
Chapter Twelve

Now in your grocer's freezer case

I was a made man at Rockett Burkhead Lewis & Winslow with the SkyBox success with USA Basketball and the agency's proud accomplishment with the Magic and Son TV spot. (As much as that's possible in the advertising business.) It was great stuff in a visible category for the agency. I was a big man on campus at RBL&W. My account was growing and getting much needed recognition for the agency.

Nevertheless, being an account person at an advertising agency is a lot like being that novelty act on the old Ed Sullivan Show where the guy demonstrates his ability to spin plates on top of poles: six, seven, and eight at a time. It's all a part of the survival game you're playing of agency musical chairs. If you can diversify by contributing to another account you might be less likely to be left without a seat in the next inevitable personnel shuffle. (Even in Mayberry.) Besides, I was then, as I am now a student of "lifelong learning" and I like change. Change is good.

If you're asked to help out on another account, even if you've got no time, you should volunteer gladly. So I did. When one of the agency partners, Steve Lewis, asked me if I could help out on the SeaPak frozen foods account I volunteered cheerfully.

The War in the Store Part II - The freezer case

I already knew a lot about fighting for shelf space from my Pepsi experience. SeaPak taught me how that applies in the freezer case. Frozen shrimp doesn't move as fast as Pepsi, though. Frozen shrimp sales volume doesn't justify direct store delivery and the daily shelf maintenance like Pepsi. So, SeaPak has a network of food brokers working the sales and merchandising activity.

RBL&W had developed a program designed to use advertising to help the sell-in and sell-through of the SeaPak

brand. (Sell-in is getting stores to carry the product. Sell through is getting consumers to buy it.) The agency creative group developed a TV campaign that featured a shrimp-loving crab that snatched the product at every opportunity. The client ran coupons in Free Standing Inserts in Sunday Newspapers in conjunction with broadcast flights. My own topspin was a broker sales incentive program. It gave brokers an opportunity to earn points toward great prizes in exchange for key performance.

Things were going smoothly. The program yielded a record number of displays (facings along with point-of-sale materials) - well documented by eager broker reps. The agency was doing great work, being creative, and helping the client generate sales with a methodical market-by-market approach. In advertising, it's when things seem to be sailing smoothly that the shit hits the fan.

RBL&W was almost taking the SeaPak account for granted when a SeaPak marketing staffer, who thought a big agency might be better, invited J. Walter Thompson to pitch the account. J. Walter Thompson convinced SeaPak that they could buy media more cost-effectively. That was the beginning of the end of a beautiful client-agency relationship. Smaller independent agencies lose business to giant agencies all the time. (That's why so many agencies eventually give up and sell-out and become part of a bigger agency or agency network.)