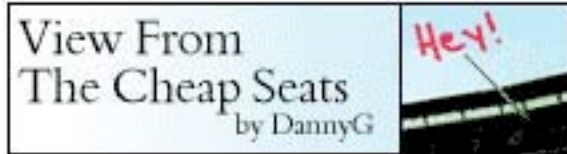


VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS



11.17.2003

I'm the Best Columnist Ever

Why am I so superior? I said so, that's why

I believe I'm the best columnist you can read on the Internet. No other columnist is as insightful and witty as I am. Because when it comes to Internet columnists, only one has proven to be consistently original and in tune with today's advertising marketplace. That's me. Which means you wisely spend your time and expand your knowledge when you read my columns.

Do you believe that shit? No, of course not. I don't expect you to.

But I've got a reason to be so pumped-up. You see, I've been fortunate in my advertising career.

My clients have included the best casino, the best hotel, the best vacuum, the best all-you-can-eat buffet, the best homebuilder, the best wireless phone service, the best mover, the best construction equipment, the best convention center, and of course, the best used car dealer around.

How did I know they were the best? Simple. The clients told me they were the best. So "we're the best" was part of the strategy for the ads I created for those clients. Regardless of their marketplace position in terms of sales, quality or innovation, these clients simply believed they were the best.

Just by claiming superiority, we'd make the phones ring or move product. That's what they wanted me to write. And the creative briefs basically called for a clever regurgitation of that position.

But inevitably, a strange thing happened once I wrote the ad. These clients realized they didn't want me to write that. Because they were afraid that their competitors, assumed to be inferior, might get upset when they're actually called inferior.

"Well, we still want to make the superiority claim, but without the chest-beating. And we really can't make a definitive superiority claim because it can't be substantiated. But we are better. So let's find a way to say 'we're great' without saying 'we're great.'"

I'll bet you've heard that from one of your clients, too.

Client-side marketing people live and breathe their product. That's the environment they're in. So I guess it's easy to drink the Kool-Aid and assume everybody in the world is just waiting for that product or service to change their lives. Clients are stubborn that way.

Conversely, advertising people live and breathe advertising, and often socialize with other ad people. We believe our unfettered vision for advertising will change the world. Ad people are stubborn that way, too. So it goes without saying that these two worlds often clash.

One of the worst assignments a creative team can take on is one where the client chooses simply to boast without any semblance of wit, intelligence, tongue-in-cheek humor. Because it's impossible to say anything meaningful. And such ads always ring hollow.

So how do you convince a client that simply claiming "we're the best" is not enough? In an era when consumers have better bullshit detectors than ever before, how can we sell a more relevant strategy? Can a client admit that his/her product is not the best, yet still make a convincing argument for someone to buy the product?

I'm still trying to figure out the answers to those questions, because I keep running into clients like this. They're everywhere. And they're breeding rapidly.

If you can help me solve these dilemmas, let me know. Thanks. You're the best.