

# VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS

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3.11.2003

## **Leaping to The Dark Side**

*Why aren't more ad accounts serviced in-house?*

I once worked on an account where, every week, a new rumor or thinly veiled threat floated around our agency, stating our client wanted to “pull the business” away.

We never lost the business, but the fear was always there, affecting everybody. And it's standard operating procedure in many agencies. Read Adweek or Ad Age, and you'll constantly see the news: Another day, another agency fired or another account in review.

I can't imagine other professional services face this turnover as much—corporations don't switch accounting firms or lawyers every 2 years to get a bigger tax refund or lawsuit judgment.

With a lack of trust in agency/client relationships, profitability margins of agencies getting ever thinner, and clients reviewing their accounts more and more frequently, problems seem to stay pervasive. It may just be that the traditional agency model doesn't satisfy the needs of many advertisers.

So why don't more companies set up in-house ad departments?

Many companies do have in-house ad departments—particularly retailers. But often times, these departments are for mostly fast-turnaround, unglamorous work.

Maybe these companies should consider a department not just for the newspaper inserts or signage—but for the whole shebang.

It strikes me as strange when I read about a client that has an in-house ad department, yet calls a review to parcel out the high-profile glory “branding” assignments. It sounds as if the company has no confidence in their own people, and I suppose if I were working in that kind of department I'd be pissed.

Setting up an advertising department that is capable of doing high-level creative work would take some effort. There seems to be a stigma for many ad people about the idea of working in-house at a corporation, the implication being they're not good enough to work at an agency. I believe it can work, though.

Would working in a corporate environment inhibit creativity? No more so than working in a bureaucratic ad agency run by fear. Could an in-house agency attract the highest level of talent? If there were sufficient enough high profile assignments, talent would flock there.

Given a little flexibility to be creative, and removing the strains common to so many agency/client conflicts, the results could be wonderful. Going in-house would eliminate the notion that agencies only look out for their own interests, not the client's. As long as companies don't perceive ad agencies as being valuable, they'll continue to look for alternatives to improve their marketing—be it product placement, branded content, PR or consulting companies.

The solution may be right in a client's own office.