

A NEW PROCESS LED OUT OF ASIA?

I believe it was Bill Bernbach who was the first to have this crazy idea of having copywriters and art directors work together. Prior to this, American agencies kept them both on separate floors, only allowing them to intertwine at the odd Christmas party, with copy taking the lead and then a team of designers putting some pictures to the words.

Today, the industry has changed somewhat – no more so than in Asia. Now every campaign is now ‘through-the-line’, ‘media neutral’, ‘360 degrees’, ‘holistic’ or some other yet to be invented phrase (it is said Eskimos have 23 words for snow – the industry is creating just as many words for integrated marketing). Yet despite these changes, most of the creative development process and hierarchies are still linear as they were fifty years ago.

The clarion call is coming for a new process for developing advertising. Right now in China, the scarcest commodity is time (well...that and talent...). Yet in some of our consulting work, campaigns are taking up to nine months to move from brief, through concept, revised concept, final revised concept, copy testing, final final revised concept, etc. etc. etc. In nine months, Shanghai probably launches twenty new property deals and a bunch of new Bund restaurants.

The reason is because now, unlike in Mr Bernbach’s day, time now costs money. The agency compensation model is continuing to migrate from commission to fee. In the US now, 87% of their marketers work with their agencies this way – and at least the same percent of the top multinationals in Asia have the same structure now. And when time costs money, both parties need to connect to use it efficiently.

Forecasting the time it takes to create commercial art (also known as advertising) is to be sure an inexact science. But the client and agency should not be so diametrically opposed in this. Few agencies will spend the time to speed up the development process because (at least in theory) they will be paid less. Fewer hours recorded leads to less income. Yet there are some breaking all the rules, involving the client early in the once sacrosanct creative process, collaboratively developing work, reinventing the concept of pre-testing and approvals – and they

are reaping the rewards.

One of our clients, a fast food company, recently stopped their Hong Kong agency presenting anything more than a tissue concept - until approval was aligned at all levels. No time wasted, highly efficient. Very Hong Kong. Another famous China agency recently picked up some American business by developing an entire TV campaign within four days camped out in their client's US office. The egos were checked at the door, and together the problem was solved.

Getting great work done is hard enough. But the marketers and their agencies that find new ways to beat the clock will win in a number of ways – not the least of which is a more collaborative and powerful relationship. And since Asia is always in a hurry, what better place on earth to take the lead.

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