

How to Write Headlines


Lesson slides



METAPHOR

Metaphor is the first love of English teachers, poets and advertising creatives, and it's used skillfully by pretty much anyone who enjoys talking. When people describe a bad toupee as a rug, or when they call a troubled celebrity a train wreck, they are speaking in metaphor. Equating your subject with something apparently unrelated helps guide your audience to a deeper and more specific understanding of that subject. People will grasp the wretchedness of a toupee much more quickly if you call it a rug than they will if you just describe it as unattractive.

WHAT YOU'RE REALLY
BUYING IS A
BIGGER BED
FOR YOU.



Dog Beds (\$35 and up)

L.L.BEAN HOME: A whole side of us you've never seen before. For your FREE catalog, call 1-800-926-1346 or visit www.llbean.com/llbeanhome.

L.L.Bean
start here
GO ANYWHERE.

Here's a great metaphorical headline, produced by Martin/Williams, Minneapolis for L.L. Bean's dog beds

Visual-driven ads have done very well with metaphor.

Here's one lovely example, part of a campaign for Sony Noise Cancelling Headphones done by Bagby and Company, Chicago:

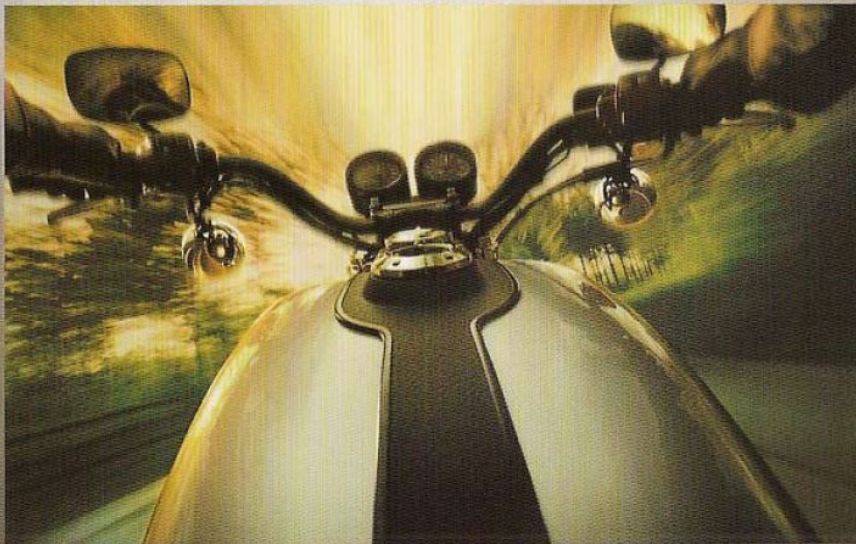


By directly equating a noisy child with a loudspeaker, the ad demonstrates Sony's empathy with modern travelers, and thus predisposes those travelers to trust Sony's solution over the competition's.

Another example, from Carmichael Lynch, Minneapolis for Harley-Davidson:

EARTH. AS VIEWED FROM HEAVEN.

Riding along a highway
on a Harley-Davidson®
motorcycle, relaxed and
easy. If there's anything
better than this, we
haven't found it. Which
isn't Chrome, Harley
Dual, Road Glide™ or
your local Harley®
dealer point the way
right. And the world
around you opens up.
You're not just riding,
you're living. It's
the Harley-Davidson®
difference.



may be a substantially
different experience.
Adventure is a lifestyle.
Of things you can only
experience by being on
the road breaking them
in. Generations of riders
would tell you they could
happily spend eternity
here. If you think you
could, too, call 1-800-
448-2153 or visit www.
harley-davidson.com for
your nearest H-D dealer.
The Legend Rides On.™



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Crispin & Porter produced this wonderfully minimalist campaign for a homeless mission in Miami:



PERSONIFICATION

Personification is a kind of metaphor. But with personification, you're no longer comparing your subject with an inanimate object; instead, you're describing it as you would a human being. Personification allows you to present mere objects as being capable of love, hate, fear, hope and every other emotion available to humans.

Here's a visually driven example, part of a great campaign done by Saatchi & Saatchi in New York for Ultra Tide:



Detergent ads have often presented stains as the enemy, but never so literally. Here, Ultra Tide is shown as a team of overwhelming strength that leaves the opposing side, the ketchup stain, hopeless, despairing and doomed.

