Modernizing the ‘Kodak Moment’ as Social Sharing

By STUART ELLIOTT

DESPITE the predictions of naysayers, the concept of the “Kodak moment” has endured into the 21st century, even if Kodachrome film is going the way of the Brownie Starmite camera. Now, Eastman Kodak, eager to sustain some recent momentum, is seeking to redefine the phrase for a new generation of picture-takers.

A campaign that is scheduled to begin on Monday will carry the theme “The real Kodak moment happens when you share.” That is different from the longtime meaning of the words: a special instant that is — or ought to be — captured in a photograph.

Before, Kodak wanted consumers who experienced Kodak moments to use Brownies, Instamatics, Fun Savers or other Kodak cameras to take snapshots that would stimulate fond memories when looked at years later in albums.

The goal of the new meaning is to suggest that Kodak moments generate warm and fuzzy feelings only when photos, images and video clips are made available through social media, e-mail messages and other forms of sharing technology to parents, grandparents, friends, co-workers and even, these days, strangers.

Another way of putting the new theme is to declare that, “It’s not a Kodak moment unless you share,” said Jeffrey W. Hayzlett, chief marketing officer at the Eastman Kodak Company in Rochester.

Kodak wants to present its digital cameras, digital picture frames and video cameras as “emotional technology,” Mr. Hayzlett said, reflecting how “we want to come back to the core of who we are” as a marketer that “knows how to turn up the schmaltz back to 11.”

(At the end of that sentence, he slyly quoted from a humorous video that Kodak distributed, initially secretly, in 2002, in which a man portraying a Kodak executive performs a rant about “pictures of the cute puppies and the cuddly kittens and the cooing babies and that doe-eyed kid, you know the one,” which ends this way: “You were a Kodak moment once, and by God, you will be one again! Only this time, it’s digital! Hoo-rah!”)

Indeed, the campaign includes its share of golden sunsets, toddlers and just-born babies, all captured through pixelicious legerdemain. For instance, in a video to be shown on the Kodak sign in Times Square, a grandmother spends time with her granddaughter as the words “Share the family tree” appear onscreen.

The campaign is being introduced under an umbrella theme, “It’s time to smile,” that is used for Kodak products in the category the company calls consumer imaging, formerly known as consumer photography.

“The emotional aspects of the brand are what really set us apart from our competitors,” said Leslie Dance, vice president for brand marketing and communications at Kodak.

“I don’t think it’s something we should ever lose,” she added. “That said, we have to be relevant.”
The ads will woo an archetypal consumer whom Partners & Napier, the Rochester agency that created the campaign, refers to as Katie. She is a busy woman, 25 to 35 years old, serving as “the chief memory officer of the family,” Ms. Dance said. “We have to bring her on board and keep her for life.”

In addition to the Times Square video, there will be television commercials; print advertisements; a microsite, or special Web site, at kodakmoments.com; animated online ads that take attention-getting tacks like showing photos flying from one side of a home page to the other; an integration of the “Kodak moment” into an episode of “Celebrity Apprentice” on NBC; and a presence in social media like Facebook and YouTube.

“Research shows there’s still a lot of equity in the strength of the Kodak brand,” said John Roberts, chief strategy officer at Partners & Napier. “The challenge is how to make it more contemporary.”

A way to achieve that, he said, is to focus the campaign on the insight that, “When you share pictures with people, you build a stronger relationship, a stronger emotional bond.” But it must be “supported by product delivery,” he added, or Kodak risks alienating Katie and her cohort.

For instance, Kodak Easyshare digital cameras have “share” buttons that can tag pictures for e-mail messages, Facebook, Flickr, the Kodak Gallery (kodakgallery.com) or YouTube. The feature echoes the slogan Kodak used to sell its cameras in the 19th century: “You press the button, we do the rest.”

Kodak’s new digital products have helped the company’s reputation, according to a survey in February by Brand Keys, a research company in New York that studies consumer and brand loyalty. Kodak tied with Canon for first place in the digital-imaging category, said Robert K. Passikoff, president at Brand Keys, finishing ahead of competitors like Fuji, Nikon, Olympus, Pentax and Sony.

The “Kodak moment” is “one of the few category positionings that still have meaning,” Mr. Passikoff said, although he joked that with the “very high expectation of immediacy” among consumers, perhaps the company ought to promote “the Kodak nanosecond.”

Although Ms. Dance declined to discuss the budget for the campaign, she said it would be more than last year’s spending on ads for consumer-imaging products.

According to Kantar Media, a unit of WPP, Kodak spent $21.1 million last year on ads in major media for products other than printers. That was down 30.8 percent from the $30.5 million spent in 2008, Kantar Media said, and down 61.1 percent from the $54.2 million spent in 2007.

Leaner costs was a reason that Kodak gave in January when it reported that it had earned a profit in the fourth quarter, its first profit in five quarters. Sales of digital products rose 12 percent while sales of traditional, film-based products declined 10 percent.

“There’s an opportunity for Kodak to have a special place in the household again,” said Sharon Napier, president and chief executive at Partners & Napier. “People don’t trust really important moments to a cellphone.”

The phrase “Kodak moment” began appearing in Kodak pitches in 1961, company research indicates, in print-ad headlines like “This Kodak moment can’t wait for Dad to get home.” It was reintroduced, as a tag line, in the early 1990s, and trademarked again in 1992.

Partners & Napier is among five agencies on the Kodak roster. The others are Deutsch, part of the Lowe & Partners Worldwide unit of the Interpublic Group of Companies; Ketchum, part of the Omnicom Group; Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide, part of WPP; and Rabinovici & Associates.