

VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS



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The Enemies Down The Hall

Can't the various disciplines all just get along?

Even in the year 2002, many agencies keep people of different disciplines isolated from one another. While espousing "integrated communications," we have segregated agencies.

Maybe you've worked in a shop like that. I have.

I'd only been at the agency a week or two when an assignment came in to write headlines for a new campaign consisting of 15 ads or so. So I wrote a bunch of headlines and taped each one to the wall of my office. That way, I'd take a look, get some reaction from my co-workers, and get a sense of which headlines were the strongest. Perfectly normal, or so I thought.

Not at this shop. Before me, no one had ever publicly displayed ideas in their gestation stage like I did. I was treated like a sideshow freak. "You really need to decorate your office better," one AE smirked.

I'd stumbled into a nether-nether world where no one collaborated and ideas were not shared until it was time to actually present something. Everyone, in every discipline, keeps their cards close to their chest.

The distrust runs far and deep. Does your agency keep account service, media, and creative people separated in different parts of your office? Or on different floors? I suggest an agency structured so dysfunctionally runs like a prison. You know, where the white-collar criminals stay separated from child rapists.

Physical barriers become mental barriers. I've heard many creative directors say, "Well, if we don't do such-and-such, we'll look bad to account service." As if someone in the agency is keeping score. We couldn't even pitch rough ideas internally without fear of having it killed.

Bill Backer once said ideas need "care and feeding." Well, I suppose that means I've worked at the advertising equivalent of an abortion clinic.

The "us vs. them" mentality of account service and creative people still exists in many agencies across the country. Hell, at many places, the media people stay even more isolated than the rest of the agency. Terrible.

I've always believed that the many of the best creative executions have involved a unique media placement. Knowing when and where an ad will appear, and using that info to custom tailor a message, is a powerful tool.

Unfortunately, media people aren't involved in the creative process. And vice versa.

There's no law that says AE's can't write a headline or media people can't think about creative executions. There's no law that says a copywriter can't help write an account plan or a creative brief. Ideas can come from anywhere, and they can be improved by anyone.

We all have our respective jobs to do, and areas of expertise. Advertising, however, is a collaborative business. A business where no two products made are alike. In order to be successful, an agency needs to welcome an open free-flow of ideas. Let the bad ideas die on their merits, not because of fear, ego or politics.

Stop the infighting. Stop the isolation. Start working together on every project, from the beginning. I believe an ad agency can operate this way and still make money.

Besides, we all know who the real enemy is.

It's the client. Right?