Let's now take a look at how personification works when words play a larger role. This famous ad, from Carmichael Lynch in Minneapolis, imbued bathroom fixtures with emotion in a way that felt radically new:



IT'S SEEN YOU
NAKED
IT'S HEARD YOU
SING

Your bathroom probably knows more about you than your own mother. So it's only fitting you make it the most wonderful room in the house. Call us and we'll send you a free guidebook overflowing with products, ideas and inspiration. 1-800-834-5747. *American Standard*

It's true that the photograph of the shocked "face" is doing half the work of personification here. But in this case, it took the headline to tell us just how intimately connected we are to our bathrooms.

Personification is also at work in this ad for Gay Lea Spreadable Butter, done by John St. in Toronto:

**Margarine is, like, so
freaked out right now.**

BUTTER THAT SPREADS.



No sane person would actually believe that margarine worries about its future. But by treating this notion as if it were fact, the ad establishes Gay Lea's superiority over margarine in a way that's funny and unexpected.

HYPERBOLE

Hyperbole is the use of outrageous exaggeration to make your point. It is well used in visual concepts, because it makes it possible to provoke shock or laughter without the need for words. You've already seen instances of it here: Laundry stains are hardly a life-and-death struggle, but Ultra Tide presents them as if they were. Similarly, no human being could ever be as noisy as a loudspeaker, but it helps Sony's Noise Cancelling Headphones to depict that situation as reality.

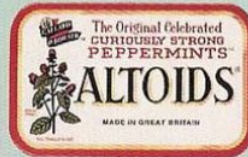
Though hyperbole is typically viewed these days as a visual device, it can also succeed wonderfully in words alone. These two Altoids ads were produced by Leo Burnett in Chicago:

**YOU MIGHT WANT TO PRACTICE
ON OTHER MINTS FIRST.**

THE CURIOUSLY STRONG MINTS™



**MINTS SO STRONG THEY
COME IN A METAL BOX.**



THE CURIOUSLY STRONG MINTS™

©1995 Colgate & Brainerd, Inc.

And here, Karsh & Hagan Communications in Denver used hyperbole to arrive at a different way of telling us this knife is sharp:



SERIOUSLY, USE TWO CUTTING BOARDS.

Titanium 5th Chef's Knife

As with any of the other 3 titanium kitchen knives, you're going to want to keep all limbs and loose clothing away from this one.



BOKER
BALMWERK-SOLINGEN
TRUSTED SINCE 1869.

FOR A FREE CATALOG OF OVER 175 KNIVES INCLUDING THE TITANIUM LINE AND OTHER KITCHEN CUTLERY, 1.800.992.6537 EXT. 18, WWW.BOKERUSA.COM

Finally, Chicago's McConaughy Stein Schmidt Brown sells us on the excellence of a steak house using nothing more than over-the-top words of "proof":

HOW GOOD IS OUR STEAK?
LAST WEEK A MAN WHO WAS
CHOKING ON A PIECE
— REFUSED —
THE HEIMLICH MANEUVER.



321 EAST

For the very best in American cuisine come to 321 East. The food is so good it sometimes leaves people speechless. 321 Division, Elgin IL. (708) 468-9612

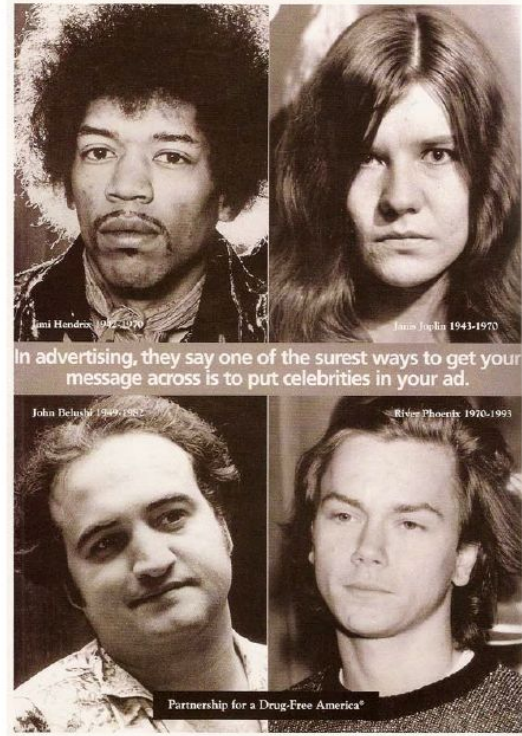
IRONY

Cicero defined irony as "saying one thing and meaning another."
A great example of visual irony is found in these anti-gun posters from John St. in Toronto:



Here, ordinary citizens are presented as perfectly reasonable targets for shooting practice. The intended message is, of course, completely the reverse.

