

VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS



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Advertising Week (or maybe it's Advertising Weak)

Think you'll get an accurate depiction of the industry next month? Sorry, Charlie

I'm sure you're all as psyched as I am about "Advertising Week in New York City" next month. Because what the ad industry really needs right now is a 5-day opportunity to pat itself on the back and celebrate all the good it does for humanity.

The schedule of events is quite a packed one, I'll admit. Many major industry-related organizations, legendary agencies, and large brands are sponsoring all sorts of panels, luncheons, receptions, etc.

At first glance, it looks like a nice representative sample of the ad world. But a few folks won't be there.

Local auto dealers won't be sponsoring a retrospective like "50 Years of Tent Sales, Screaming, and Tacky Graphics." Attorneys won't offer a panel discussion on the effectiveness of the phrase "Have you been injured in an accident?" And political consultants won't give advice on how to distort facts and use negative language to elect their candidates. In other words, much of the work that drags down our industry and society (and yet, has the most influence on the public's perception of advertising) won't be celebrated during Advertising Week.

However, there is something the entire public can enjoy. Right now there's a contest where famous ad characters and critters are competing for the title of "America's Favorite Ad Icon." Yes, everyone can vote for this. Charlie the Tuna and the Michelin Man are heavily campaigning as we speak.

Remember, these icons are the most impressive, uplifting, influential symbols of our industry. Although I'm guessing that Joe Camel's invitation got lost in the mail.

But since part of the reason for Advertising Week is to encourage young people to pursue careers in the ad biz, shouldn't we be touting our rank-and-file employees as icons, too? They're the real symbols and heroes, I think. I'd love to see Tony the Tiger share the spotlight with "Ashley The Scantily-Clad Creative Summer Intern" or "Rhonda the Token African-American Employee Who's In Either Media or Accounting, I'm Not Sure." Or maybe accuracy isn't quite the goal of Advertising Week.

Perhaps I'm being too cynical about this. After all, Advertising Week is a celebration of the entire advertising industry and the people who make a living in it. So I believe it's important that all present and future ad stars attend. I highly suggest you go. Surely the head honchos at your shop will gladly pony up reimbursements for all the staff, right? Especially in New York City—land of the \$200-a-night hotel rooms and \$15 cocktails. Or maybe accessibility and inclusiveness aren't the goals of Advertising Week, either.

But while Advertising Week is New York-centric, and perhaps rightfully so, any true depiction of the ad industry should start with the simple truth that Madison Avenue isn't the center of the ad world anymore. And yesterday's silly animated characters aren't the answer to today's marketing problems.

Maybe during Advertising Week, ad agencies across the country should set up webcams and videoconferences to show what advertising's really all about—hard working people creating ideas, collaborating on commercials, ads and brochures, greasing the wheels of capitalism every day in the face of nervous clients, reduced timelines and budgets, and bizarre office politics. Yet somehow still having a lot of fun doing it.

It'd be more valuable to show the business world how great agencies solve real marketing problems than to have Aunt Jemima give Mr. Whipple a hand job in Times Square.

Although during Advertising Week, those two icons might provide a good demonstration of today's typical agency-client relationships.