

# Circle the wagons

Two major issues have surfaced here as I write this month's column. One is important, one is fluff – but, as usual, the fluff garners the most attention.

As this column prides itself on going against the grain of not only the direct marketing industry but society in general, here we will serve first the substance, then the fluff.

## Global marketer alert

International marketers need to watch the current trend of protectionist tariffs that are increasing around the world and coming to a head just before the Group of 20 Summit, which was held in Pittsburgh, September 24-25.

While no-one disputes the need for global expansion and the tremendous lift and leverage it can give any company's bottom line, trend-spotting and the proper strategic positioning that responds to these trends are critical.

The major headline here has been the tariff the US government is placing on Chinese automobile tyres

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and China's reaction of taking this issue before the WTO.

The proposed tariff increase of 25-35 per cent could price out of the market 17 per cent of all tyres sold in the US.

China says this could affect 100,000 Chinese jobs.

The price of rubber on world commodity markets and share prices in certain tyre companies has already been affected.

But overall, this is little more than a blip. It represents about a billion dollars in exports. China exported a total of 338 billion to the US last year.

US companies are coming under increasing pressure from their unions and labour forces to stem the flow of products flooding into the market from China and elsewhere.

The US government, meanwhile, is walking a tightrope as the Chinese and US economies are now so tightly intertwined.

China will be watching very carefully how the Obama administration reacts, as this could set the tone for the remainder of Obama's term.

It may be a hackneyed phrase but 'tip of the iceberg' seems appropriate when looking at the global protectionist trend. There is much more to follow. GTA's research indicates more than 130 protectionist measures are due to be implemented around the world.

Countries being targeted the most by these measures are China, US, Japan, Germany and France.

The leading industries seeking protection are machinery, food, financial services and agricultural goods.

If your products/services may be affected by this, it is time to pay close attention.

## Beware rude Americans

The big issue here, even closing the national nightly news programme the other evening, was whether American society was becoming increasingly coarse and crude.

A US Congressman interrupts the President's address and calls him a liar! 'You lie' is now a rallying cry for the terminally discourteous and the ranters and hate-mongers that populate talk-radio over here.

A major symbol of our democracy – the 'Town Hall Meeting' – is being threatened by raucous, threatening and just plain bad behaviour at many, all orchestrated by groups opposed to a national healthcare plan.

A month or two ago, a true student of diplomacy from New Hampshire strapped a gun to his hip and paraded around outside a Town Meeting the President was attending. It is legal to wear a gun like that in that State.

Yee-hah!

It is also a Federal offence to threaten the President.

A meltdown at a major tennis tournament during a nationally televised match by one of the most indulged, spoiled and enabled athletes of our day, Serena Williams, raised concerns and brought a sudden end to her match.

But athletes have been doing this forever without consequences so what else can we expect? Once they allowed showboat athletes to do victory dances in the end zones after a football touchdown – the trend was clear and revolting.

The fact that it happened in a tennis match, where everyone used to wear white and was forced to eat overpriced strawberries may be the

**DOUG SACKS** is concerned by the global trend towards protectionism and some bad behaviour being served up in society.

difference. Kanye West – some form of musical entertainer – jumped onstage during an award ceremony, ripped the microphone out of the hands of a teenage girl who was accepting her award and ranted that someone else was more deserving.

Are we, as a society finally getting tired of rude, crude, discourteous and selfish behaviour? Or is this just more talk and spin from the media to fill up space for a few days?

Are we becoming less civil as a society?

Many international observers would say that is impossible as American society has always been so coarse and crude that any increase would be imperceptible.

Mainly European types have long risked exposure to American crudeness by coming over for extended visits, then going home and reporting on it. Prior to this, the Native Americans learned first-hand how coarse, crude, greedy, mendacious and cruel the Americans could be. But, at that point, the majority of the perpetrators were European colonist explorers and fortune hunters... but that's another story.

Alexis de Tocqueville along with Gustave de Beaumont (my true name is Douglas de Sacks), were sent by the French government to a young America in 1831 to study, of all things, the US prison system. De Tocqueville went back to France and, after reporting on the prisons, wrote one of the most famous books here, *Democracy in America*. De Beaumont wrote a slightly more infamous book about slavery and the moral fibre of American society.

Charles Dickens came along, as did Oscar Wilde. Both gave interesting interpretations. America had its home-grown observers as well, such as Mark Twain. An ancestor of mine came over in 1850, saw a country mad with gold fever and went back home on the next boat. Home to what, I wonder?

So, have we become more crude or is this a symptom of a global trend brought about by instantaneous and continuous media exposure and our willingness – even eagerness – to enable and forgive the financial, political, athletic and celebrity elite? Is this limited to America or is it a global pandemic?

Will marketers become coarser and cruder, driven by the tastes and expectations of the general population?

OK, many will say that is impossible as well.

President Obama is stressing a return to civility.

He will have to lead by example and, if he succeeds, that may be one of the more important contributions of his term in office.

Douglas Sacks is VP – strategic planning and partner at Focus Worldwide LLC, specialising in global data, analytical and marketing solutions. Email: [doug@focus-worldwide.com](mailto:doug@focus-worldwide.com)