Because irony by definition involves two messages (the explicit message plus an implied one), it's easier to achieve when you have words to help. An award-winning example, done for the American Cancer Society (by Cole Henderson Drake in Atlanta), showed a black-and-white photograph of a graveyard over the headline, "Welcome to Marlboro Country." Similarly, the Partnership for a Drug-Free America used dead celebrities as an ironic punchline to a straight headline (Saatchi & Saatchi, New York):




PARADOX

A paradox is a statement or situation that seems to be absurd or self-contradictory. The power of paradox comes from the fact that the contradiction often turns out to contain a thought-provoking grain of truth. The john st. anti-gun posters seen above provide an excellent example of visual paradox. The viewer might say, "Wait a minute...children aren't used in target shooting" before realizing a second later that in some communities, they might as well be.

Creating paradox with your headline can result in work that has even more edge and power. Placed in a new layout, this Luke Sullivan line would probably win awards all over again (ad from The Martin Agency, Richmond):

***Imagine having
your body left
to science while
you're still in it.***

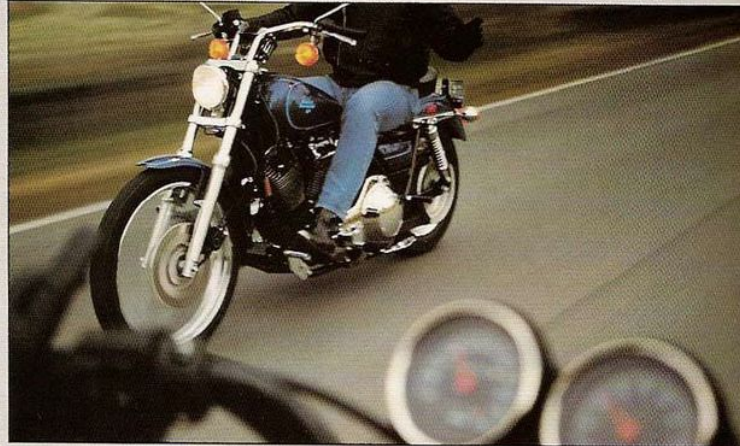


Please join us today; write People For The Ethical Treatment Of
Animals, Box 42516, Washington, D.C. 20015. Or call (202) 726-0156.

And if you're fortunate enough to be writing about one of the world's strongest brands, paradox allows you to speak about truths that are beyond words (Carmichael Lynch, Minneapolis, agency):

When was the last time you met a stranger and knew he was a brother?

A chance meeting on the highway turns into an immediate connection. The glimmer of recognition between two people who are not just passing strangers. Two Harley® riders. If you're one of these riders, you know: The two of you have been through quite a few of the same things. Like going out for a quick morning ride and not wanting back seat duty. Following a squiggly line on a map just for the pure fun of it. Keeping it up and out. Common experiences that become a shared obsession. It's this kind of obsession that inspired the Harley-Davidson® FXR series — The Super Glide®, the Low Rider® and the Sport Glide®.



The look and sound as much as the ground-pounding torque, the Big Twin will never let you be seen without some recognition. There's even more a Harley for the times, remembering who you want to look at another Harley rider as a stranger again. Because chances are, that is when your life on the road changes up in meaningful ways. You'll understand. It means "see to get" it means you're getting to experience that big-eyed, big-hearted freedom.

It means welcome to the family.



Six different Harleys that share common mission. Putting a

ride it out with the mud. They have a go-anywhere versatility

that takes them from short cruises to long haul without ever

missing a beat. A lot of that versatility comes from a sport chassis

and a 27mm fork that allows both stability and sure handling. Which

means that any FXR is as much at home on the interstate as it is on a

winding back road. At the heart of it all is the 80 cubic inch Evolution®

engine, isolation mounted for a smooth and comfortable ride. Excuse for

The Super Glide, Sport Glide and Low Rider are registered trademarks and the Harley-Davidson logo is a trademark, service mark and registered trademark of Harley-Davidson, Inc. © 1999 Harley-Davidson, Inc.

© 1999 Harley-Davidson, Inc.

