

Editorial: Some Key Questions

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Editor

AFTER A FEW TANGENTS in past issues, this editorial returns to the contents of just this issue. There is a lot of good stuff here. Much of the content of this issue centers on three crucial questions in advertising: not all of them are about advertising itself.

The questions, in order, are: (1) What kinds of relationships drive longer lasting or more productive relationships with clients or sponsors? [Harris and Taylor; Farrelly and Quester; Crutchfield and Friends]; (2) What are the effects of content and design? [McMillan, Hwang, and Lee; Lohtia, Donthu, and Hershberger]; and (3) What sorts of things can provide greater insight into the process itself [Clancy, Berger, and Magliozzi; Crimmins and Callahan; Derbaix and Pecheux]. These questions, in their most general sense, are interrelated, of course.

The relationships between agency and client or sponsor often have decisive effects on content and design of advertising. In the past, it was often possible for agency people to pick out Procter & Gamble or American Home Products advertising. Although that was in the past, even now subtle restrictions and the blending of client and agency cultures can produce advertising that reflects notions of agency, of client, of the relationship. I once worked for an agency (no longer in existence) that had a noticeable style. Clients would select this shop because the format had been very successful for certain kinds of advertising. Other clients selected the same shop thinking that the relationship between agency, client, and product would produce similar success. Often it did not. To the extent that the relationship was solid, the advertising suffered.

This is not news to old advertising hands but needs to be reiterated on occasion.

Perhaps the largest question is, "Does advertising work at all?" Relationships, effects of specific elements, and cognizance of the process are all aids in understanding. We welcome such contributions. The larger question still remains quite unanswered. There are the devotees of equity; there are the people who show that advertising will produce only immediate results; there are those who say that it only reminds one of the name. There is a certain amount of intransigence among those who take hard positions. The answers are still out there—someplace but not in Platonic space. Some examples of the question in this issue:

- Crimmins and Callahan show that targeted advertising does have some effect on antisocial behavior. How long does it last?
- Read the interchange between Taylor and Bonner and Marvin Goldberg. Goldberg states that cigarette advertising works. Taylor and Bonner claim that Goldberg's research shows no relationship between advertising and smoking behavior. Who is right?

Actually, I am confused. And that is where we should all be at this point. At least most of us are still open to some new data, new information that can lessen the confusion; in other words, better confused than intransigent. It is too early in this business to take positions.

Isaiah Berlin famously argued for a rather messy society in which all sorts of ideas could flourish and be listened to. That seems to be the path to truth in advertising research as well. **JAR**