
Ogilvy
on
Advertising
David Ogilvy



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‘Let us march against Philip’

I do not regard advertising as entertainment or an art form, but as a medium of information. When I write an advertisement, I don’t want you to tell me that you find it ‘creative.’ I want you to find it so interesting that you *buy the product*. When Aeschines spoke, they said, ‘How well he speaks.’ But when Demosthenes spoke, they said, ‘Let us march against Philip.’

In my *Confessions of an Advertising Man*, published in 1963, I told the story of how Ogilvy & Mather came into existence, and set forth the principles on which our early success had been based. What was then little more than a creative boutique in New York has since become one of the four biggest advertising agencies in the world, with 140 offices in 40 countries. Our principles seem to work.

But I am now so old that a French magazine lists me as the only survivor among a group of men who, they aver, contributed to the Industrial Revolution – alongside Adam Smith, Edison, Karl Marx, Rockefeller, Ford and Keynes. Does old age disqualify me from writing about advertising in today’s world? Or could it be that perspective helps a man to separate the eternal verities of advertising from its passing fads?

When I set up shop on Madison Avenue in 1949, I assumed that advertising would undergo several major changes before I retired. So far, there has been only *one* change that can be called major: television has emerged as the most potent medium for selling most products.

Yes, there have been other changes and I shall describe them, but their significance has been exaggerated by pundits in search of trendy labels. For example, the concept of brand images, which I popularized in 1953, was not really new; Claude Hopkins had described it 20 years before. The so-called Creative Revolution, usually ascribed to Bill Bernbach and myself in the fifties, could equally well have been ascribed to N.W. Ayer and Young & Rubicam in the thirties.

Meanwhile, most of the advertising techniques which worked when I wrote *Confessions of an Advertising Man* still work today. Consumers still buy products whose advertising promises them value for money, beauty, nutrition, relief from suffering, social status and so on. All over the world.

In saying this, I run the risk of being denounced by the idiots who hold that any advertising technique which has been in use for more than two years is *ipso facto* obsolete. They excoriate slice-of-life commercials, demonstrations and talking heads, turning a blind eye to the fact that these techniques still make the cash register ring. If they have read Horace, they will say that I am *difficilis, querulus, laudator temporis acti*. *Se*

‘I run the risk of being denounced by the idiots who hold that any advertising technique which has been in use for more than two years is *ipso facto* obsolete.’

*puero, castigator, censorque minorum.** So what? There have always been noisy lunatics on the fringes of the advertising business. Their stock-in-trade includes ethnic humor, eccentric art direction, contempt for research, and their self-proclaimed genius. They are seldom found out, because they gravitate to the kind of clients who, bamboozled by their rhetoric, do not hold them responsible for sales results. Their campaigns find favor at cocktail parties in New York, San Francisco and London but are taken less seriously in Chicago. In the days when I specialized in posh campaigns for *The New Yorker*, I was the hero of this coterie, but when I graduated to advertising in mass media and wrote a book which extolled the value of research, I became its devil. I comfort myself with the reflection that I have sold more merchandise than all of them put together.

'I hate rules'

I am sometimes attacked for imposing 'rules.' Nothing could be further from the truth. I *hate* rules. All I do is report on how consumers react to different stimuli. I may say to a copywriter, 'Research shows that commercials with celebrities are below average in persuading people to buy products. Are you *sure* you want to use a celebrity?' Call that a *rule*? Or I may say to an art director, 'Research suggests that if you set the copy in black type on a white background, more people will read it than if you set it in white type on a black background.' A *hint*, perhaps, but scarcely a rule.

In 18th-century England, a family of obstetricians built a huge practice by delivering babies with a lower rate of infant and maternal mortality than their competitors. They had a secret – and guarded it jealously, until an inquisitive medical student climbed onto the roof of their delivering room, looked through the skylight and saw the forceps they had invented. The secret was out, to the benefit of all obstetricians and their patients. Today's obstetricians do not keep their discoveries secret, they publish them. I am grateful to my partners for allowing me to publish mine. But I should add that the occasional *opinions* expressed in this book do not necessarily reflect the collegial opinions of the agency which employs me.

This is not a book for readers who think they already know all there is to be known about advertising. It is for young hopefuls – and veterans who are still in search of ways to improve their batting average at the cash register.

I write only about aspects of advertising I know from my own experience. That is why this book contains nothing about media, cable television or advertising in Japan.