While paradox helps you hit deep emotional places, it's also versatile enough to add power to more rational arguments (Scali, McCabe, Sloves, New York, agency):



WE DESIGN EVERY VOLVO TO LOOK LIKE THIS.

You're looking at a perfect Volvo. A Volvo that performed exactly as our safety engineers designed it to. Its front and rear ends, for example, collapsed on impact. As a result, much of the crash energy was absorbed instead of being passed on to the passengers.

The car's middle section, however, didn't collapse. That's because the entire passenger compartment is surrounded by Volvo's unique "safety cage." Made of six low section steel pillars, the protective housing is strong enough to support the weight of six Volvos.

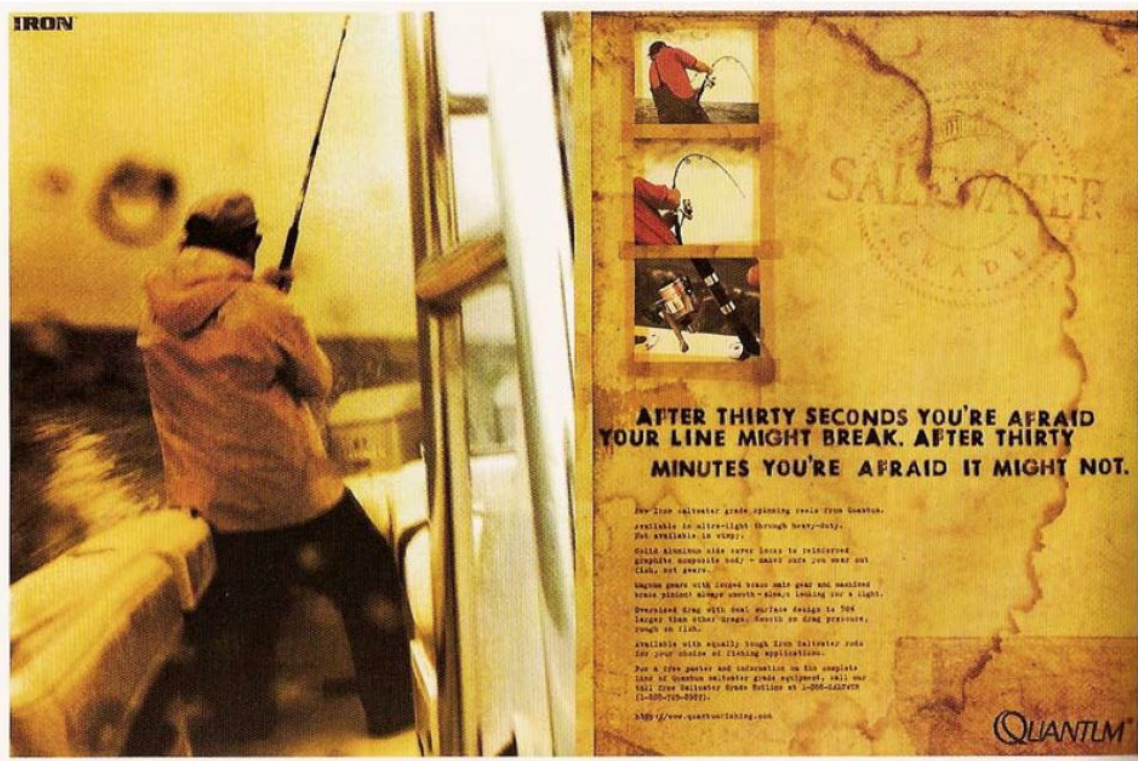
But the passengers of this car were also protected in ways you can't see. Because inside are: such standard features as a driver's side Supplemental Restraint System, a collapsible steering column and, of course, 3-point seat belts, front and rear.

Every Volvo is designed to help protect its passengers in all these ways. And, as a result, will look remarkably similar to this one after being in the same type of accident. If you're concerned about safety, **VOLVO** you can't find a more beautiful car.

© 1987 VOLVO CAR CORP. VOLVO, VOLVO DESIGN AND THE VOLVO DESIGN ARE TRADEMARKS OF VOLVO CAR CORP.

PARALLELISM

But in a writer's hands, parallelism can have even more power. Consider this ad for fishing reels, done by Core in St. Louis:



IRON

**AFTER THIRTY SECONDS YOU'RE AFRAID
YOUR LINE MIGHT BREAK. AFTER THIRTY
MINUTES YOU'RE AFRAID IT MIGHT NOT.**

See Iron saltwater grade spinning reels from Quanta.
Available in ultra-light through heavy-duty.
Not available in vinyl.

