

Account Executives:

Madison Avenue is full of masochists who unconsciously provoke rejection by their clients. I know brilliant men who have lost every account they have ever handled.

One of the most brilliant colleagues I ever had was black-balled by three clients in one year; the experience hurt him so badly that he left the agency business for ever. If you are too thin-skinned to survive this hazard, you should not become an account executive in an advertising agency.

Art Direction:

Once upon a time I was riding on the top of a First Avenue bus, when I heard a mythical housewife say to another, "Molly, my dear, I would have bought that new brand of toilet soap if only they hadn't set the body copy in ten point Garamond." Don't you believe it. What really decides consumers to buy or not to buy is the content of your advertising, not its form.

H.L. Mencken once said that nobody ever went broke underestimating the taste of the American public. That is not true. I have come to believe that it pays to make all your layouts project a feeling of good taste, provided that you do it unobtrusively. An ugly layout suggests an ugly product. There are very few products which do not benefit from being given a first class ticket through life.

Brand Image:

Every advertisement must contribute to the complex symbol which is the brand image.

Most manufacturers are reluctant to accept any limitation on the image of their brand. They want it to be all things to all people. They want their brand to be a male brand and a female brand. An upper class brand and a plebeian brand. They generally end up with a brand that has no personality of any kind, a wishy washy neuter. No capon ever rules the roost.

It takes uncommon guts to stick to one style in the face of all the pressures to "come up with something new" every six months. It is tragically easy to be stampeded into change. But golden rewards await the advertiser who has the brains to create a coherent image, and the stability to stick with it over a long period.



Client Management:

I always use my clients' products. This is not toadyism but elementary good manners.

Don't expect your agency to pay for all the dry holes they drill on your behalf.

The best way to get new accounts is to create for our present clients the kind of advertising that will attract prospective clients. We do not have new business departments in our offices. No first class man will take the job; no second class man can do it effectively.

Consumers:

You aren't advertising to a standing army; you are advertising to a moving parade. Three million consumers get married every year. The advertisement which sold a refrigerator to those who got married last year will probably be just as successful with those who'll get married next year. An advertisement is just like a radar sweep, constantly hunting new prospects as they come into the market. Get a good radar and keep it sweeping.

The consumer isn't a moron; she is your wife. You insult her intelligence if you assume that a mere slogan and a few vapid adjectives will persuade her to buy anything. She wants all the information you can give her.

Copywriting:

It is a mistake to use highfalutin language when you advertise to uneducated people. I once used the word OBSOLETE in a headline, only to discover that 33% of housewives had no idea of what it meant. In another headline, I used the word INEFFABLE, only to discover that I didn't know what it meant myself.

A lot of advertisements and television commercials look like minutes of a committee meeting, and that is what they are. Advertising seems to sell most when it is written by a solitary individual. He must study the product, the research and the precedents. Then he must shut the door of his office and write the advertisements.

Resist the temptation to write the kind of copy which wins awards. I am always gratified when I win an award, but most of the campaigns which produce results never win awards because they don't draw attention to themselves.



Inspiration:

Unless your advertising is built on a BIG IDEA it will pass like a ship in the night.

Encourage innovation. Change is our lifeblood, stagnation our death knell.

Many of the greatest creations of man have been inspired by the desire to make money. When George Frederick Handel was on his beam ends, he shut himself up for twenty-one days and emerged with the complete score of "Messiah" - and hit the jackpot. Few of the themes of Messiah were original; Handel dredged them up from his unconscious, where they have been stored since he heard them in other composers' work, or since he had composed them for his own forgotten operas.

Senior men have no monopoly on great ideas. Nor do creative people. Some of the best ideas come from account executives, researchers and others. Encourage this; you need all the ideas you can get.

Integrity:

I abhor advertising that is blatant, dull, or dishonest. Agencies which transgress this principle are not widely respected.

Never write an advertisement which you wouldn't want your own family to read. You wouldn't tell lies to your own wife. Don't tell them to mine.

In the best establishments, promises are always kept, whatever it may cost in agony and overtime.

The pursuit of excellence is less profitable than the pursuit of bigness, but it can be more satisfying.

Jingles:

Candor compels me to admit that I have no conclusive research to support my view that jingles are less persuasive than the spoken word. It is based on the difficulty I always experience in hearing the words in jingles, and on my experience as a door-to-door salesman; I never sang to my prospects. The advertisers who believe in the selling power of jingles have never had to sell anything.

Next time you decide to have the sales pitch sung in a television or radio commercial, play the song to half-a-dozen people who know nothing about the product. Then ask them what it said.



Discipline:

Shakespeare wrote his sonnets within a strict discipline, fourteen lines of iambic pentameter rhyming in three quatrains and a couplet. Were his sonnets dull? Mozart wrote sonatas within an equally rigid discipline - exposition, development, and recapitulation. Were they dull?

Firing Practices:

To keep your ship moving through the water at maximum efficiency, you have to keep scraping the barnacles off its bottom. It is rare for a department head to recommend the abolition of a job, or even the elimination of a man; the pressure from below is always for adding. If the initiative for barnacle-scraping does not come from management, barnacles will never be scraped.

