



Is Base Jumping the Dumbest Sport in the World?

Base jumping has been with us for 100 years this year. It all started when Franz Reichelt, an Austrian born tailor became obsessed with the idea of aviators jumping safely out of planes before they crashed.

Initially, his tests involved strapping a large piece of material to a dummy and dropping it out his 5th floor Parisian apartment window (much to the concerns of neighbours and passersby who regularly saw a body being pushed out of a window).

Eventually, he tired of the meaningless existence of throwing dummies out the window and he petitioned the Parisian government to do something really significant – throw a dummy of The Eifel Tower.

After receiving approval, he decided to up the ante once more. On a cool day in February 1912, he informed the onlookers that he was going to take the place of the dummy to become the first man to ever deliberately jump off a structure with a parachute attached.

Except it wasn't really a parachute.

It was a "parachute suit" that looked a lot like a fashion mistake from the 1970's... baggy pants, the sort of cape Batman would be proud to wear and a hat that would make a member of the KKK proud...

Franz was not only an inventor; he was also a great publicist and marketer for his invention. He had carefully collected a group of journalists, photographers and film cameras (still a rarity in 1912 Paris) to record his epic jump.

The jump didn't go well. After landing on the icy ground below the tower, he was transported to hospital where he was pronounced dead.

Unfortunately, the jump didn't go well. After launching himself off the Eifel Tower, his parachute failed to open and he crashed into the icy ground below the tower. He was transported to hospital where he was pronounced dead. The next day, newspapers and newsreels carried images of the "reckless" inventor who had jumped to his death in-front of the media.

Unbeknown to Franz Reichelt, he had started something with far reaching consequences -BASE jumping. With hundreds of deaths over the last 100 years, BASE jumping is now considered to be 140 times more dangerous than rock climbing and 730 times more dangerous than skiing.

Fast forward to today and BASE jumping is still seen as the ultimate adrenalin high... What is possibly more surprising is that it now attracts corporate sponsorship and big marketing dollars. Possibly best known is the support provided by companies like Red Bull (perhaps the "athletes" need the promised wings) and Tag Heuer (after all – a successful jump is all in the timing).

Bottom line: some big companies have decided to attach their brand to what can only be described as an extreme sport.

It is reported that companies like Red Bull contribute 15% of annual turnover every year to sponsoring athletes, teams and events (like BASE jumping) to promote the brand and the image of living life in the extreme. This strategy has enabled them to sell over 4.2 billion cans of red bull in a single year – an amount that is increasing at a massive 7.6% per annum.

Clearly (and despite the taste) it is a strategy which is working, and working well. Promotions seldom talk about taste (which is interesting), nutritional value (I struggled to find much) or the health benefits.

Instead, marketing focuses on an experiential lifestyle where your “self-worth” is defined by activities (the more dangerous the better) and the ability of the common man to aspire towards a life packed with experiences requiring “wiiings”.

While not every business can afford the sort of marketing spend that a company like Red Bull invests, there are some key

concepts which nearly every business can use to position themselves with consumers.

First, not all marketing has to be about a specific product or solution. In many instances, you need to increase your brand awareness with customers before they will commit to purchase a product or service from you.

Your job is to figure out how and where you should be spending your advertising budget – brand awareness or product solutions?

This means spending on who you are and what you do. This can range from websites, newspaper adverts and using social media to raise awareness that (a) you exist and (b) what sort of business you have. An example would be Coca Cola. They spend a large amount of money on who coke is and general brand awareness. They spend very little on specific campaigns (i.e. cherry coke now available in a 24 can easy dispensing cases).

Coca Cola figured out you don't need to spend on specific products. Instead, they spend on selling an experience and refreshment solution. This drives both awareness... and sales.

The second form of marketing is around a specific solution. This is where you are trying to sell a product like a new type of bread. Advertising has to be targeted. That means it must be targeted to a specific audience. It must demonstrate the relevance of the product to the marketplace and it must show how it will improve the lives of the people for whom it is intended. Finally, it ideally will leverage the back of a credible brand.

BASE jumping might be one of the dumbest sports in the world. But with clever, targeted marketing it has helped propel a drink which doesn't taste all that good into being one of the most profitable products on the planet.

Your job is to figure out how and where you should be spending your advertising budget – do you need brand awareness or are you marketing specific solutions?