If you think it is a lousy book, you should have seen it before my partner Joel Raphaelson did his best to de-louse it. *Bless you, Joel.*

David Ogilvy

2

How to produce advertising that sells

Pretend you started work this morning in my agency, and that you have dropped by my office to ask for advice. I will start with some generalities about how to go about your work. In later chapters I will give you more specific advice on producing advertisements for magazines, newspapers, television and radio. I ask you to forgive me for oversimplifying some complicated subjects, and for the dogmatism of my style – the dogmatism of brevity. We are both in a hurry.

The first thing I have to say is that you may not realize the magnitude of difference between one advertisement and another. Says John Caples, the doyen of direct response copywriters:

‘I have seen one advertisement actually sell not twice as much, not three times as much, but 19½ times as much as another. Both advertisements occupied the same space. Both were run in the same publication. Both had photographic illustrations. Both had carefully written copy. The difference was that one used the right appeal and the other used the wrong appeal.’*

The wrong advertising can actually *reduce* the sales of a product. I am told that George Hay Brown, at one time head of marketing research at Ford, inserted advertisements in every other copy of the *Reader's Digest*. At the end of the year, the people who had *not* been exposed to the advertising had bought more Fords than those who had.

In another survey it was found that consumption of a certain brand of beer was lower among people who remembered its advertising than those who did not. The brewer had spent millions of dollars on advertising which *un-sold* his beer.

I sometimes wonder if there is a tacit conspiracy among clients, media and agencies to avoid putting advertising to such acid tests. Everyone involved has a vested interest in prolonging the myth that *all* advertising increases sales to some degree. It doesn't.

**Tested Advertising Methods* by John Caples. Prentice-Hall, 1975



The Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud—\$13,995

"At 60 miles an hour the loudest noise in this new Rolls-Royce comes from the electric clock"

What makes Rolls-Royce the best car in the world? "There is really no magic about it—it is merely patient attention to detail," says an eminent Rolls-Royce engineer.

1. "At 60 miles an hour the loudest noise comes from the electric clock," reports the Technical Editor of THE MOTOR. Three mufflers tune out sound frequencies—acoustically.

2. Every Rolls-Royce engine is run for seven hours at full throttle before installation, and each car is test-driven for hundreds of miles over varying road surfaces.

3. The Rolls-Royce is designed as an owner-driven car. It is eighteen inches shorter than the largest domestic cars.

4. The car has power steering, power brakes and automatic gear-shift. It is very easy to drive and to park. No chauffeur required.

5. The finished car spends a week in the final test-shop, being fine-tuned. Here it is subjected to 98 separate ordeals. For example, the engineers use a stethoscope to listen for axle whine.

6. The Rolls-Royce is guaranteed for

three years. With a new network of dealers and parts-depots from Coast to Coast, service is no problem.

7. The Rolls-Royce radiator has never changed, except that when Sir Henry Royce died in 1933 the monogram RR was changed from red to black.

8. The coachwork is given five coats of primer paint, and hand rubbed between each coat, before nine coats of finishing paint go on.

9. By moving a switch on the steering column, you can adjust the shock-absorbers to suit road conditions.

10. A picnic table, veneered in French walnut, slides out from under the dash. Two more swing out behind the front seats.

11. You can get such optional extras as an Espresso coffee-making machine, a dictating machine, a bed, hot and cold water for washing, an electric razor or a telephone.

12. There are three separate systems of power brakes, two hydraulic and one mechanical. Damage to one will not affect the others. The Rolls-Royce is a very safe car—and also a very lively car. It cruises serenely at eighty-five. Top speed is in excess of 100 m.p.h.

13. The Bentley is made by Rolls-Royce. Except for the radiators, they are identical motor cars, manufactured by the same engineers in the same works. People who feel diffident about driving a Rolls-Royce can buy a Bentley.

PRICE: The Rolls-Royce illustrated in this advertisement—f.o.b. principal ports of entry—costs \$13,995.

If you would like the rewarding experience of driving a Rolls-Royce or Bentley, write or telephone to one of the dealers listed on opposite page. Rolls-Royce Inc., 10 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Circle 5-1144.

Suddenly DOVE makes soap old-fashioned!

New bath and toilet bar creams your skin while you bathe.

DOVE is the cleaner, gentler, moisturizing cream. It leaves your skin soft and smooth—without the dry feeling caused by soap.



DOVE

Dove is good for your skin

Above I positioned Dove as a toilet bar for women with dry skin, and used a promise which had won in test: 'Dove creams your skin while you bathe.'

