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Five Tips to Cope -- or Even Thrive -- Through Downturn

A Dig Through Ad Age Archives Reveals How to Grow in Adverse Times

By [Bradley Johnson](#)

Published: [December 08, 2008](#)

LOS ANGELES (AdAge.com) -- Now some good news: Remarkable innovation occurs in marketing and media -- in the worst of times.

Ad Age knows something about troubled times: The magazine was founded less than 90 days after the crash of '29 and has reported on every downturn since the Great Depression. As such, we have dug deep into our archives to analyze the issue of innovation during three of the worst times: the Depression and recessions of the early '70s and early '80s.

AD AGE WHITE PAPER



Using the past recessions of the 1930s, '70s and

The result of that research is "Downtime Opportunity," a comprehensive white paper we are releasing today. It's [available for purchase through AdAge.com](#).

Here are just five ideas from troubled times. The full analysis is available in the white paper.

Launch a smart media property

Who in their right mind would launch a magazine at the start of the Depression? Time Inc., which started Fortune. Time Inc. has made much of its fortune with magazines launched in recession

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Return to The Golden Age of Cigarette Advertising



Friday, December 12, 2008 Video Report

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TOP 5

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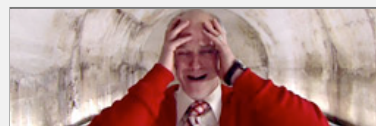
MARKETING AND MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES IN A RECESSION

A Downtime Opportunity: An Ad Age White Paper

In this 16,000-word Ad Age White Paper that resulted from his research, Bradley Johnson relays hundreds of recession-time case studies in successful marketing and product innovation from a variety of marketer, media and ad agency sectors.

BOB GARFIELD

'Doghouse' Takes Us Down a Rabbit Hole of Monotony



Saatchi's Online Video for JCPenney's Holiday

'80s as prologue, Bradley Johnson conducts perhaps the most in-depth study ever into how and where marketing and media has succeeded during downturns. [Click here to purchase the white paper.](#)

years: Time (1923); Fortune (1930); Sports Illustrated (1954); People (1974); Entertainment Weekly (1990).

Get in on the ground floor

Just one in five households subscribed to cable TV in 1980, but the potential was clear. The early '80s downturn was launch

time for what would become some of cable's biggest franchises: CNN (1980); USA Network (1980); Bravo (1980); Cinemax (1980); MTV (1981); Weather Channel (1982).

It wasn't easy. "Nearly 20 networks will lose an estimated \$150 million to \$200 million this year in gambling on the future," Ad Age reported in 1982. A good bet. Nine in 10 households now get TV via cable, satellite or alternative delivery.

Downtime promotions can be addictive

American Airlines, defending its position, in May 1981 introduced AAdvantage, the industry's first loyalty-marketing program. United Airlines followed with Mileage Plus, a short-term promotion that was to end in 1982. Frequent-flier programs went on to become a permanent fixture in airline marketing.

Chrysler introduced auto rebates in early 1975 as a short-term promotion to clear its bloated inventory. Automakers have been addicted to rebates ever since.

Upscale in a down market

The early '80s were the time of generic beer, 10% unemployment, 13% inflation and record-low consumer confidence. Even in rotten times, there's a market for trading up.

Carnation (now part of Nestlé) helped pioneer the category of premium cat foods with Fancy Feast, rolled out between 1980 and 1982.

Absolut vodka, introduced in the U.S. in 1979, began a celebrated campaign in 1981 featuring its iconic bottle. First ad: "Absolut perfection," with a halo over the bottle. By 1985, it was the No. 1 imported vodka.

Calvin Klein in 1982 launched signature designer underwear with sexually suggestive ads. Price: \$14.50 for three pairs -- a lofty \$33 in 2008 dollars.

Sell something else

New cars weren't selling in 1930, but the industry spotted an expanding revenue opportunity: service. The Motor and Equipment Association in 1930 began an ad campaign with the slogan "Care will save your car." Ford that year launched its own parts-and-service campaign.

Flash forward: In 1975, when the auto industry was struggling to dig out of deep recession, General Motors began another drive to sell parts and service. GM's new pitchman: Mr. Goodwrench, described by Ad Age as a "smiling, balding mechanic (with clean hands)."

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Venue Drives Word-of-Mouth for New Mobile Technologies

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Recession Provides a Chance to Build a Better Capitalism

Companies Can Shift Focus to the Long Term: Build Brands, Profits and Sustainable Operations

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The Stories and Analysis for Super Bowl XLIII

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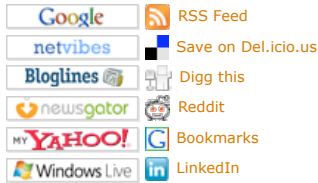
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