



Sanjay Gupta

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OFFICERS AWARD WINNER

Q + A on Storytelling with Sanjay Gupta

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In this age of the constant brand refresh, companies like Allstate are becoming increasingly rare. Allstate's two main campaigns, both playing off of the motto "You're in Good Hands with Allstate," have been around for an eternity by advertising industry standards, and yet in many ways, they're fresher than ever. So how does Allstate manage to find new angles when other brands constantly pivot their messaging?

To get these answers, I reached out to Sanjay Gupta, Executive Vice President of Marketing, Innovation and Corporate Relations at Allstate Insurance Company. Sanjay knows a thing or two about reaching out to people, and his penchant for teamwork netted him an Officers Award at the CMO Awards, presented by The CMO Club. His advice for strong marketing is an old adage we hear often, but rarely see in action, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Drew: Insurance companies are among the biggest spenders in general and on TV specifically. Collectively you can't all be wrong so TV must still be working for brands like Allstate. What role does TV play in your marketing mix and do you see that changing in the near term?

Sanjay: It allows us to tell our brand story. For example, last year we debuted a powerful brand ad titled, "We Still Climb," that helped us launch our new brand idea that Allstate doesn't just protect people when something goes wrong, but also helps them to live a good life every day. As part of that effort, we're leveraging our TV advertising to highlight Allstate's innovative products and features – including proven ones like our Safe Driving bonus checks, as well as new ones such as our QuickFoto Claim and Drivewise smart phone apps.

As far as our marketing mix goes, people still watch TV – a lot of it. Though we continue to increase the percentage of our digital media as consumer media consumption evolves,

we've found that a combination of media types usually yields the best results.

Drew: You have two very different campaigns with Mayhem and Dennis Haysbert ads. What is the strategy behind these two initiatives and from a measurement standpoint, area you able to distinguish the results of them individually versus the collective impact they have on the brand?

Sanjay: The good news is they work very well together, each campaign complementing and working off one another. Mayhem disrupts – reminding people that all insurance is not the same so people need to be careful in terms of who they choose for their protection needs, while Dennis reinforces why Allstate is the compelling choice to protect everything that's important to you. While we know that each campaign continues to work very well individually, collectively the effect is even greater. And of course, both fall under Allstate's overriding message "You're in Good Hands with Allstate."

Drew: A lot of marketers change campaigns every couple of years. This doesn't seem to be the case in the insurance category and certainly not with Allstate. Why is that? Are there specific signals you look for to determine if just an ad or an entire campaign has worn out its welcome?

Sanjay: If you have a campaign that continues to prove successful, and becomes even more successful with time, then changing for change sake is not what's best for the brand and the business. Of course we measure and constantly watch for wear out and diminishing effectiveness. But part of the reason "You're in Good Hands" has remained one of the most recognized taglines in America is because we haven't changed it in 50 years.

Even though we've had some real duration with the look and feel and of our campaigns over the last several years, we

are constantly introducing new features and different ways in which we tell our story about Allstate while also leveraging the equity that Dennis and Mayhem have built. So we not only leverage Dennis and Mayhem, but for example last year we featured several well-known home experts/TV personalities in our ads who provided helpful maintenance and do-it-yourself tips. We delivered the message that Allstate homeowners insurance offers more, and highlighted product features like claim-free rewards as well as helpful tools and perks at our Good Life Hub ([Allstate.com/goodlife](https://www.allstate.com/goodlife)) that allow customers to get more out of their insurance every day.

And this year we're talking about Allstate "House and Home" coverage where we're offering our Claim Rate Guard and Claim Free Rewards. So we're constantly talking about new and different things. In fact we just launched a campaign aimed at New Households that highlights a lot of great new services and features from Allstate, but it still looks and feels familiar. We're still able to leverage the equity of Dennis' voice in some cases, or of course use Dennis or Mayhem in pure form. So we're doing things new and different, but we have terrific equity in both of those assets and we'll continue to maximize them in our current and upcoming campaigns.

Drew: What are you most proud of in terms of recent accomplishments, and what were the key steps you took to get there?

Sanjay: Our most recent accomplishment that I'm most proud of – and it's actually still a work in progress – kicked off in September when we launched a breakthrough program and accompanying ad campaign to reach consumers and customers who represent what we're calling "New Households." These are people who are contending with many life "firsts," such a new car, house and/or a baby. With these things come new uncertainties – car repairs, home maintenance, questions about financial security, etc. – that today's young families are typically not prepared to address. These consumers typically turn to a trusted inner circle of friends and family for advice. Yet, faced with bigger dilemmas and decisions than ever before, they're finding these "experts" sometimes lack the resources or skills to help solve them.

