
Chapter Nineteen

D'Arcy

I was able to make a relatively smooth transition to another St. Louis Agency, DMB&B (D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles). Interestingly enough, my new job had me managing the advertising account of SBC Communications, the parent company of Southwestern Bell which had recently merged with Pacific Bell. The Telecommunications business continues to evolve from the historic breakup of AT&T in 1984. Somehow, SBC managed to get approval to merge two baby bells. Manifest destiny or survival or just expert financial and political maneuvering, I really can't say. The irony is that one merger caused my job loss and another resulted in my hiring (for a time).

I joined DMB&B, St. Louis in the middle of 1996. DMB&B St. Louis is perhaps most famous for the original Budweiser "Frogs" commercial. Bud-weis-errrrr.

As one of three supervisors assigned to the SBC business I was poised to learn a new category (for me) and witness an historic time for Telecommunications industry up close. It's a big category of business to be sure. SBC has approximately 110,000 employees and with its acquisition of Pacific Telesis (The parent of Pacific Bell) it reported combined 1996 revenues of \$23.5 Billion.

SBC moved their offices and most of their key marketing decision-makers to San Antonio, Texas. As an account with a lot of clout and with over \$100 Million to spend on consumer media they were highly sought client prospect. D'Arcy calculated that they could continue to manage the account from St. Louis.

This mis-calculation and the client's desire to pare down their agency roster eventually led to D'Arcy losing the business, effective at the end of 1998. Here's how the St. Louis Business Journal reported that account loss:

“SBC Communications, one of D’Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles’ largest clients, pulled its work from the St. Louis advertising firm after more than 30 years. The SBC business represents about a quarter of D’Arcy’s revenue, which was an estimated \$31.5 million last year, sources said.

SBC notified D’Arcy of the decision Monday. The telecommunications giant will send advertising developed here to agencies SBC works for in Austin, Texas and San Francisco.

In a nutshell: I was a key man on two of St. Louis’s top advertising accounts - Both moved their business elsewhere after mergers. Both centralized their marketing function outside St. Louis. (Some strategic career move I made coming to St. Louis, huh?)