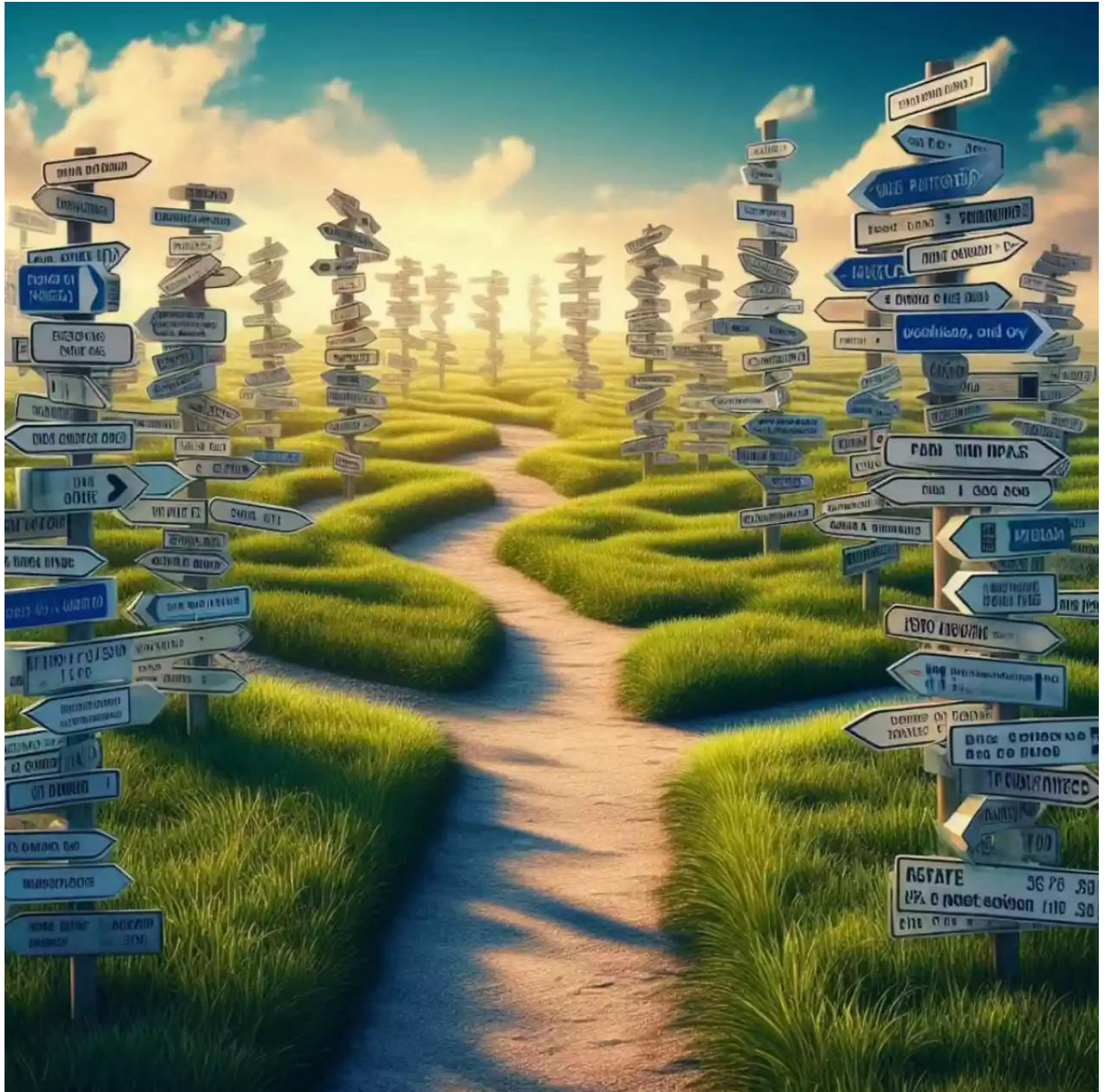


Achieving Brand Differentiation Within Communication Conventions

By Raúl Belluccia



While organizations strive for novelty, effective communication relies on established codes and conventions. These shared norms allow audiences to instantly interpret messages and graphic genres, ensuring comprehension and successful dialogue.

Companies competing in the marketplace often feel an anxiety to differentiate themselves, to be novel and innovative, to stand out and capture attention. This is the natural logic of competing for the public's gaze and favor. But this need, this urgency or compulsion, has an unbreachable

boundary: the codes of communication.

All dialogue, all communication (whether designed or not), is made possible by a series of pre-existing conventions that allow interlocutors to interpret the messages they receive and, in turn, formulate messages that are comprehensible to others.

If we are in a community where French is spoken and we want to be understood, the only alternative is to speak or write in that language; that is, to use the common convention existing in that society: the French language.

But conventions are not limited to spoken language: if there are magazines, brochures, and newspapers on a waiting room table, any of us will know at a glance which are the magazines, which are the newspapers, and which are the brochures. If we open a web page for the first time, we quickly detect the type of sender and the kind of content being shown to us. If we walk down the street, we automatically recognize (without reflection) advertisements or political propaganda, road signs, types of shops, ambulances, government information, hazard warnings, and so on.

Why do we recognize, almost instantly, the vast variety of message types presented to us daily? Because we have learned over time that 'this' is an advertisement, 'that' is a traffic light, 'this' is a news website, 'that' is a brand... and we know what to expect from each, we know what they are and what they are for. In other words: we have learned the codes, the conventions.

Thanks to established conventions, we can recognize graphic genres even before we read them. At a glance, we can already tell if we are looking at cans of beer or soda, if a website is corporate or sports-related, if a package contains medicine or candy. This is why it is advantageous to design while respecting these conventions, so the public will quickly know what type of message they have before them.

The big question is whether it is possible to meet the demands for innovation, surprise, and uniqueness that clients often require while staying within these conventions. The answer is yes. The history of great advertisements, which have surprised and continue to surprise with their persuasive creativity while remaining universally understood, serves as proof.

Most designed messages do not need to be highly surprising or disruptive. But when they do, the demand for uniqueness must be met—of course—but without compromising the most basic demand of any message: to be understood by its intended audience.

Achieving uniqueness within conventions is a difficult task for the designer, and it is even more challenging to convince certain clients that in order to differentiate, one must first be understood.

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