

Secrets Gleaned from Copywriting Legend Leo Burnett's Greatest Campaigns

By Katie Yeakle

In 1999, *Time Magazine* named American advertising executive Leo Burnett one of the 100 most influential people of the 20th century.

At the time of Burnett's death, the Leo Burnett Company, Inc. had \$389 million in billings and offices in 25 countries. In 1995, the company hit \$5 billion in revenue for the first time.

It all started on August 5, 1935 when 44-year-old Leo Burnett opened a Chicago-based advertising agency.

Burnett's advertising mentor and the inspiration for his career was American businessman and philanthropist, Theodore MacManus (1872-1940). Stephen Fox, author of *The Mirror Makers*, describes MacManus's advertising style ...

"What McManus taught was classic image advertising. Soft-sell advertising. In which there is not a specific claim made. In fact, you may not even mention the product or anything about it, but instead you surround it with images and associations that are likeable and friendly and often very beautiful. It's a certain style of advertising that Leo Burnett recognizes and makes his own."

In line with the McManus style of advertising, Burnett's advertising campaigns depicted American values of strength, tradition, comfort, and family. Burnett flat-out rejected the idea of "misguiding" consumers by using devices such as contests, premiums, and sex.

Here are five of Burnett's greatest advertising campaign triumphs that helped create his legacy:

1.

The Marlboro Man — In the 1950's, filtered cigarette advertising targeted women. So much so, men wouldn't smoke them because they worried people would think they had a virility problem. In 1954, Philip Morris Corporation wanted to change the image of their Marlboro cigarettes (whose slogan at the time was "Mild as May").

Burnett found a picture of a cowboy and asked, "Is there anything more masculine than a cowboy?" Soon after, the Marlboro Man was born. And in 1963, the place he hailed from, Marlboro Country, was introduced. The new slogan

became: "Come to where the flavor is, come to Marlboro Country." Within four weeks after the Marlboro Man campaign launched, the Marlboro brand became the number one cigarette in the greater New York area. By 1972, Marlboro cigarettes were at the top of the tobacco industry.

2.

Rice Krispies — At the start of the 1950's, the dominant feature on a cereal box was the name of the cereal in big black letters. This was because, pre-supermarkets, grocers would stack the boxes up high and they needed the name clearly displayed to identify the cereal.

In 1951, Burnett's team presented W.K. Kellogg, the 91-year-old founder of the Kellogg Corporation, with a series of redesigned cereal boxes. On the boxes were appealing photographs of the cereal, milk being poured into cereal, and kids eating cereal. It was a way of advertising cereal that had never been done before. W.K., who passed away later that year, was impressed, and Burnett landed the Kellogg account.

The press at the time called Burnett's ideas revolutionary, stating that a new era in packaging advertising *and advertising itself* had just begun. Also in 1951, the Leo Burnett Company came up with another famous advertising character, Tony the Tiger (front man for Kellogg's Frosted Flakes) including his appealing catchphrase, "*They're grrrrreat!*"

3.

The Jolly Green Giant — The Minnesota Valley Canning Company, one of Burnett's first clients, had a green giant as their mascot. But he wasn't really that appealing, and Burnett decided it was time for a mascot upgrade.

Burnett traded the giant's bearskin for a leafy suit, gave him a smile, and put the word 'Jolly' in front of his name. He made the giant happier, stronger, and more amiable. Someone who might protect you if you ever needed help. Women loved him. The Jolly Green Giant became such a hit with consumers, The Minnesota Valley Canning Company changed their name to The Green Giant Company.

4.

StarKist — In 1961, the Leo Burnett Company introduced the world to Charlie the Tuna (created by Tom Rogers). The spokesfish would try to impress other fish with his good taste, only to be told, "They don't want tunas with good taste, they want tunas that taste good ... Sorry Charlie."

5.

United Airlines — In 1964, Burnett received a call from Colonel William A. "Pat" Patterson, chairman of United Airlines. In the 1950's and 1960's, people were extremely worried about flying due to the number of crashes. Patterson wanted Burnett to help him convince people it was safe to fly.

Burnett's team came up with the slogan, "*Fly the friendly skies of United.*" It was one of the longest running and most successful airline campaigns in history. It was retired in 1996, but resurrected again in 2013.

Some of the other advertising campaigns and characters created during Burnett's time at his company are the lonely Maytag repairman, Morris the Cat, Toucan Sam, the Pillsbury Doughboy, the Keebler Elves, and Allstate's "Good Hands."

On June 7, 1971 Burnett came into work and announced that he was cutting his work schedule down to three days a week. That very night, at the age of 79, he died of a massive heart attack.

His legacy remains firm, as no other advertising agency has created so many memorable, long lasting, and marketable characters.

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This great advertiser reminded of THINGS I HEARD IN THE FORTIES--such Duz does everything! (laundry detergent), L A V A (grease-removing hand soap, "12 FULL OUNCES THAT'S A LOT--PEPSI COLA HITS THE SPOT! and a deep bass voice singing, "Use Ajax, the foaming cleanser, soaks the dirrrrt...right down the drain!--Burnett probably did these, too. He had to be a genius if they are remembered for fifty or more years. -Ron Miller

HARRISON – over a year ago

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