

Why we heart Ikea

The home furnishing brand has proven itself to be much more than a category – it's a cultural movement

BY KELLY GADZALA

Who wouldn't salivate at the idea of a Saturday afternoon shopping trip to Ikea – not to mention those yummy Swedish meatballs they sell? Can a person actually not smile at the memory of those “unboring” commercials from a few years back, or the now iconic “Start the Car” TV spot with the woman running to her car thinking she'd stolen something from the store (a Canadian effort that was adapted by 12-plus countries)? And how about the radio voice of

has just 11 stores nationally, but that doesn't mean it isn't a major home furnishing player. In the last year, the brand has gained momentum, with results showing it's resonating now more than ever.

“Ikea has wind in its sails,” says Hilary Lloyd, Ikea Canada's deputy marketing manager. “In the last year we've experienced significant anniversaries in multiple markets, made continued announcements about expansions and investments that demonstrate the brand's

And given the brand's commitment to the environment, it's no surprise that new stores will incorporate high-efficiency heating and cooling systems, water conservation plumbing fixtures and skylights. At the end of 2010, it invested \$4.6 million to install 3,790 solar panels on three Toronto-area stores that will generate about 960,000 kWh per year of renewable energy. Solar panels are also being considered for store expansions.

Ikea's corporate social responsibility has blossomed this past year. In April, Ikea Canada was recognized as one of Canada's Greenest Employers by Mediagroup for the third year in a row. One month later it celebrated its 15-year partnership with Tree Canada, an organization that has helped it plant more than 16,000 trees.

But at the heart of Ikea is an accessibility that sets it apart from other furniture retailers. “The brand should always be lighthearted, honest and far from dull,” says Lloyd. “Our communication aims to have what we call our ‘twinkle in the eye.’”

Take the “Long Live the Home” platform released in August, the first campaign by new creative AOR Leo Burnett, which launched with a 60-second commercial followed by a series of 30-second spots that capture emotional moments, like a new baby, that make home so important.

The tone is more serious than past campaigns, says Judy John, CEO and CCO, Leo Burnett, and though humour is still important to the brand, the response to the serious spots has been positive, with people commenting on how they made them cry. “It really touched that emotion,” says John. Connection is an important part



of the brand's other marketing efforts. ExhibitIkea saw it partnering with four top Canadian artists to create installations using Ikea products in a downtown Toronto space in August. The installation garnered 22,530,669 media impressions, with 400 members of the media, designers and stylists attending the opening and 4,000 people through the door during the public days of the event.

The August catalogue launch, “Inspiration on Every Page,” with creative by Leo Burnett and media by Jungle Media, engaged consumers with tag executions in subway stations and outdoor spaces, with messaging that every space could be improved with inspiration from the 2012 Ikea catalogue. In Toronto, *Metro* newspapers, with books of sticky tags attached to them so people could easily tag catalogue pages, were passed out at Union Station along with the catalogues. The launch was so successful that visits to Ikea.ca in August hit more than 4.2 million, far exceeding stated goals. Canada also had the highest level of Ikea app downloads out of all the countries in which Ikea operates.

“People identify with the brand,” says Lloyd. “They just love to laugh and be entertained – Ikea gets that and wants to be a part of people's everyday lives.”



Above: OOH tag executions reminded people that any space could use a little inspiration from the Ikea 2012 catalogue. Top right: Canadian designer David Dixon used Ikea fabric to create dresses for ExhibitIkea in Toronto.

Ikea over Canadian airwaves, an actual Swedish guy from L.A.? People can't even see him but he's a beloved hallmark of the brand.

Let's face it: Ikea is part of our collective cultural unconscious, and it's here to stay.

Founded in 1943 in Sweden, Ikea has always aimed to offer a variety of well-designed products at affordable prices, though that goal has been refined over time to emphasize style, quality and “owning the entire home.” The home furnishings retailer has 280 stores in 26 countries, which are visited by over 626 million people every year. In its 35th year, Ikea Canada

values as a good corporate citizen, and shown continued sales that outpace the category.”

Lloyd says Ikea's expansion approach has been conservative compared to its competitors, but this year it's ramping up with nationwide growth including a rebuild of its 34-year-old Richmond, B.C., store and a store in the works for Winnipeg, a new market. The rebuilt Ottawa store is set to open this fall and will be Ikea's largest Canadian retail operation at 398,000 square feet with 50 room settings, a new children's play area, a 640-seat restaurant and over 1,200 parking spaces.