In our quest to be more than an insurance company and help people live a good life every day, Allstate is offering tangible solutions, expertise and savings to help New Households get things right the first time. For example, to help them deal with their need to maintain their homes, we're offering a free one-year membership to Angie's List. We're also offering a customizable life insurance product that delivers personalized protection for changing family needs. And we're offering new features like Allstate Car Buying Service (which helps people save an average of \$3,000 or more off MSRP on new car), Allstate Realty Advantage (which helps customers find a reputable local real estate agent, plus they can get cash back of up to \$3,000 when they buy or sell their home), and Car Seat Discounts from Safety 1st (which allows customers to save 20% or more on select car seat models). Through these offers from trusted brands, our agency owners are arming young families with information, service and tools they need to feel more in control.

We're promoting this New Households program with a comprehensive advertising campaign that highlights how Allstate's Good Hands are doing more than ever before. The campaign includes a combination of national and local TV, radio, digital media, print, social media and PR. The ads are designed to bring Allstate's customer value proposition to life for consumers, and position our local agency owners as key resources to help them address everyday challenges. The campaign leads with real life, not insurance. It depicts the reality of being a young family vs. the perception you may have had of how perfect life would be. By taking a humorous approach, we show that Allstate agents can not only relate, but also help with surprising and unique solutions to young families' everyday challenges.

Drew: What challenges have you faced in your efforts to get the entire company engaged with the brand?

Sanjay: Actually our brand is very well understood at Allstate both with our employees and our agency owners. It's a brand that our people speak to with great pride, and they live up to what our brand stands for day in and day out. But we further reinforced the key tenets of what our brand stands for

last year with the introduction of “Force for Good” – a simple but powerful guide for our employees and agency owners that reminds us to always be laser focused on delivering for our customers every day. We do that by doing the right thing, putting people ahead of policies, and defying expectations by delivering what people would not expect from an insurance company.

Drew: What’s been your greatest success?

Sanjay: The best marketing story you can tell is when your customer experience, innovation and marketing – as well as your product features – are all working well together in a cohesive fashion. I’ve been fortunate to do that time and time again in my career, but certainly we’re doing that now at Allstate with the compelling way we’re bringing all of these things together. A good example is the work I just described for you with our New Households campaign.

Drew: How important is mobile marketing to your brand and what does it encompass?

Sanjay: More than 50% of people are now accessing the web through mobile phones, so clearly you can’t ignore mobile. We do extensive work not only in terms of mobile optimizing our web presence and our applications, but we also do quite a bit of marketing on mobile platforms. And we also leverage mobile to create new product features such as our QuickFoto Claim app and our Digital Locker home inventory app.

Drew: What is your proudest accomplishment related to your company’s social responsibility efforts and how did you accomplish it?

Sanjay: While we do a lot of great things in terms of our extensive commitment to corporate responsibility, I’d have to say our Allstate Foundation Purple Purse program is the accomplishment I’m most proud of. It stems from our Foundation’s broader signature program focused on providing domestic violence survivors with the financial skills and tools to break free and stay free from abuse. Purple Purse makes

it fashionable to talk about domestic violence and the financial abuse that traps women in abusive relationships.

Our 2014 Purple Purse campaign wrapped up in early October and was incredibly successful. We harnessed the power of passion and social media to raise awareness and funds for domestic violence services – including the creation of our first-ever Purple Purse Challenge on Crowdrise, an online platform that uses crowdsourcing to help raise charitable donations. Just as important, we helped 140 partner nonprofits learn how to fundraise using this technology. All told, we raised nearly \$2.5 million from a combination of consumer contributions and our Allstate Foundation challenge grants.

Popular and eloquent actress Kerry Washington joined us as our campaign ambassador. We adopted a fashion theme as a key strategy to make it easier for the public to talk about this very dark issue that affects 1 in 4 women. And Ms. Washington even designed a special purple purse to elevate awareness of the importance of financial empowerment as a means to help DV survivors become free of abuse. A record number of employees, Allstate agency owners and personal financial representatives joined the Purple Purse movement, and the program generated unprecedented media interest and highly positive earned media impressions (716 million and counting) across a broad spectrum of national broadcast, print and online news outlets including “Good Morning America,” “Extra,” “Morning Joe,” Time, People and the Huffington Post.

I’m especially proud of the way our team leveraged so many key Allstate resources to increase our impact this year, including our media relations team, our marketing team, our flagship social networking partners and our local agencies. It’s a powerful display of what’s possible when we combine our resources and knowledge to do good for society.

Drew: As a highly regulated industry, insurance has a lot of restrictions when it comes to social media. As such, what role does social play for Allstate in your overall marketing plan and how do you see that evolving in 2015, if at all?

Sanjay: Marketers tell a story to the audience, and the good news with social media is that we can now make that a two-way conversation. Fans help tell your story, and certainly if you get something wrong, you can learn and fix things quickly too. So a good brand with a learning agenda is even a better brand.

About the author

Drew Neisser is the CEO and founder of Renegade, the NYC-based social media and marketing agency that helps inspired CMOs cut through. He is the champion of Marketing as Service, a philosophy he espouses in his writings on FastCompany.com, PSFK, TheDrewBlog and The Cut, a much-appreciated monthly newsletter. If you have a CMO success story to tell, let Drew know at dneisser@renegade.com.

