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RELEVANCE: MAKING STUFF THAT MATTERS

Tim Manners

Demographics, fads and advertising have signified marketing success for the last half century. But those are lost on today's customers. Shoppers want to know how a brand can solve their problems and improve their lives.

Manners' book is brimming with brands that have asserted their relevance — and those that have fallen short. American Airlines attempted to reach out to female passengers with an exclusive Web site, but some customers were infuriated by the classification, proving that being stereotyped is worse than being irrelevant. Manners writes that a better approach is to home in on the personality or behavior of the consumer and strive to offer a product or experience

anyone would enjoy.

Much advertising these days is highly irrelevant to the consumer — even more so, intrusive, annoying and unavoidable. But Manners reports on some iconoclasts. Philips Electronics wanted to buy all the ad time at Minneapolis movie theaters, but instead of advertising it would sponsor silence in the cinema. Though the theaters refused the idea, Philips has had other successes, such as sponsoring an episode of "60 Minutes" and donating that airtime to create longer news segments.

While relevant brands certainly can help consumers, they'll also benefit themselves by establishing a loyal, happy, long-term base. ■

— *Michelle Avery*