

Central Texas Ad League's Summer Seminars
*"Winning, Wacky Ways to Kick Start Creativity and How Best to Sell Ideas That Work . . .
Or Whatever!"*
Presented by: Joe Fournet August 17, 2007

Thank you and welcome. It's nice to see such a wonderful and interested group gather here on a Friday morning to hear about "what happens in Killeen, stays in Killeen." Hopefully, though, you'll be able to bring back to your corner of the world some tidbits and techniques to help enhance your creativity and tweak some of the ways you go about selling ideas.

We're going to have some play time with some fast thinking, explore an unusual way to find that sometimes elusive idea, realize that being "crazy" is not a bad thing, and, yes, you'll get to play with crayons!

First, some thoughts on creativity . . .

Communication and image go hand-in-hand when it comes to appealing to the masses in a persuasive way. Creativity is the spark. When times are robust and especially when they are in the dust, the simplest idea, creatively executed to reveal its marketability, is what's needed to differentiate.

Ever wondered when that next great idea is going to hit you? Regardless of what aspect of the creative process involves you, creativity is key; it's a state of mind. And when the mind is having fun, creativity is boundless. ☺

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What is creativity? Creativity occurs when people perceive there are no limits; it's the ability to see, feel, touch, think and imagine what one has not seen, felt, touched, thought or imagined before; it's solving a communications or marketing problem in order to stimulate demand.

My favorite definition is "intelligence having fun." It doesn't matter whether you're an artist, wordsmith, media planner, financial planner, sales guru or receptionist. Each one of us represents a different perspective, a different creative slant. We're talking thought and mind power today; the power of ideas, and, again, creativity is the spark.

Creativity needs to become more synonymous with that often under-rated four-letter word,
"FUN!"

Ideas foster creativity and vice versa. When imagination is thrown in, ideas can be nourished through the creative process so they'll resonate with personality.

But, in order to innovate and create, move beyond the conventional. Don't ever underestimate the power of the mind or your imagination.

Don't ever be afraid to ask, " Why, Why not or What if . . .?".

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Some “winning and wacky ways to kick-start creativity” . . .

Creativity Survival Kit – Get any sort of container (old, cleaned out paint can is great) in which you place whatever makes you FEEL creative and THINK creatively. A music CD, crayon, gum, Post-it Notes (for that next, great idea) are all wonderful examples. If you're thinking this is just silly, well you're absolutely right. In this industry, silly is sometimes serious business.

Thinking at Warp Speed – Generating ideas at breakneck speed is a great way to capture ideas on Post-it Notes (one per note) in answering a specific question to solve a problem. You don't have time to analyze and judge and, as such, you circumvent fear (of a bad idea).

Okay, play time!

Get into teams of 5 with the folks near you. Use the Post-it notes near you to generate one idea per Post-it (a word or simple phrase).

As you begin to generate several Post-its, stream them together and stick on the wall nearest you or organize in some way.

Address this challenge: What would comprise the perfect creative seminar?

Attempt twenty ideas in five minutes. If you get more than 20, that's fine.

Remember, don't think too hard. You're just generating ideas.

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Now, what do you do with these ideas?

Drill Down Technique – How do you know when you've hit THE idea? There's more than one approach. We're going to practice one that may not be widely used. Again, this is a timed exercise. Stay in your groups.

Discuss and then Choose what you consider to be the best five ideas.

You only have 3 minutes.

OK, got your 5 best ideas?

ELIMINATE THEM.

Now, choose five more (2 minutes)

ELIMINATE THEM

Choose five more (2 minutes)

ELIMINATE THEM

Now you have five left. (2 minutes)

ELIMINATE 3

Of the 2 remaining, ELIMINATE 1 (1 minute)

Maybe this **last idea** is the best one, or one you may not have paid much attention.

Now that we've generated some ideas . . .

How do you sell ideas that work?

1.) Not surprisingly, apply ample doses of creativity

**2.) Listen. Listen. Listen.
To your clients, colleagues, everyone and everything.**

3.) Refer to #s 1 and 2.

Listen, listen, listen! Be aware of your surroundings and learn what your clients want and discover what they need. How do you do that? Start by asking probing questions beyond what is normally asked.

Nothing is out of bounds or closed to discussion until someone says it is. Then, ask why. Eventually, you'll discover new and different points of view.

You're also discovering advertising's new role: Provoke conversation. Think of it as a new mindset, of being like an investigative reporter. You're constantly refining the questions, especially when you use a few of the last words spoken in the previous answer. The more you get the client to converse, the better informational foundation you lay for idea generation.