Rolls aluminum side cover locks to withstand
complete horizontal load - makes sure you wear out
fish, not gear.

Longer gears with forged brass main gear and machined
brass pinion deliver smooth - silent loading for a fight.
Overload line with steel spools holds up to 500
pounds than other brands. Built to hold pressure,
rough on fish.

Available with equally tough Iron saltwater rods
for over 20 years of fishing enjoyment.

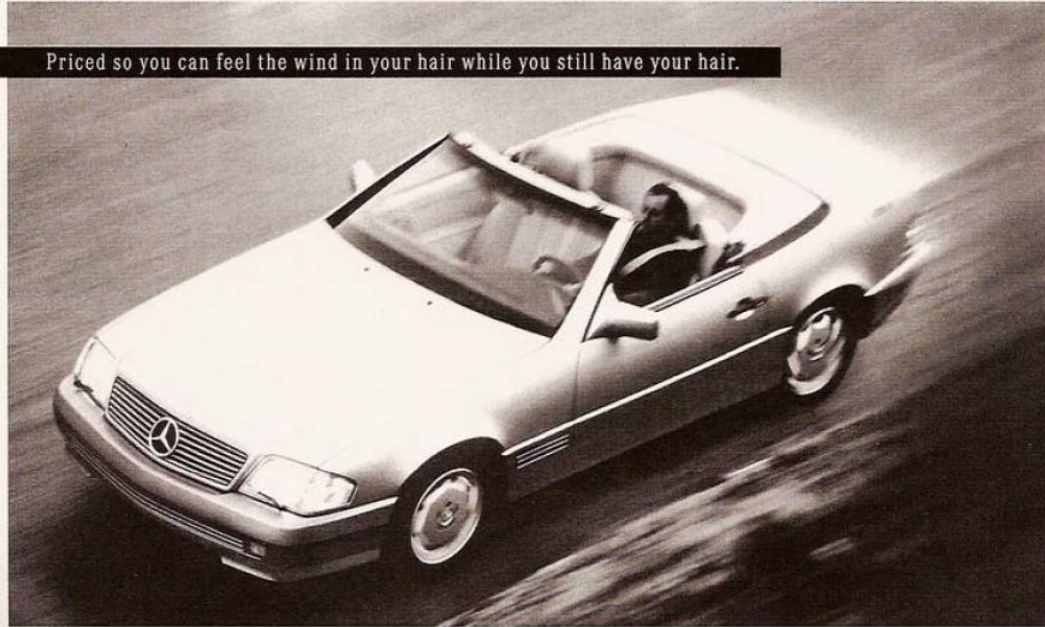
For a free poster and information on the complete
line of Quanta saltwater grade equipment, call our
Salt Iron Saltwater Grade Hotline at 1-800-645-6275
(1-800-745-8000).

Visit www.quantafishing.com

QUANTUM

This next ad, for used Mercedes-Benz cars, uses parallelism to say something far more compelling than "affordable" (The Martin Agency, Richmond):

Priced so you can feel the wind in your hair while you still have your hair.



Don't be surprised to find yourself behind the wheel of your dream car a little ahead of schedule. With the Encore Program, you can buy or lease a pre-owned Mercedes that has passed a rigorous inspection. And includes a zero-deductible limited warranty and 24-hour roadside assistance. Take a test drive. And feel free to put the top down.



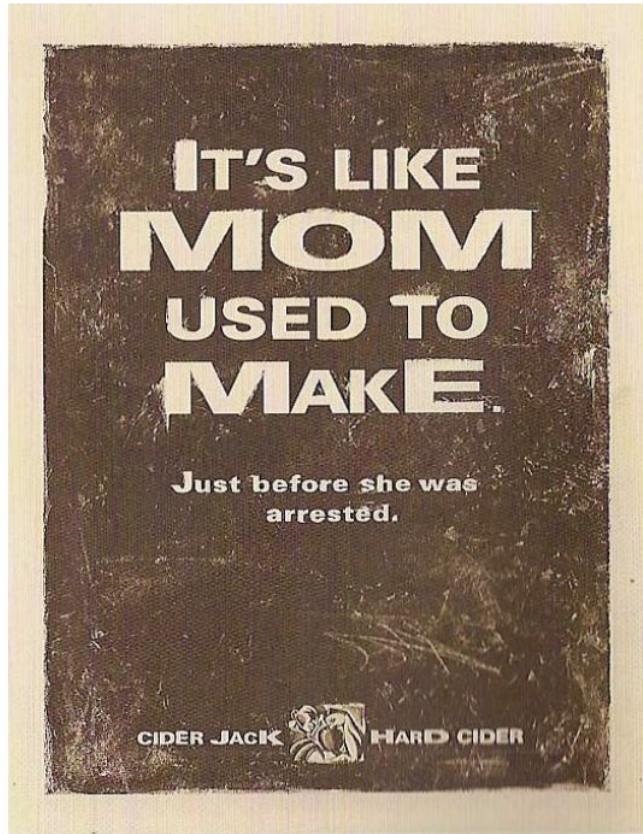
Parallelism is versatile enough to elevate the proposition for a humble food-storage container
(agency: Pagano Schenck & Kay, Boston):



