



Strategic Marketing for the Homeless

Ever notice that wherever you go, all the homeless look alike? The same tattered cardboard signs, the raggedy clothes...the tin cup. Some see it as a problem; I see it as an opportunity. They already have a consistent Brand Identity but with a little "Design Thinking" we could develop a strategy to turn that equity into a respectable enterprise and the Next Big Thing investment bubble

High-Visibility Advertising: Local merchants would gladly pay to have their name and logo stickered on the homeless person's message board, much like sponsor graphics on a race car. "Dine at Prix Ristorante" could go right under the main message, "Help me, I'm starving". The idea here would be to get as many sponsor stickers as possible and thereby avoid starving.

Community Ambassadors-at-Large: The homeless could be paid community "ambassadors" if they were given a little training. They're already posted at strategic locations. We just need to give them something to do. While at their post, they could be:

Official Greeters: sitting on the median is a perfect place to greet passers-by with the official town greeting, or a friendly "Hey Man" much like Wal-Mart. Communities would be more than happy to subsidize this value-added service.

Information Givers: people always want to know something about the community they are driving through. But the answers don't have to fit the questions, only the sponsor's agenda. "Neiman Marcus is two blocks down on the left" will work for anybody in a BMW asking anything related to shopping.

Data Mining: while motorists are waiting at the stop light, the homeless could ask certain predetermined questions, like "what are you wearing?" There are companies that pay big bucks for this kind of information.

Demographic-Based Message Boards: It is a well-known factoid that many homeless persons laugh all the way to the bank, or wherever it is they keep their money. They don't pay taxes, they have flextime and get to work in the great outdoors.

But they could do even better. Using a derivative version of psychographics, homeless messages would be targeted toward specific demographic groups or geographic locations. "Will work for food" is too shopworn to be effective.

Silicon Valley: "Lost my estate-tax inheritance in the hedge fund debacle." PayPal wireless transfers accepted through twitter account.

Palo Alto: In this liberal community the pitch for sympathy works best: "I am blind and my cat is not feeling well."

San Jose: With the number of foreign visitors in this area, it's not unreasonable to assume motorists would pay if they saw: "Head Tax Collection Point. Have your two dollars ready".

Oakland: In this gang-banger community, threats always work. "I'm on crack and I have a gun".

Work Smarter not Harder: Similar to community-based psychographics, training cards with silhouetted auto profiles would rank vehicles according to the proclivity of their drivers to give money. The literature has shown that the highest contributions would come from a 2003 Volvo V70 station wagon with a "Save the Whales" bumper sticker.

Licensing and Authentication: Each homeless person and Canine-American companion, if any, would be given a "certified mendicant" picture ID, Sales Kit, Tin Cup with logo, and a paperback copy of The Power of Positive Thinking. And the best part...no government regulation! Management could skim the cash proceeds with impunity and investors would be paid by selling more licensee fees. You don't have to be Bernie Freakin' Madoff to see that this is a credit default swap gold mine.

And that, my friend, is Design Thinking.