Provoking conversation to kick-start some ideas is one perspective. Once ideas develop into a form of advertising, another type of conversation takes place. The more innovative the idea, the more interesting the conversation.

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An idea can come from anywhere and anyone. Content is king and even though how it's conveyed is important, the idea should be media and discipline neutral. Otherwise, you limit yourself. It's what we do with the idea that matters. Clients only care about how we're going to make it work and be relevant.

In a recent interview with Advertising Age, the legendary Lee Clow had this to say about the importance of ideas: *"It's been a little bit of dragging traditional creative people kicking and screaming into the notion that we're going to do complete media expressions for the brands we work for, and we aren't going to start with TV; we're going to start with ideas.*

Creative people are 50% ego and 50% insecurity. They need to constantly be told they're good and they're loved. And nobody's figured out a way to celebrate the people who do interesting, multimedia accomplishments on behalf of brands. Sometimes it ends up being looked at as just kind of integrated marketing, where everything uses the same typeface and the same color. And sometimes it's viewed as, that's the interactive guy's job, and I'll do the main media. ..."

At a management conference of the American Association of Advertising Agencies, several speakers said agencies must still deliver what clients need most: *creative solutions to business problems*. While this is nothing new, today's environment seems to focus on more than just advertising. We need to be creative business thinkers as well as storytellers. We should think of ourselves as the designated "devil's advocate," the trusted resource with a different perspective.

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Figure out what needs to be said and how it might be told. Sales folks and account people play integral roles in soliciting that type of information from the client. As ideas are developed, make sure their essence is refined. In other words, make sure your ideas are clear and that you can explain their basic value in about 20 seconds. This makes it easier for the idea to gain acceptance.

SOME EXAMPLES OF GOOD IDEAS AND WONDERFUL EXECUTION

According to Advertising Age, the future for the best marketers will be discipline-and media-agnostic. Nike Plus epitomizes the increasing convergence of ideas and utility. It's a user-friendly product because it enhances the experience of running by allowing runners to measure and compare performances over time and with others by using their iPod to sync with the sensor inside the shoe. But it's also a smart marketing tool to drive sales of Nike running shoes and apparel -- much as Swiffer created the need to buy Swiffer pads and Gillette razors created the need to buy expensive blades.

The Dove viral sensation "Evolution" won this year's Cannes' Grand Prize and was voted as best creative idea for 2006. The short film shows the painstaking and unglamorous steps required to turn a woman into a billboard-ready babe, a process, which in effect, sucks the "real beauty" out of an already naturally attractive person.

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Said Bob Scarpelli, Cannes' jury president for Film and Press Lions and CCO at DDB worldwide, "It's a big idea, beautiful execution and a powerful story for Dove to tell."

AdAge's Jonah Bloom recently said he feels awards shows like Cannes should have the final and grandest prix of all going to the "best and biggest creative business idea" -- not to an ad that fits in a particular media channel.

IN CONTRAST, EXAMPLES OF "VERY QUESTIONABLE" IDEAS

In the "what were they thinking" category:

Sorry boys and girls, I know it's a sensitive subject . . . but . . . Maxipads (think it was Stayfree), their "Have a Happy Period" campaign. "Happy Period" -- talk about an oxymoron. I understand the decision to go forward with this was made by mostly, if not all, male product managers.

Where the heck were the female communications advisors?!

In the "falling flat" category:

Coca Cola -- remember the New Coke (pretty forgettable)? Now we have Diet Coke Plus, with vitamins and minerals no less! However, one can only furnish 25% of your daily value for niacin and vitamins B6 and B12, and 15% of daily value for zinc and magnesium. Think I'll stick with 1-a-Day.

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EXERCISE TIME AGAIN

Awake the Artist Within – If you have a blank sheet of paper to collect your thoughts on a problem or question – but you could only use a crayon (more than one is okay) – how different would your thought process be; how would you feel using the crayons rather than a pen, pencil or –gasp—typing on a computer? Well, let's find out.

Explore ways to make your office environment more fun.

Timed exercise (5 minutes?).

How did everybody feel? Did you think any differently?

Jolly Green Giant-sized Yellow Wallpaper – Giant Post-it Notes are great for brainstorming. Ideas, words, thoughts, sketches, silly stuff, serious stuff, whatever, can all be included. As you finish with one, post it on the wall. Don't take it down. Let them become a designated "Idea Wall" in your office or some place you can easily refer to them.

