Case Study: Adbusters
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Background

Adbusters is a global network of “culture jammers”. Their objective is to “change the way information flows, the way corporations wield power, and the way meaning is produced in our society”.

The magazine was founded in 1989 by Kalle Lasn and Bill Schmalz in Vancouver, British Columbia. The birth was in large part a result of a major media corporation refusing to sell airtime to the founders for a commercial titled “A Tree Farm is Not a Forest”. Though not your typical arts organization, Adbusters embodies the notion of culture, and that of participatory culture as well. It relies on a combination of journalism, graphic design, photography, and participant generated content to develop and deliver its message. Self described as a “global network of artists, activists, writers, pranksters, students, educators and entrepreneurs who want to advance the new social activist movement of the information age”, Adbusters thrives on our media rich lives both as a point of participation and a point of critique. Edgy and provocative, this leftist grass roots organization invites its followers to engage in the same values through campaigns promoted on it’s website, and participate in what it calls “mental environmentalism”.
Overall Assessment

The adbusters website is upon immediate perusal a fair representation of its values and aesthetic. In fact, the description of being culture jammers as well as the desire to change information flows is found on the homepage in the top left section of the page. Information is segmented both underneath the main navigation as well as on a side bar. By using a combination of text and imagery, one can quickly identify points of interest. Below, a bit of the home page is captured. IF you were to scroll down further, you would find blog and subject headlines, spoof ads, and twitter feeds, along with different ways to participate. These may be responding to an blog, joining the revolution, following on twitter, or subscribing to the magazine.

![Adbusters Website Screenshot](image)

Design and Navigation

Navigating the Adbusters site seems fairly straightforward. Including teasers for the variety of media available on the homepage in logical groups allows for many points of entry. Whether you prefer to join, read, post, or watch, you can get there from here. Aside from the imagery, the color scheme relies on a white background with light grey boxes to differentiate sections and topics. Black navigation bars with white text at both
the top and the bottom of the page are easily found and distinguishable. A variety of issues can be accessed at the bottom of the home page through a horizontally scrolling gallery. There is also more detailed sub navigation for a variety of categories at the bottom of the page, so you don’t have to flip too many virtual pages to find what you need. Despite it’s anti-capitalist nature, the site does include a store. Of course, the funds go to the preservation of the cause. The about page allows viewers to report any problems they may be having with the site, a nice gesture indicative of a commitment to the use of technology as a means to communicate with its audience.

**Prescription**

I find this site to be fairly comprehensive and easy to use, and my suggestions for improvement are not vast. However, I did notice in my ventures through this particular virtual space that I could choose to register or login at the top right hand corner in the main navigation. I did not, however, see why I should do so. Perhaps I would need to have an account if I wanted to post a reply to something – but that seems unnecessary. It may behoove the organization to let me know exactly what I will get in turn for registering with their site, to have a better chance of me doing so. It is possible to share content on the site via Twitter and Facebook. Interestingly, when I search Facebook for Adbusters, it brings me to the adbusters page, it does not appear to be a Facebook profile. I suppose this is logical, since the organization hosts a campaign called “Digital Detox”. I wonder, though, how such an organization reconciles the need for it to use technology in order to reach it’s global audience. Perhaps that’s a conundrum that they also find themselves dealing with.