

VIEWPOINT

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EDITORIAL

MTA AND KOREY KAY SHOW THE POWER OF GOOD ADVERTISING

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority doesn't get much credit for getting things right in New York, but its "If You See Something, Say Something" campaign is a textbook case of advertising done right.

In the wake of the recent Times Square bombing scare, vendor Lance Orton, interviewed by the press, echoed the phrase when discussing his decision to alert authorities about the smoking SUV. That sort of recall is the stuff that marketers and ad agencies dream of. It might seem to some off-putting to discuss advertising in the wake of a potential terrorist attack, but the MTA and agency

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Korey Kay & Partners can take pride in a campaign begun in the shadow of Sept. 11, 2001. After all, the effort wasn't just a matter of getting a tagline stuck in the heads of average New Yorkers. Rather it was an issue of public safety and persuading New Yorkers to not only pay closer attention to their surroundings but to take time out of the day to report irregularities. That's no small feat. New Yorkers may have been afraid after Sept. 11, but the fact remains that the city's populace takes a certain pride in being unflappable—as well as in a perpetual mad dash to the next appointment.

Obviously, this isn't the first time a tagline has so infiltrated pop culture. Just pick anything from Nike or Coca-Cola. Even in the realm of messaging that borders on public-service announcements, there have been legends: "Don't mess with Texas"; "A mind is a terrible thing to waste"; and, a direct forebear of the MTA campaign, "Loose lips sink ships."

But what strikes us as different about this one is how the MTA has approached ownership of what many would consider its intellectual property. It has allowed the slogan to be licensed out worldwide. For free. According to the MTA, "See something, say something" is being used for public awareness campaigns by 54 organizations, including Harvard University, the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security, the city of Amsterdam and three Australian states.

While it may have seemed crass to do so, the MTA would have been well within its rights to charge licensing fees for the line. Indeed, considering it seems perpetually on the brink of financial ruin, some might argue it should have. But it didn't.

Much like Lance Orton did when he called in the SUV, the MTA and its agency did the right thing with this campaign. That shouldn't be overlooked.