Does all this sound a bit crazy? Do ya feel a bit crazy in this business?

Those of us in the advertising business often joke about being a bit crazy in order to do what we do. Did you know that irrelevance can make you mad? Several years ago Harvard University did a study on the relationship between creativity and madness. Ignoring what seems irrelevant to your immediate needs may be good for your mental health but bad for creativity.

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Focusing on every sight, sound, and thought that enters your mind can drive a person crazy. It interferes with a busy person's efforts to sleep. Psychologists have a term for ignoring the irrelevant; they call it "latent inhibition."

A team of them at Harvard has discovered that students who score low in this seemingly vital trait are much more likely to be creative achievers than those who excel in putting things out of their minds.

"Scientists have wondered for a long time why madness and creativity seem linked, particularly in artists, musicians, and writers," notes Shelley Carson, a Harvard psychologist.

"Getting swamped by new information that you have difficulty handling may predispose you to a mental disorder," Carson says. "But if you have high intelligence and a good working memory, you are more likely to be able to combine bits of new information in creative ways." Studies suggest that a good working memory and the capacity to keep in mind many things at once, can protect creative people from going nuts.

Another possibility goes to the different stages of paying more attention to what is around you. First there's insight, where creative ideas form and which may be enhanced by a buzz of unrelated stimuli. Then comes evaluation and editing, which require focus and concentration.

Carson notes, "Highly creative people in our studies showed the same latent inhibition patterns

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found in other studies of schizophrenics. “ (*I'm not sure how comforting that's meant to be.*)

"Both madness and creativity must involve many different genes," Carson points out. "It's not impossible that the two share some of these genes. It's my hope that future research into this and other areas will help us progress toward silencing the demons of mental disorders that often coexist with the traits of creativity."

Until then, the situation is cogently expressed by this old joke:

A man is driving past a mental hospital when one of the wheels falls off his car. He stops and recovers the wheel but can't find the lug nuts to secure it back in place. Just then he notices a man sitting on the curb carefully removing small pebbles from the grass and piling them neatly on the sidewalk.

"What am I going to do?" the man asks aloud. The fellow piling the pebbles looks up, and says, "Take one of the lug nuts from each of the other wheels and use them to put the wheel back on."

The driver is amazed. "Wow!" he exclaims. "What a brilliant idea. What are you doing in a place like this?" he asks, nodding toward the mental institution.

"Well," the man answers, "I'm crazy, not stupid."

"That's exactly what our research is about," Carson comments. "It shows that, to be creative, you can be bright and crazy, but not stupid."

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WRAPPING UP

Creativity really shines when a focused and simple message is conveyed in a visually and mentally stimulating form that gets results. There is no finer feeling than when the creative idea and execution kick butt!

However, a renewed effort into and education as to how to attain a higher caliber, smarter level of creativity must preoccupy our community and our industry. Clients must be willing to trust their creative consultants – ad agencies, design shops, freelancers, printers; yet, we should demonstrate through professionalism and marketing savvy why this trust is well earned. And folks, it does have to be earned.

We lose respect for our “dearly-loved” creative product when the creative is too cute, too complex or just plain dumb. There is absolutely no excuse for presenting creative that makes no sense or doesn't follow or illustrate the marketing strategy behind it. We must stand firm in our commitment to convey the message as straight-forward and interesting as possible.

In fact, if you want to generate interest, you need to be interesting. Clients are hungry for more innovative marketing ideas. The agencies that are adding value are those that can fuse together an amazing community of talent both inside and outside their agency. True innovation springs from the collision of different experiences and perspectives.

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**Regardless of what you do or how you do it, remember: Trying to satisfy everybody never
got anybody anywhere.**

We must convey the message as straightforward and innovative as possible. The marketing strategy behind it must be clear, concise and on target. We're the experts and we need to make sure the client feels comfortable with that.

In the AdAge interview, Lee Clow had this to say on taking risks: *"So it comes with being daring that you're going to screw up. But I'd rather apologize than to be so timid as to not try and do anything smart or brave."*

Will there be mistakes made? Sure. According to Scott Adams in The Dilbert Principle, *"Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep."*

When you have a media-neutral idea, you have no boundaries on the canvass.

And your wacky creative ideas may just be easier to sell.

In my appreciation of you being here,

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allow me a somewhat silly, but nevertheless, sincere toast:

May your ideas be stellar,

May your bad ones be kept in the cellar,

May your ads be true,

May your skies stay blue, and

May your Addys all be gold.

Thank you very much!!

Feel free to submit comments and questions to the address below.

