

## Wilhide & Company

3019 West 43RD Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55410

Surviving the winter? Here's hoping you have a trip planned somewhere warm. Take this with you.

# OBSERVATIONS

February 2004

A Journal Of Things We Find Interesting

## The Advantages of Outsourcing

Michael Alter is president of SurePayroll, one of the largest payroll services providers in the U.S. He has seen a major shift from "traditional employer-employee relationships" towards using contract workers and creative ways of outsourcing. One of the drivers of this change is cost. Contract workers usually pay their own benefits (which can account for a third of the cost of hiring an employee) and they get paid just for the services they provide.

Another driver of the trend is talent. While it may take months to "break in" a new employee, people are outsourcing more and more jobs to pros who are already up to speed. "I personally believe there has been a structural change," Alter says. "You can get people who have very specialized skills for a very reasonable price, and you don't have to put them on staff full-time."

We anticipated this trend by about a decade and a half. We've been provid-

ing expert contract services for marketers and advertisers since 1986. We've done the things you might expect: freelance copywriting for brochures, ads, direct mail, manuals, newsletters, fliers, etc. Occasional freelance design and art direction for brochures and letterhead identity. Creative direction for ad campaigns and direct marketing programs.

But we've also done out-of-the-ordinary things, playing unusual roles for clients. Among the more memorable:

\* Just before Thanksgiving one year we got a call from Norwest Banks (now Wells Fargo). They wanted to put together an ad campaign to promote the involvement of their Twin Cities branch banks in their communities. They wanted each ad to be tailored to the branch (there were about 70 of them). And they wanted them to run in community papers during the holidays.

This is the sort of thing a larger agency could usually handle, given a few

months prep time. We had a couple weeks before the deadlines started hitting. It was a marathon! At one time we were directing seven photography crews, putting in 12-hour days to interview branch managers, writing copy, dropping it into layouts and rushing it through approval processes and into production. In the end we completed 48 ads in just under 7 weeks. That spring the bank was cited for its outstanding community banking efforts.

\* The old First Bank (now US Bank) called on us to help with its internal United Way drive, something usually handled by staff. But they were short handed and had set an ambitious goal. We worked with an internal design team, brainstorming dozens of ideas to promote that year's United Way theme. We produced posters, mailers, letters, and a variety of "miscellaneous." My favorite was a postcard urging people to contribute early, before the formal solicitations began. The headline: "How to avoid people asking you for money."

Then it came time to produce a video to be shown at employee meetings. Time was short and budgets were tight, so we wrote a script and I dug out my old ties and a suit, dusted off my acting talents and played the on-camera spokesperson. The result? The bank exceeded its goal (for the first time in three years) and the campaign won awards in both the local and national United Way competitions.

\* Another client used our services to write and produce invitations to seminars held around the country. We averaged around 70 a year. A few weeks before one program began the person responsible for logistics left the company. So we stepped in and, working out of the client's offices, handled all the details of finding and booking locations, getting times and dates secured, arranging for A/V equipment and tracking reservations.

\* A healthcare company that sold products for people who needed care in their homes decided to open a retail outlet. There were a lot of details to handle and no real marketing department. So we became it. We set up a three-day event that featured a huge tent, a mariachi band, wheel-chair sports events and a series of talks by nationally known spokespeople for people with disabilities. We also helped launch the retail outlet with direct mail, print ads, publicity and radio commercials.

It was a successful launch and an inspirational exercise. Whenever my back or my knees hurt I remember one speaker who made the point that we are all only "temporarily able-bodied." We need help when we're very young and when we get old and often in between, and we should keep this in mind when dealing with people who have more severe disabilities.

We've also helped a non-profit create a low-budget collateral program, revised and edited manuals for a major healthcare provider, written and produced newsletters for schools, helped coordinate programs for nine IBM groups located around the U.S., given

training sessions and talks in the U.S. and abroad and managed projects for short-staffed marketing groups.

**We're very flexible. You can use us for a lot of needs, not just the usual tasks of copywriting and planning advertising or direct marketing campaigns. When you have more work than you can handle, call us. When you need high level expertise and experience, call us. When you want something done now, not several months from now, call us.**

That number: 612-926-3939. Or email us: [wilhide@skypoint.com](mailto:wilhide@skypoint.com)).

## Bits and Pieces

You'll be pleased to know that this writer is now officially the Poet Laureate of Linden Hills. It's a neat idea -- another way to bring people in this neighborhood together and stimulate discussion. We plan a mixture of poetry slams and salons throughout the year, starting with a Free Love event just before Valentine's Day. People can brighten the depths of a Minnesota winter by reading their favorite love poems aloud, drinking, eating (and maybe having some chocolates).

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Check out the cover article in the February issue of **Format** magazine. It's an extended version of "The True Measure of an Ad" that appeared in the last **Observations**. If you don't get **Format**, contact the editor, Sheri O'Meara ([sheriomeara@comcast.net](mailto:sheriomeara@comcast.net)).

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The February issue of **Tactics**, the newsletter of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) will carry a story about the Navy's first journalism school, whose officer in charge was my father. The piece is called "Embedded in Great Lakes." You can get more information about it by contacting the editor, John Elsasser ([john.elsasser@prsa.org](mailto:john.elsasser@prsa.org)), or ask me and I'll send you the copy draft.

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There's an interesting piece in the January 5th **New Yorker** by Louis Menand that discusses "the culture of imagery," especially political imagery. He cites Daniel Boorstin's 1961 book, **The Image**, that tracks the use of mass market imagery back to the printing revolutions of the late 19th century. The growth of "pseudo-events" (think Bush landing on an aircraft carrier, or the current fascination with "reality" shows) was made possible by technology and the development of "advertising science."

In 1960, the TV images of the candidates in the Kennedy-Nixon debates were the deciding factor in the election. Ever since then images have played a major political role. "Our national politics has become a competition for images or between images, rather than between ideals," said Boorstin.

Are political images "real or illusory, genuine or fake?" asks Menand. The question almost has become irrelevant now: Our society is so full of manipulated imagery that we've come to expect it, even if we don't really know how to evaluate it. Menand makes the point that the ideal TV political image is "blurry" in the sense that you can fill in the blanks with your own ideas. A candidate who is too "defined" turns viewers off because there's not enough for them to do.

These issues and others are considered in an excellent video, "Consuming Images," produced by Bill Moyers as part of his series on **The Public Mind** which I use in my class on advertising strategy. Moyers concludes that we need to develop a "visual literacy" so we can find a rational basis to respond to imagery the way we do to words.

**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