Right Robert Townsend, the eccentric head of Avis, asked me to do his advertising. When conflict with another client forced me to refuse, Doyle Dane Bernbach created one of the most powerful campaigns in the history of advertising. 'When you're only Number 2, you try harder. Or else.' This diabolical positioning made life miserable for Hertz, who was Number 1.

Opposite Doyle Dane Bernbach positioned Volkswagen as a protest against Detroit, thereby making the Beetle a cult among non-conformists. The copywriter was Julian Koenig, the art director Helmut Krone. Sales of the car went up to 500,000 cars a year.

resulting campaign helped to reverse a seven-year decline in Shell's share-of-market.

If you are too lazy to do this kind of homework, you may occasionally *luck* into a successful campaign, but you will run the risk of skidding about on what my brother Francis called 'the slippery surface of irrelevant brilliance.'

Your next chore is to find out what kind of advertising your competitors have been doing for similar products, and with what success. This will give you your bearings.

Now comes research among consumers. Find out how they think about your kind of product, what language they use when they discuss the subject, what attributes are important to them, and *what promise would be most likely to make them buy your brand.*

If you cannot afford the services of professionals to do this research, do it yourself. Informal conversations with half-a-dozen housewives can sometimes help a copywriter more than formal surveys in which he does not participate.

Positioning

Now consider how you want to 'position' your product. This curious verb is in great favor among marketing experts, but no two of them agree what it means. My own definition is 'what the product does, and who it is for.' I could have positioned Dove as a detergent bar for men with dirty hands, but chose instead to position it as a toilet bar for women with dry skin. This is still working 25 years later.

In Norway, the SAAB car had no measurable profile. We positioned it as a car for *winter*. Three years later it was voted the *best* car for Norwegian winters.

To advertise a car that looked like an orthopedic boot would have defeated me. But Bill Bernbach and his merry men positioned Volkswagen as a protest against the vulgarity of Detroit cars in those days, thereby making the Beetle a cult among those Americans who eschew conspicuous consumption.

When you're only No.2,
you try harder.
Or else.



Little fish have to keep moving all of the time. The big ones never stop pin king on them.

Avis knows all about the problems of little fish.

We're only No.2 in rent a cars. We'll be swallowed up if we didn't try harder.

There's no rest for us.

We're always emptying ashtrays. Making sure gas tanks are full before we rent our cars. Seeing that the batteries are full of life. Checking our windshield wipers.

And the cars we rent out can't be anything less than fishy, new super torque tanks.

And since we're not the big fish, you won't feel like a sardine when you come to our counter.

We're not jammed with customers.

Avis is only No.2
in rent a cars.
So why go with us?



We try harder.
(When you're not the biggest, you have to.)

We just can't afford dirty ashtrays. Or half-empty gas tanks. Or worn wipers. Or unarmaged cars. Or low tires. Or anything less than

scat adjusters that adjust. Heaters that heat. Defrosters that defrost.

Obviously, the thing we try hardest for is just to be nice. To start you out right with a new car, like a lively, super-torque Ford, and a pleasant smile. To let you know, say, where you can get a good hot pastrami sandwich in Dubuik.

Why?

Because we can't afford to take you for granted. Go with us next time.

The line at our counter is shorter.



© 1962 VOLKSWAGEN OF AMERICA, INC.

Think small.

Our little car isn't so much of a novelty any more.

A couple of dozen college kids don't try to squeeze inside it.

The guy at the gas station doesn't ask where the gas goes.

Nobody even stares at our shape.

In fact, some people who drive our little

flivver don't even think 32 miles to the gallon is going any great guns.

Or using five pints of oil instead of five quarts.

Or never needing anti-freeze.

Or racking up 40,000 miles on a set of tires.

That's because once you get used to

some of our economies, you don't even think about them any more.

Except when you squeeze into a small parking spot. Or renew your small insurance. Or pay a small repair bill.

Or trade in your old VW for a new one.

Think it over.





Schweppes is the original Bitter Lemon, invented in England in 1785.

"You can see the lemon in Schweppes Bitter Lemon. That's because Schweppes uses whole, fresh lemons. Juice, pulp, peel, everything."

So says Commander Whitehead, President of Schweppes (USA) Ltd. "Schweppes invented Bitter Lemon," he continues. "It was our first new product in one hundred years, and we did not stain."

Schweppes uses whole, fresh lemons in making Bitter Lemon. Juice,

pulp, peel, everything. Thus its tart, grown-up taste.

