

Pearls of Wisdom



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I write again because, I guess, I am honour-bound to put a little positive flesh on the crumbling bones of my deprecating preachiness regarding the demise of JWT.

In my own humble way, perhaps I am obliged to prise open the oyster.

To begin, let me share my particular favourite and a spectacular thing accomplished by Thompson that advanced the

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art (and science) of advertising. Something you may not be aware of, brilliantly conceived, certainly game-changing, and developed in the London office. (so no bias there then? Ed.)

It's Account Planning.

Now today we all take account planning for granted, yeah? Well, it was not always that way. It was a brainwave of a chap at JWT Berkeley Square called Stephen King (God I loved 'The Shining'. Ed). No, not that one!

Sometime in the 1970s I believe, King observed that account execs were mainly masters of backslapping; they knew the best restaurants, the best girly bars, the best clubs in town. Many of these fellows were public school boys. They had almost inexhaustible expense accounts and kept the wheels of the client/agency relationship well-greased. 'Hooray Henrys' to a man - nice work if you can get it.

It was, and that was it!

But, when it came to effective briefing, assessing the best advertising needs of the advertiser, they neither knew what to do, nor do I suspect, cared. Our Stephen saw the need

to advance adverts, for someone to examine the needs of the consumer, to be a studier of the product, a studier of the market, a studier of the competition, a studier and commissioner of research (the best planners, like Little Stevie, had a research background), so that ultimately all this learning could be analysed to help them 'crack the brief'.

Hence, a completely new and separate function was brought, kicking and mewling into existence way back then by J. Walter Thompson. it was, tara! - the account planner.

Not fully content, Stevie also devised tools to help coalesce all this learning, most of which I touched on last time; 'The Buying Cycle', 'Brand Personality', 'A Scale of Advertising Effect' 'Stimulus and Response', to name just a few.

The end result being a brief crystalised down to be so tight, so concise and so on-point, with no waffle, no yetism and no shopping list of product claims or attributes; something so simple and strategically single-minded that the creative could almost write itself. No thrashing about, no worrying that the only direction that was given to a team

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was – “just throw some shit at the wall and see what sticks”, simply come up with something while the client and the account execs go to the nearest titty bar, and then come back and throw darts at it. (mix some metaphors why don't you? Ed).

Best of all, the advertiser was expected to sign-off on the brief before creative pen touched creative paper. In this way it became harder to question the campaign providing it was ‘on-brief’.

So there you have the actual origin of the account planner. It was JWT what done it.

Of course, in the immortal words of Michael Caine, “Not many people know that”. (Not true, smarty pants. Ed). Because it spread like wildfire, it was a succès d'estime. But, as with all great ideas, its origins got lost in the mists of time. While adopted by most all agencies, its actual application was, and probably still is, not at all consistent or, indeed, correct. Sometime it's a mere PR exercise; reduced to a sales aid of no real practical use, sos.

Stephen is probably rotating as we speak.

So there. Please remember

Thompson for the game changing contributions they made and rather than things insipidly sentimental.

As I write it occurs that there could be enough cool game changers for a series. Let me know and I'll see what I can do.

A brief would be nice.

I leave you with the pithy words of Steely Dan for all those doubters out there.

You wouldn't even know a diamond.

If you held it in your hand.

The things you think are precious.

I can't understand.

Donald Jay Fagen, Walter Carl Becker



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40 years, 12 as executive creative director and regional planner for JWT and 26 making TVCs. Retired some five years ago yet still, for some strange reason, he can't shut- up about advertising. Any feedback: [mail p.loosley@gmail.com](mailto:p.loosley@gmail.com) (please keep it brief).