

Section I

Adventures in Advertising

Introduction

The events described in this account are true. They come from direct experience in the advertising profession. I hope the facts presented here are somewhat entertaining and occasionally enlightening. They are as true and as objective as one can be about one's own business life. I've enjoyed a fascinating career (so far). I don't want to wait until my memory fails me before sharing some of these stories and observations. This is not a book about advertising, per se, but that is the foundation of the early part of my career.

Advertising Agencies try to provide Clients with a framework, a thought-process, a creative perspective, certain objectivity, and an understanding of customers, projects and the competitive landscape.

If you are successful in an advertising career, you will offer a refreshing objectivity. If you fail, you will tell the client too much stuff he/she already knows and add no value to the marketing communications effort.

Catharsis

Why do generals write books about their battles and campaigns? The word Catharsis comes to mind. Hopefully you will forgive some of the self involved tone of this section of this book and derive some value from this semi-autobiographical, semi-philosophic, sometimes affectionate critique of the advertising business as I've experienced it. In part, it's an account of my journey. I'm sure I've learned from my mistakes. So much is out of your own control in the advertising business - that's part of what makes it so much fun. Mostly, this book is chronological. But as a fan of Kurt Vonnegutt Jr., I won't resist occasional urges to "time travel" out of sequence.

Lifelong Learning

An important motivation for this book is what I call “lifelong learning.” I expect this idea will weave its way in and out of this text.

I believe it is essential for people to take stock of their accomplishments and failures. Analyze them and learn from them. David Drimer, a long-time close friend, and former Vice President of Marketing at the Journal of Commerce (a leading international trade publication) once said, “I have learned from my mistakes. Given the opportunity I could repeat them exactly.” I kind of feel that way too.

I worked for 12 advertising agencies in 15 years. I always thought I’d either work for one company (climbing the ladder of success) or be in my own business. I have always taken on new jobs with every intention of growing with the firm. Maybe you get what you deserve. Maybe I seek change. Maybe I like the chaos too much.

Early in my career I took everything personally. I always thought that I should be able to control my own destiny. I just didn’t encounter the obstacles I expected. I was thrown out of some places. I was downsized in other places. Account losses resulted in my dismissal. In some cases I quit before they threw me out. I moved my family from New York to Los Angeles to Raleigh, North Carolina, to Miami and St. Louis. All the time I was on a quest for a worthy career in advertising. I don’t take it personally any more.

I’ve worked for agencies big and small. Here’s the list: SSC&B:Lintas (1982), Marsteller, Inc. (1983), J. Walter Thompson (1983-85), Sawdon & Bess (1986), Tracy-Locke (1987-89), Sweeney & Partners (1989), BBDO (1990), Rockett Burkhead Lewis & Winslow (1991-1993), Crispin Porter + Bogusky (1994-95), Tinsley (1995), TBWA Chiat/Day (1996), D’arcy (1997). If you know the agency business, you’d have to say this was a pretty impressive list.

My client roster is pretty impressive too. I’ve handled advertising and communications programs for Heineken,

Amstel Light, JVC Consumer Electronics, U. S. Marine Corps, Burger King, Pizza Hut, Matchbox Toys, Pepsi, Fixodent/Fasteeth Denture Adhesives, SkyBox Trading Cards, Campbell Soup Foodservice, SeaPak Frozen Foods, GameTek computer game software, HalfPrin Aspirin, Boatmen's Bank, Southwestern Bell and Pacific Bell.

I could never give an objective account of the reasons for my moves. Mostly, I was restless and anxious for success in a very elusive profession. I write this account now feeling pretty fortunate to have had an unusual perspective on a peculiar business that is changing fast: too fast for anyone who has been in one place to see as clearly. My Cubist perspective might be interesting. (I have seen this business from multiple views. And, as such, will likely paint an abstraction that has emotion, vivid color and some exaggerated features.)

So here it is. My Adventures in Advertising (in some cases mis-adventures).