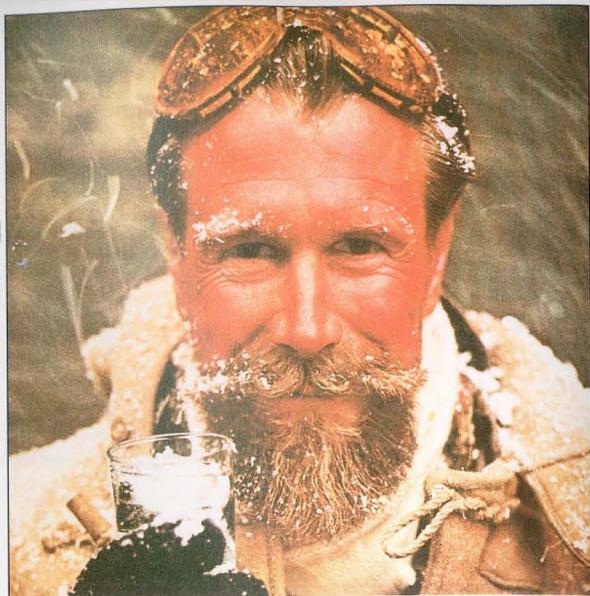
"Schweppes Bitter Lemon is the first adult soft drink," declares the Schweppesman, "the only one you can order without feeling like a pup!"

There are at least two more uses for Schweppes Bitter Lemon. It is an

unobtrusive way to sit out a round or two. It is also the most versatile new mixer since Schweppes Tonic itself.

No matter how you use Bitter Lemon, always turn the bottle upside down before you open it.

That way, everyone gets his fair share of lemon morsels.



Will you love Schweppes in December as you did in May?

ABOVE you see, not Nantuck of the North and not the Abominable Snowman—but Commander Edward Whitehead, Ambassador from the House of Schweppes in London. The Commander will tell you that this winter's most fashionable drink is

Vodka-and-Tonic. (All the rage from

coast to coast.) And that no capable barman would try to mix an authentic Vodka-and-Tonic without Schweppes. In one hundred years, nobody has found a substitute for Schweppes bitter-sweet flavor. A flavor that makes every Tonic drink! Vodka-and-Tonic, Gin-and-Tonic, Rum-and-Tonic)

taste so *curiously refreshing.*

And nobody has been able to copy Schweppes excellence — those patriotic little babbles that last your whole drink through.

Make sure you get the original Schweppes when you ask for it. Tastes as good in December as it did in May!



Above An essay in the art of image-building. For 18 years I used the face of my client Commander Whitehead as the symbol of his own product. It worked to beat the band on a peppercorn budget.

Brand image

You now have to decide what 'image' you want for your brand. Image means *personality*. Products, like people, have personalities, and they can make or break them in the market place. The personality of a product is an amalgam of many things — its name, its packaging, its price, the style of its advertising, and, above all, the nature of the product itself.

Every advertisement should be thought of as a contribution to the brand image. It follows that your advertising should consistently project the *same* image, year after year. This is difficult to achieve, because there are always forces at work to change the advertising — like a new agency, or a new Marketing Director who wants to make his mark.

It pays to give most products an image of quality — a *First Class ticket*. This is particularly true of products whose brand-name is visible to your friends, like beer, cigarettes and automobiles: products you 'wear.' If your advertising looks cheap or shoddy, it will rub off on your product. Who wants to be seen using shoddy products?

Take whiskey. Why do some people chose Jack Daniel's, while others choose Grand Dad or Taylor? Have they tried all three and compared the taste? Don't make me laugh. The reality is that these three brands have different *images* which appeal to different kinds of people. It isn't the whiskey they choose, it's the image. The brand image is 90 per cent of what the distiller has to sell.

Researchers at the Department of Psychology at the University of California gave distilled water to students. They told some of them that it was distilled water, and asked them to describe its taste. Most said it



WOODSMEN DROP IN from all around Tennessee carrying truckloads of maple for Jack Daniel's

It has to be hard, sugar maple taker, from high ground. Our Jack Bateman (that's him saying hello to the driver) will split it and stack it and burn it to get charcoal. And nothing smooths our whiskey like this special charcoal does. Of course, none of these woodsmen work regular hours. So you never know when they'll drop in. But after a sip of Jack Daniel's, we believe, you'll know why they're always welcome.