It is the inescapable duty of management to fire incompetent people.

Hard Work:

I figure that my staff will be less reluctant to work overtime if I work longer hours than they do.

I believe in the Scottish proverb: "Hard work never killed a man." Men die of boredom, psychological conflict and disease. They do not die of hard work.

Agencies which frequently work nights and weekends are more stimulating, more successful - and more profitable. A tight ship is a happy ship - provided it is an informal ship.

Hiring Practices:

If you always hire people who are smaller than you are, we shall become a company of dwarfs. If, on the other hand, you always hire people who are bigger than you are, we shall become a company of giants.

If you ever find a man who is better than you are - hire him. If necessary, pay him more than you pay yourself.

In most agencies, account executives outnumber the copywriters two to one. If you were a dairy farmer, would you employ twice as many milkers as you had cows?

Layouts:

It has been found that the less an advertisement looks like an advertisement, and the more it looks like an editorial, the more readers stop, look and read. Therefore, study the graphics used by editors and imitate them. Study the graphics used in advertisements, and avoid them.

Most readers look at the photograph first. If you put it in the middle of the page, the reader will start by looking in the middle. Then her eye must go up to read the headline; this doesn't work, because people have a habit of scanning downwards. However, suppose a few readers do read the headline after seeing the photograph below it. After that, you require them to jump down past the photograph which they have already seen. Not bloody likely.

Leadership:

Do not summon people to your office - it frightens them. Instead go to see them in their offices. This makes you visible throughout the agency. A Chairman who never wanders about his agency becomes a hermit, out of touch with his staff.

Our offices must always be headed by the kind of men who command respect. Not phonies, zeros or bastards.

Mental Health:

The psychiatrists say that everybody should have a hobby. The hobby I recommend is advertising.

People:

I admire people with gentle manners who treat other people as human beings. I abhor quarrelsome people. I abhor people who wage paper-warfare.

I despise toadies who suck up to their bosses; they are generally the same people who bully their subordinates.

Few of the great creators have bland personalities. They are cantankerous egotists, the kind of men who are unwelcome in the modern corporation.

Positioning:

The most important decision is how to position your product.

A lot of successful advertising was created before POSITIONING was invented. And a lot of today's campaigns are based on optimum positioning but are totally ineffective - because they are dull, or badly constructed, or ineptly written. If nobody reads your advertisement or looks at your commercial, it doesn't do you much good to have the right positioning.

The Power of Advertising:

I once found myself conspiring with a British Cabinet Minister as to how we might persuade Her Majesty's Treasury to cough up more money for the British Travel advertising in America. Said he, "Why does any American in his senses spend his vacation in the cold damp of an English summer when he could equally well bask under Italian skies? I can only suppose that your advertising is the answer." Damn right.

The mail-order advertiser has no retailers to shrink and expand their inventories, to push his product or to hide it under the counter. He must rely on his advertisements to do the entire selling job. Either the reader clips the coupon or he doesn't. A few days after his advertisement appears, the mail-order writer knows whether it is profitable or not. For twenty-seven years I have kept my eyes riveted on what mail-order advertisers do in their advertisements.

Research:

The most important word in the vocabulary of advertising is TEST.

Test your promise. Test your media. Test your headlines and your illustrations. Test the size of your advertisements. Test your frequency. Test your level of expenditure. Test your commercials. Never stop testing, and your advertising will never stop improving.

Specialization:

I don't believe in this specialisation. Who said that there's one breed of cat which is an account executive, and then there are the creative people - and they are quite different? This has been perpetuated by both sides for years. It's nonsense.

Teamwork:

Nowadays it is the fashion to pretend that no single individual is ever responsible for a successful advertising campaign. This emphasis on "teamwork" is bunkum - a conspiracy of the mediocre majority.

Television Commercials:

I have found that it is easier to double the selling power of a commercial than to double the audience of a programme. This may come as news to the Hollywood hidalgos who produce programmes, and look down their noses at us obscure copywriters who write the commercials.

Dr. Gallup reports that if you say something which you don't also illustrate, the viewer immediately forgets it. I conclude that if you don't show it there is no point in saying it. Try running your commercial with the sound turned off; if it doesn't tell without sound, it is useless.

Research has shown that commercials which open with a dramatic visual hold their audience better than commercials which don't. If you are advertising a fire-extinguisher, open with the fire.

The Value of Learning:

Supposing you've got an acute appendicitis. You've got to be operated on tonight. Would you like to have a surgeon who's read some books of anatomy and knows how to do that operation - or would you prefer to have a surgeon who refused to read all books about anatomy and relied on his own instinct? Why should a manufacturer bet his money - perhaps the future of his company - on your instinct?

I can't stand callow amateurs who aren't sufficiently interested in the craft of advertising to assume the posture of students.

Training should not be confined to trainees. It should be a continuous process, and should include the entire professional staff of the agency. The more our people learn, the more useful they can be to our clients.