benefits, usually the territory of the category leader — and they're taken.

Instead, a Challenger Brand succeeds by offering the consumer an emotional reward — a sense of relevance, understanding and common ground the category leader cannot match. For example, the Starbucks® customer is not just buying coffee; he or she is buying a moment of affirmation, taking part in a cool, culturally-approved experience. A Challenger Brand must demonstrate that it “gets it.” See gkv’s work for Medicare for a further demonstration of how to emotionally connect with your target audience.



# sacrifice



To quickly create a unique relationship with its customer base, the often under-funded Challenger Brand must consider what it will sacrifice.

What types of trade-offs should a Challenger Brand be willing to make? Here's our view:

- > Numbers for loyalty because there is no greater brand asset than a loyal customer.
- > Availability for desirability because a more limited distribution adds authenticity and intensity to the relationship between the Challenger Brand and the consumer.
- > An involved message for a defined message because Challenger Brands must communicate simply, clearly and confidently, even if it means sacrificing what may seem like an important secondary message.

For Maryland's budget-challenged anti-tobacco effort, gkv reduced tobacco consumption by sacrificing a "health risk" message to focus on a smoke-free lifestyle initiative utilizing a grassroots community program to spread the word.



# live your brand inside

Challenger Brands understand the importance of on-brand customer service as a competitive advantage.

Brand is a ubiquitous word. It is most often referred to within the context of external marketing. However, a brand is much more than that. It is the promise a company makes to its customers. It represents the values and beliefs the organization holds. It is what drives a company's reputation and worthiness to its customers.

Research has shown that the customer experience — the interaction between the company's employees and the customer — has a far greater impact on a brand and ultimately the economic well-being of a company than any external marketing.

To help our clients deliver a consistent on-brand customer experience, we have developed training techniques designed to align the brand promise with the customer experience. It is how we helped Independence Air become the number one rated airline in customer satisfaction after one year of operation.





## **gkv offers end-to-end** **creative marketing solutions**

As a full-service marketing communications firm, we offer Challenger Brands advertising, direct response, interactive/Web development, e-mail campaigns, public relations, grassroots marketing and brand identity. If you need help training your dog, learning a guitar lick or making margaritas, we can help you with that, too.



# advertising

There are three kinds of advertising: the ads for the category leader, the ads for the companies trying to emulate the category leader and the ads for the few companies that realize emulating the category leader is a waste of money.

We are proponents of the third kind. gkv's more than 25-year body of work for Challenger Brands is characterized by clear departures from the category status quo. Our clients sign on to win at their own game, not someone else's.

# direct marketing

In the world of Challenger Brands, having a creative agency and a separate direct agency is a waste of money and opportunity.

Our brand-advertising specialists work closely with our direct-response specialists. We don't feel the need to protect the brand from strategies and tactics designed to generate qualified inquiries, convert hand-raisers to buyers or cross sell existing customers. We use direct the way we use everything else: to challenge the status quo and get results.

# interactive

Electronic clutter has risen to new levels of annoyance. We believe it's absolutely critical to stay true to the voice of your brand when using the Web, just as it is with traditional direct marketing.

Every interactive initiative begins with a thorough analysis of brand goals before a technology implementation is even considered. Just because you can do a spinning logo in Flash doesn't mean it's good for the task at hand — and that task is ROI.

Web sites, banner ads, e-commerce, Flash games and whatever else might come in the future must be strategically sound, make the brand connection, stimulate action and turn your customers into admirers.

- disciplines > User Interface Design / Information Architecture
- > Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
- > Search Engine Marketing (SEM)
- > 508 Compliance/Usability Analysis + Implementation
- > Interactive Design/Re-design

- tools > XHTML/CSS/XML/Javascript/AJAX
- > PHP/ASP.NET/ADO.NET
- > MySQL/MS SQL
- > Flash
- > QuickTime
- > Final Cut Studio
- > Pen/Paper/Whiteboard

- execution > Strategic Search Campaigns
- > Web site/E-Commerce Design + Build
- > Campaign Landing Pages/Microsites (Data Collection)
- > HTML E-mail Marketing
- > Interactive Banners (Flash/Rich Media)
- > Product Demo CD/DVDs
- > Desktop Widgets
- > Flash Games
- > Flash Product/Property Slideshows
- > Viral Web Video



# traditional media

Consumers no longer tolerate too much information. In self defense, they have become their own program directors.

At gkv, we map media that is important to the customer, helping our clients connect with them at the right time, in the right place and through the right channel. It's not just about reaching, it's about engaging. Giving an appreciative nod to CPM, while on the way to a relevant, emotional connection.

It's our job to move consumers from target groups into affinity groups. Thoughtful media connections lift the advertiser's image, increasing receptivity to the brand. Ultimately this leads to greater response, referrals, repeaters and return on our clients' investments.

Our media planners are every bit as creative as our copywriters and art directors. They have to be. It's the only way to beat the bigger spending category leaders. At the end of the day, the ultimate tiebreaker isn't who's bigger, it's who's smarter.



# social media



Social media has exploded, and the potential for brands to thrive in this conversation-based space is increasing with every passing day. By their nature, Challenger Brands are brands in a hurry and on a limited budget. Social media, with its immediacy and low cost-of-entry, is a perfect fit for Challenger Brands — with a little guidance.

Social media consists of people talking and sharing life experiences with each other in real-time social networking sites, blogs, microblogs, forums, video and picture sharing sites. All have common interactive elements. Like other mediums, it's a space where awareness can be built for a brand. But the true beauty of this expanding medium is its ability to build consumer advocacy and allow marketers to monitor consumer attitudes toward their brand in real-time.

