

ADVERTISING INDUSTRY MANIFESTO #1:

FEAR & CREATIVITY

There is something that has always been true about the advertising agency business, and is its greatest asset, at this moment.

The advertising agency business is not just about making ads. The essence of our business is developing ideas, which create value propositions. This makes all the difference in the world. It is why, I believe, what we do is more important than ever, given the current economic and social environment globally. Here is why:

Fear is more prevalent today. It is the number one factor that inhibits peace and economic vitality. Fear is a killer, particularly when the economy experiences a recession. Fear suffocates the creativity that brings people together and that fuels economic optimism.

Fear is what happens when we are afraid, when we lose our sense of control. Fear grows in our society, when there is unpredictability, like with the terrorism we all have now experienced or the Enron/Anderson debacle. Fear grows when there is uncertainty over our safety or over questions like “has the economy hit bottom yet?”

Fear particularly hurts a business that depends on creativity and having an ideas-oriented culture such as the advertising industry. It is hugely detrimental to the quality and inventiveness of our creative output.

Our endeavor is more Art than Science. Science costs money. Art costs passion. Frank Lloyd Wright used to talk about this a lot, so did Picasso. Fear is why many artists suffer demons, like those suffered by Jackson Pollock and Van Gogh. The torment and tension that can occur when fear is present due to social upheaval, personal insecurity or economic uncertainty can greatly affect the visionary inventiveness and optimism, in anyone's business.

To foster creativity, agencies have tended to be optimistic, even fearless. Agencies invent ideas that make it possible to change behaviors and beliefs. This is why clients seek our help.

Being fearless becomes even more important when times are tough, when there is social uncertainty or when clients are less than optimistic. When clients run scared, they need creativity and innovation more than ever from an agency partnership.

During the depths of the depression, Charles Kettering knew first hand the tremendous power for economic growth from new ideas. During a speech he gave to business leaders in 1938, he commented on the prevailing attitude that most business leaders had been expressing, e.g. that 'we just need to wait until the economy starts to come back again.' Kettering emphasized that the economy does not stimulate itself into a change of momentum all by itself. What is needed to jump-start the economy is creativity and new ideas. He would know, as the inventor of the electric starter for the automobile Kettering revolutionized that industry and breathed fresh life into the economic spirit.

Those who have been in the advertising business for a while, know that after all the cuts in spending and resources, clients will soon need fresh ideas to fuel growth. You cannot cut your way to prosperity. A study by the Association of American Advertising Agencies on marketing and advertising during recessions shows that the brands and companies that held or increased their investments during recessionary times, gained significant growth in share and sales long-term. (Advertising In A Recession: The Best Defense is a Good Offense" by Bernard Ryan Jr.) When everyone else is afraid to act, the fearless few who do have everything to gain.

The advertising agency industry has never been more challenged than it is right now. Likewise, I believe it has never been more needed. With the social ramifications of global communications technologies, continued social concerns and the need for economic stimulus, our inherent inventiveness and creativity are sorely required.

This is a time when we need fresh, wonderful, fearless ideas to help create and, perhaps restore, value. We need ideas that can stimulate consumers and the economy into a positive momentum, to create more jobs, to improve the relationships between societies globally and to otherwise improve peoples lives. I can think of no more important industry to do this, right now, than the advertising agency business. Let's step up to our game.

Tim Love
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