

VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS



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Trump and Chumps

For a moment, advertising got a glimpse of reality

I'm sure by now you're familiar with the Donald Trump reality show train-wreck "The Apprentice." It began with 8 young men and 8 young women forming "corporations" to compete doing various business tasks.

In their second business assignment, the two groups competed to create spec ad campaigns for corporate jets. I believe they had a few days to complete it, and the use of some of Deutsch's New York office to help produce the concepts.

And with someone's "job" with Trump literally on the line, the two groups presented their concepts right to Donny Deutsch himself.

The ads the women created were primarily penis jokes aimed at men. The ads the men made used boring stock photo yuppie business imagery.

It is revealing that these campaigns reflect how tough smart advertising is to create, particularly with 8 bright minds (and egos to match) in the room.

But what scares me is that these Apprentice contestants are all supposedly successful, bright people who have a solid future in business.

In other words: they're our future clients.

Be afraid. Be very afraid.

To be fair, I know that a few days is not enough for any group of people to familiarize themselves with the nuances of good advertising and marketing.

But in spite of all the industry discussion of how jaded/cynical/skeptical most consumers are of advertising, the contestants on "The Apprentice" resorted to familiar clichés. And these were bright 20- and 30-something people—the very generation widely purported to be so jaded.

In many ways, resorting to clichéd thinking is what lots of clients do. What's familiar is safe. Since they pay the bills, clients tend to get their way.

I've seen many ad people (myself included) walk out of client meetings amazed at how seemingly unqualified some clients are to judge marketing concepts. But for many marketing managers and other client decision-makers, judging and approving ad concepts represents a tiny fraction of their time—their jobs are often more wide-ranging than we think. Nevertheless, the decisions they make about ads affect both the brand and the agency.

So how do our clients learn about great advertising? Can you actually train a client if they lack expertise, or is that idea too self-serving?

Colleges and MBA programs don't teach good real-world marketing practices to students. And on-the-job training is scant if any.

The ad industry has to find a way to educate clients and earn their trust. We have to assert that marketing creativity and profitability aren't mutually exclusive. And that the safe route isn't the best route, no matter what consultants and the bean counters think.

One thing's for certain:

If the next generation of clients is as ignorant of marketing as the contestants on "The Apprentice," well, for the ad industry, reality is going to be harsh indeed.