

## Flip Flops

Flip flops.

Now there's a functional product. Have you ever wondered who actually named them, and what were the circumstances surrounding that branding ceremony? Was the original name for that product too burdensome? (I think I'll buy a pair of those new open-toed, open-heeled stiff-bottomed shoes that make frapping noises on the ground and flopping noises against the bottom of your feet when you walk thing-a-ma-bobs.) Pity the poor marketing team that was given the responsibility of creating that image and selling it to the public. Can you just picture countless late hours at the office and mountains of Styrofoam coffee cups scattered about with waste baskets full of crumpled papers with not-so-clever rejected names on them?

Flip flops.



What does that term actually describe? Bad hair styles? A series of bad scores for an Olympic diver? A pancake that isn't up to the cook's standards? Open-toed, open-heeled stiff-bottomed shoes that make frapping noises on the ground and flopping noises against the bottom of your feet when you walk thing-a-ma-bobs? Yeah, that's it!

So, now that they came up with a unique name for this product, what did that marketing department have to do next? Simple, they needed to come up with a way to convince the public that they couldn't survive without "flip flops." The challenge: Make the average person think that they aren't cool unless they own a pair, or even better, have them believe they can't live without them. Hmmmmm. This might be more of a challenge than they thought, but I've learned just how amazing marketing, advertising, and the power of suggestion can be. It can appeal to the emotional side of people, and people buy on emotion. If you need something, you'll try to get it, but if you really want something, you'll go to even greater lengths to find a way to get it.

In times like these, I frequently rely on research to prove my point. Individual circumstances dictate which tools I use, and in this case, my reference comes from the *Book of Famous Quotations*. Remember, if someone took the trouble to write it down, it must be true. (Note: Please refer to this statement as you read my story. It will lend a degree of credibility to what I say . . . whether it's true or not.) It was P. T. Barnum who said, "There's a sucker born every minute," and those words spoken in 1885 have been proven true countless times in the world of advertising and retail marketing.



Perception becomes reality. Let's examine this scenario. Your refrigerator just broke down. The ice cream in your freezer section is melting and making "ala mode" out of the rest of the refrigerator's contents. Panic! So, you pick up a



copy of the local newspaper and begin scanning the appliance ads. "Special: Refrigerator - \$599.99!" That's good, because if your budget topped out at \$600, you should be able to afford that particular model. So, what if a competing company's ad said "Special: Refrigerator - \$600!" would you go back to the first company's ad because it was cheaper? The public has become so conditioned to look for prices that are gimmicks, when the actual price of \$600 appears, they balk at it. Look at the menu in just about any restaurant.

Even McDonalds advertises \$.99 hamburgers. Is that because people wouldn't be as attracted to them if they were one cent higher? Honey, let's list our house with the realtor for \$249,995. (Do you really think the prospective buyer wouldn't know that it was really a \$250,000 house and that they would have to pay more than the \$249,995 price to move in?)

### The dunning of America!

Now, back to those flip flops. That corporate marketing department must have hired some models with very attractive feet for their initial campaign. Their feet needed to be somewhat attractive, and of course, clean. Since flip flops are considered unisex (like a bathroom I saw in a Key West restaurant), they can be marketed in many ways, and they were! Remember, people don't buy products that are advertised by ugly people (even though many buyers are indeed ugly themselves). They started off by having some famous movie stars wear flip flops in one a beach scene. (Wow! Brad Pitt wears flip flops! I've got to run out to the store and get a pair like he is wearing



so I can be cool like him.) Once that was established, the ad agency could hire just about anyone to model their flip flops. You see, all they have to show is their feet, and ugly people can actually have nice looking feet. The inverse is also true . . . some very nice looking people (from the calves up) have extremely ugly feet!

The trend started. We began to see people at the beach with flip flops, then people relaxing at home wearing flip flops, people on the Red Carpet at the Academy Awards wearing flip flops, construction workers on job sites wearing flip flops, people getting married wearing flip flops . . . get the picture?

But nowhere in any of the advertising archives was I able to locate people dancing while wearing flip flops. (I think I saw Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello gyrating on the beach in one of their movies from the 1960s, but the cameras didn't pan down to their feet.) Nobody has yet dared to wear their favorite flip flops on Dancing with the Stars. It might be that it is just down-right dangerous! There are a disproportionate number of left feet in relation to the

number of people on a trendy club's dance floor on any given night. Throw in the high heel factor and you've got something similar to an obstacle course with land mines.

Personally, I don't have anything against flip flops. In fact, the ones I wear are much quieter than most. But my toes always seem cramped.

Maybe it's time to lose the socks.