CHARCOAL
MELLOWED
&
DROP
BY DROP

Tennessee Whiskey • 50 Proof • Distilled and Bottled by Jack Daniel Distillery
Leak Millers Prop., Inc. Route 1, Lynchburg (Pop. 261), Tennessee 37322
Product of the National Association of American Whiskey by the United States Government

had no taste of any kind. They told the other students that the distilled water came out of the tap. Most of them said it tasted *horrible*. The mere mention of *tap* conjured up an image of chlorine.

Give people a taste of Old Crow, and *tell* them it's Old Crow. Then give them another taste of Old Crow, *but tell them it's Jack Daniel's*. Ask them which they prefer. They'll think the two drinks are quite different. *They are tasting images.*

I have always been hypnotized by Jack Daniel's. The label and the advertising convey an image of homespun honesty, and the high price makes me assume that Jack Daniel's must be superior.

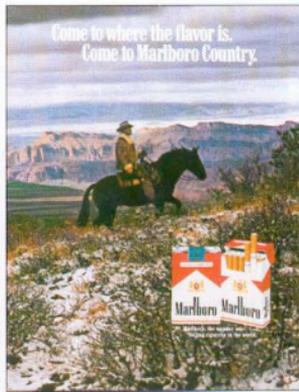
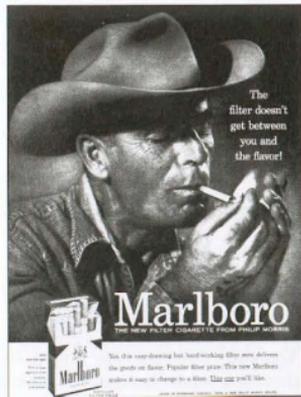
Writing advertising for any kind of liquor is an extremely subtle art. I once tried using rational facts to *argue* the consumer into choosing a brand of whiskey. It didn't work. You don't catch Coca Cola advertising that Coke contains 50 per cent more cola berries.

Next time an apostle of hard-sell questions the importance of



Above When you choose a brand of whiskey you are choosing an image. Jack Daniel's advertisements project an image of homespun honesty and thereby persuade you that Jack Daniel's is worth its premium price.

Right Leo Burnett's campaign for Marlboro projects an image which has made it the biggest-selling cigarette in the world. It has been running, almost without change, for 25 years.



brand images – ask him how Marlboro climbed from obscurity to become the biggest-selling cigarette in the world. Leo Burnett's cowboy campaign, started 25 years ago and continued to this day, has given the brand an image which appeals to smokers all over the world.

What's the big idea?

You can do homework from now until doomsday, but you will never win fame and fortune unless you also invent *big ideas*. It takes a big idea to attract the attention of consumers and get them to buy your product. Unless your advertising contains a big idea, it will pass like a ship in the night.

I doubt if more than one campaign in a hundred contains a big idea, I am supposed to be one of the more fertile inventors of big ideas, but in my long career as a copywriter I have not had more than 20, if that. Big ideas come from the unconscious. This is true in art, in science and in advertising. But your unconscious has to be *well informed*, or your idea will be irrelevant. Stuff your conscious mind with information, then unbook your rational thought process. You can help this process by going for a long walk, or taking a hot bath, or drinking half a pint of claret. Suddenly, if the telephone line from your unconscious is open, a big idea wells up within you.

My partner Esty Stowell complained that the first commercial I wrote for Pepperidge Farm bread was sound enough, but lacking in imagery. That night I dreamed of two white horses pulling a baker's delivery van along a country lane at a smart trot. Today, 27 years later, that horse-drawn van is still driving up that lane in Pepperidge commercials.

When asked what was the best asset a man could have, Albert Lasker – the most astute of all advertising men – replied, 'Humility in the presence of a good idea.' It is horribly difficult to *recognize* a good idea. I shudder to think how many I have rejected. Research can't help you much, because it cannot predict the *cumulative* value of an idea, and no idea is big unless it will work for thirty years.

One of my partners came up with the idea of parading a herd of bulls through Merrill Lynch commercials under the slogan – 'Merrill Lynch is *bullish* on America.' I thought it was dopey, but fortunately it had been approved before I saw it. Those bulls are still parading, long after the account moved to another agency.

It will help you recognize a big idea if you ask yourself five questions:

- 1 Did it make me gasp when I first saw it?
- 2 Do I wish I had thought of it myself?
- 3 Is it unique?
- 4 Does it fit the strategy to perfection?
- 5 *Could it be used for 30 years?*

Opposite Sometimes, the best idea of all is to show the product – with utter simplicity. This takes courage, because you will be accused of not being 'creative.'