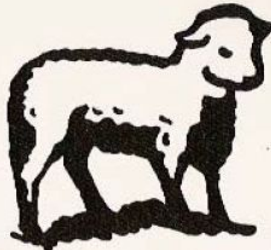
ANESIS

If you're looking for edginess in your lines, anesis is a tool you'll want to keep close at hand. It comes from the Greek word for "loosening" or "relaxing." It is the use of a concluding sentence or phrase that undercuts or diminishes what was said previously. Typically with anesis, one starts with a fairly lofty, dignified or respectful statement and lets it all go downhill from there.

This ad from Clarke Goward, Boston, is a good example:



Borders, Perrin & Norrander used anesis to talk about a restaurant famous for its chops:



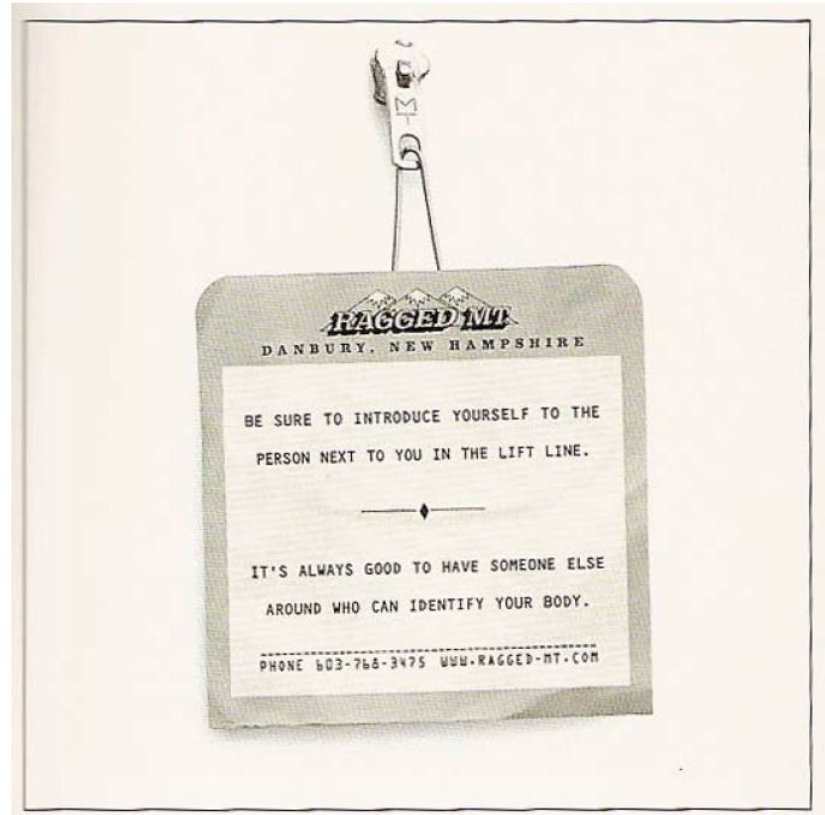
NO

**ANIMALS WERE
HARMED TO MAKE
OUR LAMB CHOPS.
WELL, OKAY MAYBE A FEW.**

Call for reservations: 221-0006

Red Star
Tavern and
Road House

This ad for a ski resort starts with a friendly exhortation, but quickly takes a turn for the worse
(agency: Clarke Goward, Boston):



In this ad for Moon Pies, Loeffler Ketchum Mountjoy of Charlotte, NC makes fun of the language of nutritional claims:

