

Semi-A-Live From Worldwide AdForum, New York, Day 5

Day 5, Friday

Well the day kicked off with rather less gusto than the previous four, with most people wandering in bleary-eyed and baggy-tailed thanks to the fantastic AdForum dinner last night. That comprised most of the agency heads we'd seen throughout the week who came along to try and get us tipsy and spill the industry beans. Most of us were very clever and managed the former all by ourselves.

But after a couple of strong coffees we were back in the game, and even more so with a session on 'Power Games in Digital Advertising' with Michael Kassan, Principal of strategic advisory company MediaLink. He ignited a great session on the current competitive struggle for leadership between the digital giants and the corresponding impact on firstly advertisers and secondly, consumers.

Key to this discussion was the Google proposed search ad deal with Yahoo, an idea that has got the Association of National Advertisers firmly stamping its foot on behalf of its constituent members such as P&G and GM. If Madison Avenue wasn't already nervous of the Big G, this deal is likely to have them physically shivering as 90% of the search advertising market falls into Google's hands, inevitably leading to a concentration of market power, less choice and price hikes. A great observation was that despite the fact that advertisers are the direct cash cow for Google's revenue, there is certain arrogance in Google's total lack of consultation with them on the move. What was that about open source?

So we left that session feeling pretty energized and headed to Madison Avenue itself to hear what DDB and their digital cousin Tribal had to say about the whole palaver. DDB President and CEO Chuck Brymer was commendable in confronting for the first time all week the 'white elephant in the room' of the current economic situation and its impact on the industry, and most importantly, how they can stay ahead of what repercussions their clients will be experiencing. Staying true to the heritage of DDB he again cited creativity as the answer, albeit with a stronger than ever emphasis on ROI given the dented top lines that clients are seeing. We heard that 'People 2.0 - embracing people as the new media', is key to achieving this, and quite a poetic one at that.

Tribal DDB, represented by the fantastic Elisabeth Ross, Global CEO, also had some great guiding tenets; simply 'With - not At', 'Earned - not Bought', 'Democratic - not Dictation', 'Involvement - not Exposure', 'Services - not Communications', and 'Collaborative - not Linear.' It was a beautifully simple expression of what most agencies conveyed with various levels of success over the week and reminded me how nice it is to be communicated to well by a communications agency, ironically sometimes totally lacking.

After completing pages of feedback that came with bucket loads of whinging - turns out having work shown to us all week we didn't want to have to do any ourselves! - we were done for the week. There was a certain nostalgia we felt as we ended our school camp and had to head back to our real lives...how dull by comparison! But what a week of fantastic talent and seriously rapid industry developments that as far as I'm concerned really build a case for more AdForums in NYC... well at least quarterly would be fair, no?