You can count on your fingers the number of advertising campaigns that run even for five years. These are the superstars, the campaigns that



Grethe Meyers nye stel "Rødtop" fås i 38 dele til både bord og køkken.

Sådan fornyer man en klassiker

designet af Grethe Meyer

Det er tyve år siden Grethe Meyer lavede "Blåkant" for Den Kongelige



møbler og PH's lamper.

Porcelainsfabrik. Og lige fra starten var vi klar over, at her stod vi overfor en klassiker på linie med Børge Mogensens

Tiden har givet os ret. Grethe Meyers rene, gennemtænkte formgivning og diskrete dekorationskunst er blevet højt præmieret og højt elsket i mange lande.

Men kunst er fornyelse, og Grethe Meyer har netop fornyet "Blåkant's" tidløse former med en glad, rød kant og en lysere bundfarve. Ændringen er lille, men virkningen stor, og "Rødtop" er næsten lige så forskellig fra

"Blåkant" som sommer fra vinter. Hvad De foretrækker, ved vi ikke. Vi er bare glade og stolte over at kunne give Dem muligheden for at vælge.



DEN KONGELIGE

Right Good ideas come from the unconscious. The author dreamed about an old baker driving his horse and wagon along a country lane on his way to deliver Pepperidge Farm bread. Twenty-five years later the horse and wagon are still in the commercials.



determine consumer preferences for color, size, design, taste and so on. When faced with selling 'parity' products, all you can hope to do is explain their virtues more persuasively than your competitors, and to differentiate them by the style of your advertising. This is the 'added value' which advertising contributes, and I am not sufficiently puritanical to hate myself for it.

'The positively good'

My partner Joel Raphaelson has articulated a feeling which has been growing in my mind for some time:

'In the past, just about every advertiser has assumed that in order to sell his goods he has to convince consumers that his product is *superior* to his competitor's.

'This may not be necessary. It may be sufficient to convince consumers that your product is *positively good*. If the consumer feels certain that your product is good and feels uncertain about your competitor's, he will buy yours.

'If you and your competitors all make excellent products, don't try to imply that your product is *better*. Just say what's good about your product – and do a clearer, more honest, more informative job of saying it.

'If this theory is right, sales will swing to the marketer who does the best job of creating confidence that his product is *positively good*.'

This approach to advertising parity products does not insult the intelligence of consumers. Who can blame you for putting your best foot forward?

Repeat your winners

If you are lucky enough to write a good advertisement, repeat it until it stops selling. Scores of good advertisements have been discarded before they lost their potency.

Research shows that the readership of an advertisement does not decline when it is run several times in the same magazine. Readership

'You aren't advertising to a standing army; you are advertising to a moving parade.'

remains at the same level throughout at least four repetitions.

You aren't advertising to a standing army; you are advertising to a moving parade. The advertisement which sold a refrigerator to couples who got married last year will probably be just as successful with couples who get married this year. A good advertisement can be thought of as a radar sweep, constantly hunting new prospects as they come into the market. Get a good radar, and keep it sweeping.

Henry Ford once said to a copywriter on his account, 'Bill, that campaign of yours is dandy, but do we have to run it *forever*?' To which the copywriter replied, 'Mr Ford, the campaign has not yet appeared.' Ford had seen it too often at too many meetings. The best way to settle such arguments is to measure the selling effectiveness of your campaign at regular intervals, and to go on running it until the research shows that it has worn out.

Word of mouth

It sometimes happens that advertising campaigns enter the culture. Thus the musical theme in a Maxwell House coffee commercial became Number 7 on the hit parade. After Commander Whitehead started appearing in Schweppes advertising, he became a popular participant in talk shows on television. This kind of thing is manna from heaven, but nobody knows how to do it on purpose. At least, I don't.

Fifty years ago attempts were made in England to cultivate word-of-mouth advertising by spreading anecdotes like this one:

'An old farmer was walking down a road, bent double with rheumatism. Someone in a Rolls-Royce stopped to speak to him. Told him to take Beecham's Pills. Do you know who it was? *The King's Doctor!*'

Down with committees

Most campaigns are too complicated. They reflect a long list of objectives, and try to reconcile the divergent views of too many executives. By attempting to cover too many things, they achieve nothing.

