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Tourism advertising without kitsch?

Heidi, Matterhorn, cheese and chocolates: what place is there for clichés in the promotion of a country? And does souvenir kitsch fit with the cultured image of Switzerland? A debate that has raged for a hundred years!

“An image cobbled together by the sales sector is disastrous for Switzerland and damages its reputation,” ranted director Werner Kämpfen in the 1969 annual report. Under no circumstances should the sector allow itself to be led by the souvenir industry. The SNTO should rather communicate an image which is “neutral and factual” and “lovable and critical”, he argued.

Cliché splits opinion

How to present this exotic corner of the world, where milk is turned into cheese and chocolate, and the clocks tick a little more accurately, to the wider world is a long-running debate – and typically Swiss. For years we seem to have been ashamed of our chocolatey side. These days, our relationship with kitsch and cliché is much more playful. People

travelling to Holland want to see tulips and windmills. First-timers in New York want to see yellow taxis. So why, ask national advertisers, should Switzerland be ashamed of its Heidi image? Tongue-in-cheek authenticity is the new way.

The best example of advertising that doesn't set off the kitsch alarm is the grizzled duo Sebi & Paul, who carried the torch for Switzerland Tourism from 2011 to 2015. Viewers still greet these Swiss country characters with pleasure. It's the same for the delightful Heidi and Matterhorn motifs in the Sky-metro at Zurich Airport, presented as a 30-second “flipbook”, with the sound of alphorns and cowbells in the background – they are a lovely way to greet and bid farewell to visitors. People enjoy seeing these running gags on Swiss icons again and again.



The federal government increased its annual contribution to the SNTO from eight to ten million francs. The intention was that activities in foreign markets should be investments for the future. Milestones included the acquisition of the new Swiss Centres in London and New York.

▼
1969



Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were the first people to walk on the moon. The SNTO advertised: “Before you travel to the moon – travel to Switzerland”. 46 years later Aldrin fell in love with Switzerland and got back into a space suit on behalf of the holiday destination.

△
1970



© Switzerland Tourism

“It’s not enough just to use clichés.”

As CEO of advertising agency SFLB **Dr Peter Felser** made his mark with campaigns for Switzerland Tourism. Today, amongst other things, he leads branding and strategy projects with his consultancy firm Felser Brand Leadership. Here, he gives us his thoughts on clichés in tourism advertising.

Swiss tourism advertising often plays with Swiss clichés. Does that still work?

There's no general recipe for success here. If the audience doesn't know much about Switzerland and pays only fleeting attention to the advertising medium, then a cliché can be helpful. Seen in this way, clichés work better in Asia, say, than they do in our neighbouring countries. Just using clichés of course is not enough. Successful advertising also needs a clear strategy and a surprising way of realising it.

SFLB also used clichés in ST campaigns. Why?

For us it was obvious that we



could not just rely on beautiful landscapes. We also had to make use of the achievements of people, focus on strengths and not continually be trying to correct weaknesses. The Swiss inclination for perfectionism led us in the end to the key sentence: “We do what-

Totally genuine:

Sebi Küttel and Paul Betschart are authentic messengers for the likeable Switzerland in everyone's holiday dreams.

ever it takes to make your holiday perfect”. The likeable promotional characters Sebi & Paul were another example of our approach.

Don't clichés such as these contradict the modern, sophisticated aspects of Destination Switzerland?

Of course there are also sophisticated and modern aspects of Destination Switzerland. But how unique is that part of Switzerland? And how relevant is it for the visitor? For many people there is a deep need to experience “another world” on their holidays. Also, what is seen as modern changes over time.