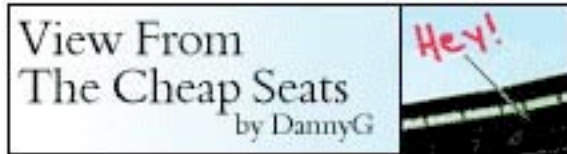


VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS



4.24.2003

In The Belly Of The Beast

What I learned by spending a few days at Talent Zoo

Three weeks ago, I decided to hand-deliver my column to the receiving desk on the 34th Floor of the Talent Zoo Tower. With a rare few days off, and being a little too old for spring break in South Padre Island, I asked if I could hang around a while. As an ad agency employee and sometime job seeker, I wanted to view life from the other side.

After signing a confidentiality agreement, as well as enduring a 20 minute interrogation under a bare light bulb (outsiders are treated with suspicion), I was given permission to observe the inner workings of the Talent Zoo empire.

I learned a lot. I'd like to share my observations with you.

There are a buttload of job seekers and not nearly enough jobs for all of them. Given the state of the economy, that really shouldn't come as a shock. But when you're actually confronted with a constant influx of emails, resumes and books, you see how overwhelming it can get, and how tough the competition for every position truly is.

The only resumes and books that really stand out are the great ones and the really shitty ones.

Being a naturally curious creative guy, I looked through a bunch of books. Most people fall somewhere in the middle between genius and hack. After flipping through 5 books in a row everything looks the same (and for all the non-creatives, all resumes look the same.) Any ads done before 1995 look very dated now. Nearly everyone has a spec campaign or two thrown in, and some are quite obviously spec. Sticking a book in a metal case won't make a difference if the ads suck. Dealing with PDF's, CD-ROMS and online portfolios is a royal pain in the ass. And by the way, there's no 3/4" machine at Talent Zoo, so I'm sure I missed a lot of good (and bad) TV spots.

Everyone thinks they're God's gift to advertising. Every job seeker claims to be hard-working, passionate, and dedicated. Every creative is conceptual, thinks outside the box and is never content with mediocrity. Job seekers love to pile on the positive attributes. Believing in yourself and your abilities is truly important, but listing those qualities on a resume doesn't make a lasting impression.

Everyone thinks they're perfect for every open job. People who are not qualified for a particular position apply anyway, thinking that a shot in the dark is better than no shot at all. These candidates are easy to spot because their name is constantly recycled, and they're just wasting everybody's time. I noticed one guy had applied for copywriter, art director, creative director, and a traffic position--and was not qualified for any of them.

Agencies take their sweet time making hiring decisions, and no amount of prodding from Talent Zoo speeds the process along. Calling every two hours won't help you get anywhere.

Everyone sends emails with grammatical mistakes. Even the copywriters. But some copywriters send books with grammatical mistakes and ads with greeked body copy, and nothing makes this copywriter cringe more than sophomore mistakes like those.

Nice people don't always finish first, but they stay at the top of the list.

Judging by the correspondence I sampled, most candidates are pleasant and polite, even if they don't get a job via Talent Zoo. However, some candidates are rude and full of attitude, and everyone at Talent Zoo knows who those candidates are. So play nicely, kids.

Not a bad education for a few days of lingering. The staff at Talent Zoo are truly good people who would love to help everyone find a great job, but the law of supply and demand says they can't. So keep that in mind. And don't send them any bribes--it still won't help you land a job any faster. Although a little chocolate never hurts.