Having your brand or product engage in social media is the ultimate litmus test of its relevancy. And because it allows for a two-way channel of communication, the marketer has the opportunity to enter the conversation and potentially redirect it if their brand or product is not being embraced.

To effectively use social media, brands need to be patient. They must listen before speaking, or they risk harm. Would you walk up to a group at a cocktail party and interrupt the conversation with marketing speak, then turn and run? Most likely, you'd listen from across the room and determine the right time (if any) to interject and become part of the conversation. The same discipline is required for a brand trying to get its message across in social media.

To get consumers to listen in these digital forums, we apply our 28 years of marketing experience and inject our core disciplines into Social Media strategies: paid placement via our Media group, public relations (PR) messaging and outreach through our PR team, consumer trends and demographic modeling from our Research arm, and technology evaluation from our Interactive staff.

As part of an overall communication strategy, social media can be a very effective tool in creating greater brand awareness, altering brand perception or even correcting bad brand experiences.

Check out [gkv/blog](#) for more insider perspectives from gkv's very own thought leaders.



## public relations

Without a doubt, Challenger Brands are the most creative, most effective users of public relations (PR).

Challenger Brands understand the unique opportunities for message delivery, emotional connection to consumers, news value and entertainment value that often are all wrapped together in a PR event. Think Richard Branson riding down the street on an elephant.

Think Swatch® building a watch — a real one — that was five stories tall and then hanging it from a building in Germany. Think about how striking it would be to help introduce a new airline by creating a “jet truck” — part pickup truck and part airplane tail section — and driving it around Washington, D.C. That’s what gkv did for Independence Air.

Challenger Brands are thought leaders. They are not simply afterthoughts to news stories — they are news stories.

## grassroots

Sometimes a non-traditional brand delivery vehicle can, in and of itself, become an appealing characteristic of a brand. People expect to see TV commercials. What they don’t expect to see are branded street entertainers.

Engaging your target audience where they live their lives is arguably the most compelling behavior a Challenger Brand can undertake.

Your brand’s presence at street fairs, ethnic festivals and concerts is a live, honest, one-on-one appeal for prompt re-evaluation by your target audience. Done with style, intelligence and passion, grassroots marketing is an incredible shortcut to making the emotional connections that Challenger Brands require.



# culture branding

The word brand — ubiquitous as it has become — is almost always spoken in a marketing context.

Yet, when you think of what a brand really is — the essential promise of an organization, the unique values and behaviors that create its reputation and determine its worth to the consumer — it is customer experience, rather than marketing, that can most immediately, most profoundly and most economically deliver the promise of the brand.

Tribe Culture, a division of gkv, will operationalize your brand on the inside to make customer service a competitive advantage. By introducing brand-specific goals, policy and training to all employees, we will help them truly understand how your company’s core values — your essential uniqueness — translate into specific decisions and actions that are either on-brand or off-brand. Decisions and actions that at a “moment of truth” during their daily routines can either send customers away or make them loyal fans.

We will give your employees a freshly focused vision — a new sense of pride and corporate self that will come from having a starring role in the delivery of your brand.



# brand identity

While brands speak to the mind and heart, brand identity is tangible and speaks to the senses. Brand identity synthesizes and visualizes your brand. It is arguably the shortest and fastest form of corporate communication there is.

Brand identity also can be a scam.

Seriously. The amount of drivel and fluff and cookie-cutter thinking being peddled at \$500 an hour by large corporate identity firms is astonishing. It shouldn't take a year. It shouldn't cost a million dollars.

Our approach to brand identity for Challenger Brand clients is simple. We help them tell the real truth about themselves, discover the real truth about their consumers, find where the two connect and then go about the thoughtful business of creating striking symbols that will achieve an emotional connection between the Challenger Brand and the consumer. Our approach does this quickly, reasonably and successfully.



experience

The logo for gkv, consisting of the lowercase letters 'gkv' in a white, sans-serif font, enclosed within a white circular border. The logo is positioned in the bottom right corner of the page.

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# category experience

We have rich experience in an array of categories including travel & tourism, health care, financial services, gaming, higher education, technology and social marketing.

While our category list is diverse, the clients who have chosen to work with us in our more than 25-year history have one thing in common — their desire to change the status quo to achieve greater success. They have sought our guidance to help them break from conventional marketing thinking of their category by adapting a Challenger Brand attitude and approach.

- > B2B
- > B2G
- > Financial Services
- > Gaming & Attractions
- > Health Insurance
- > Health Systems
- > Higher Education
- > Packaged Goods/Food
- > Restaurants
- > Retail
- > Cause Marketing
- > Travel & Tourism



# clients



Great relationships are created when the line between the client and the agency is blurred. When the client/agency relationship moves beyond the exchange of services and into the realm of shared purpose — this is the kind of relationship we have with our clients.

- > Aerotek
- > Archway Cookies
- > Baltimore County Golf
- > BGE HOME
- > Candlewood Suites
- > Cape Cod Potato Chips
- > Coventry Health Care
- > InterContinental Hotels Group, Latin America
- > L-3 Communications
- > Lance Snack Foods
- > Martek Biosciences Corporation
- > Maryland Health Insurance Plan
- > Maryland Physicians Care
- > Maryland Senior Prescription Drug Assistance Program
- > Maryland State Lottery
- > Medstar Health
- > Metropolitan Jewish Health System
- > Tom's Snack Foods
- > QI Project
- > Werner Ladder
- > Western Maryland Health Systems



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