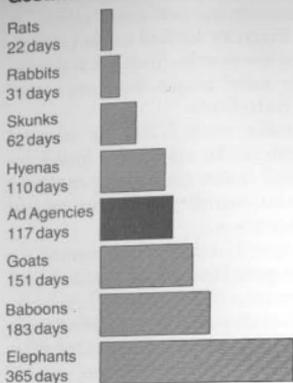
Many commercials and many advertisements look like the minutes of a committee. In my experience, committees can criticize, but they cannot create.

'Search the parks in all your cities
You'll find no statues of committees.'

Agencies have a way of creating campaigns in committees. They call it 'team-work'. Who can argue with team-work?

The process of producing advertising campaigns moves at a snail's pace. Questions of strategy are argued by committees of the client's brand managers and the agency's account executives, who have a vested interest in prolonging the argument as much as possible; it is how they earn their living. The researchers take months to answer elementary questions. When the copywriters finally get down to work, they dawdle about in brain-storming sessions and other forms of wheel-spinning. If a copywriter averages an hour a week actually *writing*, he is exceptional.

Gestation



Above Advertising agencies have a genius for wheel-spinning. The average time it takes them to produce a campaign is 117 days – faster than goats but slower than hyenas.

The average period of gestation is somewhere between that of hyenas (110 days) and goats (151 days). For example, storyboards for commercials are argued at level after level in the agency, and level after level in the client's organization. If they survive, they are then produced and tested. The average copywriter gets only three commercials a year on air.

Ambition

Few copywriters are ambitious. It does not occur to them that if they tried hard enough, they might double the client's sales, and make themselves famous. 'Raise your sights!' I exhort them. 'Blaze new trails! Hit the ball out of the park!! Compete with the immortals!!!'

Leo Burnett said it better, 'When you reach for the stars, you may not quite get one, but you won't come up with a handful of mud either.'

Pursuit of knowledge

I once asked Sir Hugh Rigby, Surgeon to King George V, 'What makes a great surgeon?' Sir Hugh replied, 'There isn't much to choose between surgeons in manual dexterity. What distinguishes the great surgeon is that he *knows* more than other surgeons.' It is the same with advertising agents. The good ones *know* more.

I asked an indifferent copywriter what books he had read about advertising. He told me that he had not read any; he preferred to rely on his own intuition. 'Suppose,' I asked, 'your gall-bladder has to be removed this evening. Will you choose a surgeon who has read some books on anatomy and knows where to find your gall-bladder, or a surgeon who relies on his intuition? Why should our clients be expected to bet millions of dollars on your intuition?'

This willful refusal to learn the rudiments of the craft is all too common. I cannot think of any other profession which gets by on such a small corpus of knowledge. Millions are spent on testing individual commercials and advertisements, but next to nothing is done to analyse the results of those tests in search of plus and minus factors. Advertising textbooks have nothing to say on the subject.

When he had been head of J. Walter Thompson for 45 years, the great Stanley Resor told me, 'Every year we spend hundreds of millions of dollars of our clients' money. At the end of it, what do we *know*? Nothing. So two years ago I asked four of our people to try and identify factors which usually work. They already have twelve. I was too polite to tell him that I had ninety-six.

Advertising agencies waste their client's money repeating the same mistakes. I recently counted 49 advertisements set in reverse (white type on black background) in one issue of a magazine, long years after research demonstrated that reverse is *difficult to read*.

What is the reason for this failure to codify experience? Is it that advertising does not attract inquiring minds? Is it that any kind of scientific method is beyond the grasp of 'creative' people? Are they afraid that knowledge would impose some discipline on their work?

It has not always been so. When George Gallup was Research Director at Young & Rubicam in the thirties, he not only measured the

readership of advertisements, *he accumulated the scores and analysed them.* Certain techniques, he found, consistently out-performed others. A brilliant art director called Vaughn Flannery latched on to Gallup's discoveries and applied them. Within a few months, Young & Rubicam advertisements were being read by more people than any other agency's, to the incalculable benefit of their clients.

Mills Shepherd conducted similar research on the editorial content in *McCall's*, and came up with similar results. He found, for example, that photographs of finished dishes consistently attracted more readers than photographs of the raw ingredients. Recipes, printed on recipe cards, were sure-fire with housewives.

Using the same research technique, Harold Sykes measured the readership of advertisements in newspapers. He reported that 'editorial graphics were consistently high performers.

In 1947, Harold Rudolph, who had been Research Director on Stirling Getchel's agency, published a book on the subject.* One of his observations was that photographs with an element of 'story appeal'

**Attention and Interest Factors in Advertising by H. Rudolph. Funk & Wagnall, 1947*

If more copywriters were ambitious, they too would find fame and fortune. This is Touffou, the medieval castle where the author holes up when he is not visiting one of the Ogilvy & Mather offices.



were far above average in attracting attention. This led me to put an eye-patch on the model in my advertisements for Hathaway shirts.

