

MAKING A MATCH HAS NEVER BEEN HARDER

It's not on the tourist trail, but a trip to Beijing's Zhongshan Park (next to the Palace Museum) is quite an eye opener. Its here that the parents of the singles are playing the role of matchmaker (and we thought we had this game to ourselves!). One sign written on the ground says "Female, age 32, 168 centimeters tall. A military officer who holds a master's degree from a university in the United States. I wish to meet a man aged about 35 who is at least 170 centimeters tall and a university graduate with a monthly salary in excess of 3,000 yuan." Others are carved into trees, some are hung up on walls. It's a hotbed of huckstering, with parents doing everything short of a powerpoint deck to find spouses for their children, so eager are they to create the empty nest.

Meantime in China, divorces are on the up. In Beijing, the number is reported to be as high as 50% this year. In 1979, it was as low as 5%. Thankfully, the rural statistics show couples are more likely to stay together at least – but in some of these cases, because of relocated work, the husband may only see his wife once a year. And while there are 952 marriages an hour all over China, there are still 184 separations.

Staying together has never been tougher. From our new business table in Media last year, we tracked over 1,600 creative and media accounts changing hands across the region – that's close to one every sixty minutes – is your agency the unlucky loser this hour? Now that most agencies are now part of a public company, revenue pressure has become a ninety day affair, so chasing a match is done with new vigor and energy. I recently asked someone from a multinational agency how long they had been there. Their reply? – “Thirteen quarters!”

This week, Samsung changed agencies without a pitch – just as well, as the previous process last year was long enough to cover their next three reviews. Coca-Cola found a new global home. And Unilever gave up seventy plus years of laundry history at Lowe for BBH. And those are just the first three hours for the week.

Keeping a client-agency relationship together comes back to all the values of keeping a real relationship together – love, integrity, trust, commitment – and the

occasional spice to keep things interesting. Yet this week, while negotiating an agency fee, we saw a new project fee they added called “Agency Pro-activity” – “not only are we planning to be spontaneous, we want you to pre-approve our cost to do so.” Surely the client-agency world will not come down to this.

The people that have it right– the P&G’s, the J&J’s, etc (the rest know who they are) attract better agency talent, better marketing brains, and usually better ideas. No agency marriage is made in heaven – but most can do with a hell of improvement

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