

# OBSERVATIONS

May 2003

A Journal Of Things We Find Interesting

## A Changing Profession?

The guest speakers in my graduate class on advertising strategy this spring were an exceptional group. Not only were the presentations first rate but the content was insightful, current and applicable. I've been teaching this class (Creative Strategy in Advertising, part of the Master of Business Communication curriculum in the graduate school of the University of St. Thomas College of Business) for 17 years and can't recall a finer group of speakers. I'm deeply grateful to all of them.

Each of them offered responses to a common question: "What are the effects of the advertising recession on the future of the profession?" Here are summaries of what they said -- edited and adapted.

**Amanda Keiser**, an account executive at Fallon, said that the most immediate effect has been to limit job opportunities across the board. There are very few openings in companies and even fewer in agencies. This means that fewer new people are getting that first job, which could mean a longer term shortage of fresh ideas. Clients are also taking a more conservative approach to what they're putting out. People are scared of trying new things. "Breakthrough" ideas (such as the BMW films campaign) that were possible a few years ago probably wouldn't get by now. Amanda thinks the good agencies will survive, but she doesn't expect a turnaround in agency hiring until late in 2004.

**Erin Keeley** of Fallon Brand Consulting echoed the sense that clients are more conservative. "Everyone is benchmarking everyone else, which means there is less innovation." She



A giant cat greets visitors near Takayama in the mountains west of Tokyo -- just one of the memorable images from our recent visit to Japan. These cat figures are everywhere (though not this big). The arm waves up and down and invites people into the business establishment. They're supposed to bring good luck.

thinks we need to ask if there are new ways to do effective branding and new ways to differentiate brands from each other. When everyone is taking the same "safe" approach, brands become more alike, which sort of defeats the purpose of branding. She expects that the ad industry will continue to consolidate but that we may see some fresh branding ideas come from that consolidation.

**Ted Lokan**, president of MarketLogic, said the deep ad industry recession has "changed the business forever. Advertising is just not working as we planned. The old strategies are not working any more because consumers have become more jaded." He thinks we need to come up with new formulas for getting an effective message across and thinks

it's a positive sign that clients are becoming more conservative and "results-oriented." He believes we need to focus on differentiating between customers, and concentrate on "permission-based" marketing that prioritizes increasing sales among existing customers rather than pushing products to new ones.

**Melody Lentsch**, who heads up Carmichael Lynch's interactive efforts, has seen a lot of campaigns canceled and spill over on to the Web as clients look for measurable results. She reminded us that the Web is still a new medium and a new technology. There is still a steep learning curve as we move from early adopters to more sophisticated users who are beginning to better appreciate what the Web can

## Changing Profession, continued

and cannot do. Within that spectrum there are a whole range of users, even within agencies -- from Luddites who resist new technology altogether to people who think through the models and prioritize their efforts based on limited budgets and bottom line concerns. She also notes the dramatic shift in hiring from three years ago when you had to pay "ridiculous salaries" to attract anyone with technical know-how to now when there's a glut on the market of highly skilled people.

**Miranda Moss** of Yamamoto/Moss sees the current hard times as an opportunity for renewal -- both personally and in business strategies. "People with passion" need to follow that passion, whether it leads them to deeper involvement with marketing or to new activities. The focus for marketers is to find new markets for products as opposed to introducing new products. She also thinks we need to come up with new ways to promote, not use "the same strategies as before 9/11." One possible solution is to promote to "missionary groups" who will embrace your message and spread it. She cited Apple and certain non-profits who are able to tell their story "clearly and truthfully" and get around the increased skepticism in the market which has been spurred by CEO greed, fraud, accounting scandals and unbelievable claims.

My take on all this is mixed. On the one hand, this has been a tough time for almost everyone in the business. Clients have been hard to come by and budgets have been cut and cut again. Campaigns with good work and great promise have been canceled. Experienced pros have left the field or are radically underemployed and new people are finding it very hard to break in. In this environment it gets even more frustrating to see work that is less than adequate -- you want to make every opportunity count.

On the other hand, I've been hanging around St. Thomas classes this spring and it's hard to avoid a feeling of optimism. There are good people from a wide range of companies who are deepening and broadening their knowledge of marketing. The disciplines of sound marketing remain the same -- focus on what the customer wants, understand what the audience knows, figure out how your product or service matches those desires. New technologies give us more ways to be both interactive and integrated. Better trained marketers give us people who know more about what they're doing. And the good young people who come into the business will know more about skepticism and how to overcome it.

## How NOT to do the Web

Melody Lentsch's presentation on using the Web included a list of the "Seven Deadly Sins" of Web sites. Here's a paraphrased version:

1. Lose sight of why your target audience comes to the site. A good Web site is not for you, it's for your customers, prospects, stakeholders, etc. Think about what they're looking for and make it easy for them to find it.
2. Create something that needs a button to say "skip the introduction." If the introduction -- the first page they see -- is too long, or irrelevant, don't put it up. Let them get to where their interest lies immediately.
3. Believe that if you build it they will come. You need to promote a site knowledgeably, which means knowing the ins and outs of getting it up front on the search engines your prospects are likely to use.
4. Violate the 7-second rule. If it takes too long to download, visitors will be gone. And if it takes more than 3 or 4 clicks to get to the information they're seeking, they'll click off.

5. Believe that pop-up ads are dead. Not so -- especially if they are helpful to visitors looking for specific kinds of information. If they're looking for faucets, for instance, they may also be looking for sinks, and a pop-up can help them get there.

6. Think people like to read on line. No. If you need longer copy to explain something, offer it as a pdf or some kind of easily printed attachment. It's hard to read text off a screen. People still like to hold the details in their hand.

7. Confuse the Web with TV. Television is a passive medium. People want the Web to be interactive. Give them an easy way to contact you, ask questions, get more information, etc.

Ms. Lentsch also emphasized the need to balance functionality and design on a Web site. The good ones are well designed visually, but they also are designed to help people get what they came to the site for. That can mean anything from a site search engine that is oriented to the kinds of questions visitors actually ask to real-time human help -- either on-line or on the phone.

### [www.wilhide.com](http://www.wilhide.com)

If you haven't visited our Web site recently, check it out. As I gradually get familiar with the technology, I'm adding new stuff more frequently. Among the things you'll find on the "what's new" page:

\* [10 reasons why branding is dead or should be](#). Bruce Tait of Fallon Brand Consulting and I debated the issue May 8 at the annual IABC conference in St. Paul. This is my side of the argument.

\* [A few more pictures from Japan](#). we were lucky enough to be in Tokyo just as the cherry blossoms burst into full bloom and it was spectacular! The whole world seemed beautiful and invigorating under those glorious trees.

\* [Should you use the CEO as an advertising spokesperson?](#) I was asked to give a guest talk in a St Thomas class on management priorities and put together some basic thoughts. First you need to determine if the CEO CAN do it. Then you need to decide if he or she SHOULD do it.

**Observations** is an occasional publication we put out when we feel like it. We provide creative services and consulting for marketing communications. If you have a project we could help with, please contact us. If you'd just like to shoot the breeze about some of this stuff, we usually have time for that too.

Doug and Jean Wilhide

## Time Available

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