Later, the advertising community turned its back on such research. Agencies which pioneered the search for knowledge now excel in violating the principles their predecessors had discovered.

Clients sometimes change agencies because one agency can buy circulation at a slightly lower cost than another. They don't realize that a copywriter who knows his factors – the triggers which make people read advertisements – can reach many times more readers than a copywriter who doesn't.

For 35 years I have continued on the course charted by Gallup, collecting factors the way other men collect pictures and postage stamps. If you choose to ignore these factors, good luck to you. A blind pig can sometimes find truffles, but it helps to know that they are found in oak forests.

It is remarkable how little the plus and minus factors have changed over the years. With very few exceptions, consumers continue to react to the same techniques in the same ways.

'A blind pig can sometimes find truffles, but it helps to know that they are found in oak forests.'

The lessons of direct response

For all their research, most advertisers never know for sure whether their advertisements sell. Too many other factors cloud the equation. But direct-response advertisers, who solicit orders by mail or telephone, know to a dollar how much each advertisement sells. So watch the kind of advertising they do. You will notice important differences between their techniques and the techniques of general advertisers. For example:

General advertisers use *30-second* commercials. But the direct response fraternity have learned that it is more profitable to use *two-minute* commercials. Who, do you suppose, is more likely to be right?

General advertisers broadcast their commercials in expensive *prime time*, when the audience is at its peak. But direct response advertisers have learned that they make more sales *late at night*. Who, do you suppose, is more likely to be right?

In their magazine advertisements, general advertisers use *short* copy, but the direct response people invariably use *long* copy. Who, do you suppose, is more likely to be right?

I am convinced that if all advertisers were to follow the example of their direct response brethren, they would get more sales per dollar. Every copywriter should start his career by spending two years in direct response. One glance at any campaign tells me whether its author has ever had that experience.

Do I practice what I preach? Not always. I have created my share of fancy campaigns, but if you ask which of my advertisements has been the most successful, I will answer without hesitation that it was the first

ad I wrote for industrial financing in Puerto Rico. It won no awards for 'creativity,' but it persuaded scores of manufacturers to start factories in that poverty-stricken island.

Sad to say, an agency which produced nothing but this kind of down-to-earth advertising would never win a reputation for 'creativity,' and would wither on the vine.

What is a good advertisement? An advertisement which pleases you because of its style, or an advertisement which *sells* the most? They are seldom the same. Go through a magazine and pick out the advertisements you *like* best. You will probably pick those with beautiful illustrations, or clever copy. You forget to ask yourself your favorite advertisements would make you want to buy the product. Says Rosser Reeves, of the Ted Bates agency:

'I'm not saying that charming, witty and warm copy won't sell. I'm just saying that I've seen thousands of charming, witty campaigns that didn't. Let's say you are a manufacturer. Your advertising isn't working and your sales are going down. And everything depends on it. Your future depends on it, your family's future depends on it, other people's families depend on it. And you walk in this office and talk to me, and you sit in that chair. Now, what do you want out of me? Fine writing? Do you want masterpieces? Do you want glowing things that can be framed by copywriters? *Or do you want to see the goddamned sales curve stop moving down and start moving up?*'*

'If it doesn't sell, it isn't creative.'

The cult of 'creativity'

The Benton & Bowles agency holds that 'if it doesn't sell, it isn't creative.' Amen.

You won't find 'creativity' in the 12-volume Oxford Dictionary. Do you think it means *originality*? Says Reeves, 'Originality is the most dangerous word in advertising. Preoccupied with originality, copywriters pursue something as illusory as swamp fire, for which the Latin phrase is *ignis fatuus*.'

Mozart said, 'I have never made the slightest effort to compose anything original.'

I occasionally use the hideous word *creative* myself, for lack of a better. If you take the subject more seriously than I do, I suggest you read *The Creative Organization*, published by the University of Chicago Press. Meanwhile, I have to invent a Big Idea for a new advertising campaign, and I have to invent it before Tuesday. 'Creativity' strikes me as a high-falutin word for the work I have to do between now and Tuesday.

A few years ago, Harry McMahan drew attention to the kind of commercials which were winning the famous Clio awards for creativity:

Agencies that won four of the Clios had lost the accounts.

Another Clio winner was out of business.