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Marketers use ads to remind customers of their longevity

By Theresa Howard, USA TODAY

NEW YORK — Old is the new young in advertising, as big-name marketers use their longevity to give their brands an aura of stability amid economic turmoil.

Post Shredded Wheat on Sunday joins the diverse brands wearing their wrinkles on their sleeves. A new ad for Shredded Wheat, which was created in 1892, says the product put the "no" in innovation.

VIDEO: [Allstate ad emphasizes insurer's longevity](#)

Post is trying to tap into consumers' current back-to-basics mind-set and leverage its longevity into a rock-solid image. It joins Lowe's Home Improvement (established "more than 60 years ago") and Allstate (founded in 1931).

Marketing experts say the trend is about image during an economic sea change. "It's not going to have an effect on consumers making a purchase decision, but in these times, you want to put your best face forward as people look at companies that are going out of business," says Walter Guarino, a marketing professor at Seton Hall University. "It's image building. My guess is you will see more of it."

But branding expert Robert Pasikoff, president of Brand Keys, says touting still being in business smacks of desperation. "(The) consumer has been brought up now in a fast-moving age. People are looking for things that are up to date. There's no good way to say, 'We've been doing this for 150 years.' Heritage is fine, but people are not buying Coach because it is old."

Still, some marketers believe that even if the message doesn't move sales immediately, it's important to show the brand in a way that fits the times. Some who are trying to project their brand's viability:

Allstate: We survived the Depression

In an ad that began airing in January, Allstate spokesman Dennis Haysbert says that "1931 was not a great year" to start a business, but that's when Allstate was founded.

"We're trying to bolster trust and confidence by saying that we started in the Great Depression, and we survived 12 recessions," says Lisa Cochrane, vice president, marketing. "We're saying we know how to approach things."



Post ads introduce the fictional Frank Druffel, who proclaims Shredded Wheat is unchanged from its original form.

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TV commercials to air in broadcast prime time and on cable introduce fictional Frank Druffel as the "president" of the Post Shredded Wheat company. He brags that "we have not changed a thing in 116 years."

People are responding. "I have never received so much consumer correspondence," she says. "We've received amazing correspondences from school teachers and nurses and families from all across the U.S. saying the ad has been heartwarming. I think we hit a button."

Post: We have not changed a

Such an ad message will "show people this is something that's been around for generations," says Heath Osburn, marketing director. "It's important to show (consumers) reliability as they work through uncertain times."

Post internal research has found that Americans are looking for messages that provide assurance and security, says Kelly Peters, senior director of integrated insights and strategies.

"The ad is a reflection of the shift in American values," she says. "People are looking for security, and this taps into that notion in the form of reliability and authenticity."

Lowe's: Touting traditional values

A TV ad about Lowe's heritage aims to motivate both shoppers and store employees.

It begins in black and white and talks about the home improvement chain's founding in the 1940s as soldiers returned from World War II. It features a modest ranch home that is improved over the years as the ad turns into color.



By Gaye Gerard, Getty Images
Australian model Anna Vitali.

"There is a nice history about the values of the founding fathers that are true to the organization today," says Pete Woods, vice president, marketing services. "These people had a very strong empathy for their customers. For the last 64 years, our management has talked to store associates about taking care of customers and each other."

ASK THE AD TEAM

Q. Who plays the model on the beach in the Verizon Wireless Friends and Family ad? In the ad, a young kid wants to add her to his "five."


—*John W. Fitzgerald, Winchendon, Mass.*

A. Australian Anna Vitali, 23, plays the model in the ad, and the beach scene was shot in Australia. The ad promotes the Verizon plan that lets the subscriber pick five phone numbers for unlimited calling. The kid gives his fantasy a shot, but the announcer chimes in that he'll have a tough time getting this beauty's number to add to his list.

Vitali is a model in real life and has modeled for La Perla in Milan, United Colors of Benetton, Australian Jockey Club and LG.

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