

# VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS

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## 7-Layer Ads

*How do ad concepts survive the chain of client approvals?*

I once worked on a boutique hotel account. Every month or so we'd send a PDF of a few different ads to the general manager which he could choose from. Then, we'd get him on a conference call to present and explain the ads.

He'd usually like our work, but invariably, during the call, he'd put us on hold. To go show the ads to the concierge. He trusted the concierge's opinion. One time, he took a poll of the entire front desk staff.

We've all heard the canard that it's really the client's wife (or husband, these days) who makes the decisions on creative work. But the truth is, whether a piece of advertising actually runs or not is nearly always out of the hands of the people who create it.

Let's face it: when you work for an advertising agency creating ads, you're spending someone else's money. And I don't believe clients have it easy when it comes to approving or killing work. They face any number of pressures, from shareholders (who love profits) to pushy salespeople (who love bullet points) to their own bosses (who love themselves). Plus, in other cases, it may be a focus group that decides ultimately what work lives or dies.

If an account's approval process means that you have to present and re-present work gradually up the chain, from marketing managers to the CEO, a strange phenomenon occurs: All of them have the power to say no, but only the top person can say yes.

Plus, technology hasn't made the approval process easier; technology has made it harder. Because you can send work to someone you've never met, and never get a chance to see their visceral reaction to advertising—which every human being has.

And that client can, in turn, show the work around to other people you'll never meet. Hell, it doesn't even have to be a spouse or child. Work can get killed by people you'll never meet for reasons you'll never know.

I don't think there's anything more frustrating for ad creatives than putting the fate of their work in someone else's hands. Even many ad agencies have layers of internal approvals that need to be met. Sometimes you're lucky to get a nugget of an idea through before some higher-up decides to put their personal conceptual stamp on it.

Despite the supposed streamlining and downsizing of corporate America, the advertising approval process remains more convoluted than ever. But at some point, there needs to be less layers, and more trusting of intuition. Because consumers tend to make their purchasing decisions emotionally much more than rationally. I'm not suggesting that advertising be reckless or foolish, merely that ideas often have a primal power to move people—and we should pay attention when we see that power.

I'd love to hear from some of the client-side people out there. Do you feel pressured by the ad agency to say 'yes'? Did you ever regret saying 'yes' or 'no' to a piece of work? Are there times when you're just not sure?

I understand. Try getting 4 creative people to decide where to go for lunch. Trust me, you'll never get an approval. Ever.