

Chapter XII - Advertising Education in the Years to Come

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Predicting the future is largely an exercise in futility. Sextus Julius Frontinus, Roman Governor of Britannia in the first century A.D., illustrated this folly with his declaration, “Inventions reached their limit long ago, and I see no hope for further development.” In 1946 the president of 20th Century Fox predicted, “Television won't be able to hold on to any market it captures after the first six months. People will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night.” And around that same time the chairman of IBM stated flatly, “I think there is a world market for about five computers.”¹ The twists and turns of social and scientific progress continue to confound all attempts at soothsaying. An accurate foretelling of the road ahead in ad education, then, would be more luck than prescience. With that rather enormous qualification, we will nonetheless attempt to draw a vague outline of what might be expected, based on the trends evident in industry as well as in university programs concerned with training students to enter fields associated with marketing communication.

Prior Attempts at Crystal Ball Gazing

In 1965, Ross looked at the state and trajectory of advertising education, anticipating where the field would be ten years later.² He began by reporting survey results identifying “current” problems of that time, such as the lack of financial support, the lack of cooperation between journalism and marketing programs, the need for better faculty, and the need for better students. He next reported those respondents’ ideas about how ad education would look in 1975. Their predictions focused on issues like where advertising would be housed academically, the number of advertising departments that

would exist, and the number of graduate courses that would be offered. Overall, they expected a growth in major programs and separate advertising departments, mostly situated in journalism, along with a concomitant growth in graduate education.

Nearly 25 years later, in 1989, Ross looked back at those predictions and found them largely borne out.³ The number of undergraduate programs increased from 77 to 110 during that quarter century, and most of those programs were indeed in journalism/mass communication (98) rather than in marketing (11). Graduate programs had expanded somewhat, too, from 49 to 58. Ross then reported a new survey, much like the one used years earlier. Most respondents predicted a continued increase in the numbers of students, with concurrent growth in the numbers of women and minorities. And, optimistically, they foresaw an improvement in the quality of students. The number of advertising jobs, and the number of faculty, both were expected to grow. The most pessimistic prediction was an expected stagnation in the financial support from their schools, though some expected expanded support from industry.

Most of these predictions, such as the quality of students and the overall financial support, are difficult to assess today. And while the Internet boom of the late 1990s almost certainly led to a wealth of employment opportunities for students, the relative collapse of that industry in the first few years of the new millennium saw those jobs evaporate. Consequently, whether there was a net increase in advertising jobs is uncertain.

But at the same time, advertising programs continued to grow, as expected. In 1989, there were 6,956 undergraduate students who graduated from advertising programs in the U.S.⁴, while in 2004 that number had grown to 8,374.⁵ And graduate programs likewise continued to expand, from 403 master's and Ph.D. students to 681.⁶ Likewise, fulltime faculty rose from 382 to 603.⁷ It appears that, in large part, the predictions were fairly accurate.

In Spring 2000, advertising faculty members at The University of Texas published their thoughts about the future of advertising education.⁸ These educators covered a vast range of topics, all of which continue to be relevant. Among other things, they noted that the Internet has accelerated the rate at which change occurs in the industry, which consequently should affect the speed of evolution within the academy. They also recognized changes within

the advertising profession that would have implications for the education process, as well as increased pressures caused by limited funding. Problems were identified, including departmental jealousies, outdated accreditation standards, inadequate relationships with industry, lack of focus in graduate programs, and curricular over-emphasis on agencies, as opposed to other advertising employers.

Their view of the future was less a prediction than a proposal for reforming ad education to deal with these changing realities. They argued the necessity of strengthening ties with practitioners, and they also made several curricular suggestions, including increased emphasis on ethics, better integrating “creativity” and creative thinking into all ad courses, reconceptualizing media planning, and making account planning a central theme for all programs. It is too early to tell whether other programs have taken, or will take, the road proposed by this group of faculty.

Although the very nature of education would seem to dictate that those engaged in its dissemination must continuously look to the future, these few examples represent the bulk of written attempts to envision the next step in advertising education. Rather than present a poll of faculty expectations or a proposal of what should be, what follows is something not generally found in the ad ed literature: unbridled opinions about the future, pure and simple. The year depicted in this crystal ball is 2016.

Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall...

Reflecting the Industry

The way we teach advertising is, and should be, a reflection of the industry it serves. Advertising is about change, so it should be no surprise to see the advertising profession undergoing continuous evolution, and even an occasional revolution. The creative dimension of advertisements must stay in front of aesthetic trends in society, media planning must always be where consumers seek information, strategic or account planning must follow lifestyle and cultural developments, etc. Societal change is endless, and so must be the advertising that appeals to it. In turn, training those interested in this field dictates educators either follow or lead those rapid course adjustments.

This is confounded by the fact that we are living in a time of incredible technological innovation, much of which has direct bearing on the fields of communication. The Internet, cellular telephones, personal digital assistants, global positioning systems, satellite radio, instant messaging, TiVo, Bluetooth, WIFI, digital photography, Java, mp3, and more, have introduced major opportunities and implications for the advertising industry *just since the 1989 predictions* presented by Ross. More is in the pipeline. Any university advertising program that fails to adapt will become hopelessly antiquated.

It is possible to overestimate this need for change, however. Some aspects of advertising are fixed in stone. Strategic thinking skills, effective communication techniques, and understanding the consumer always have been and will be needed in this discipline. Those parts of the educational process need not sway with the changing winds. Indeed, any program that does not cling tightly to those core elements of ad education will find itself on a deadend trail.

Prediction:

Some programs will not adapt, and some will abandon their core. Both eventually will wither and die.

Growth, Breadth, and Specialization

Whether or not advertising programs will continue to expand over the next decade or two depends on how one chooses to define “advertising.” For example, in recent years some programs have modified their names to include terms like “Integrated Marketing Communications” (IMC) or even “Integrated Communications.” The reality is that traditional advertising in recent years has lost ground to an expanding reliance by industry on other forms of marketing communication.⁹ This is confounded by the increasingly difficult task of drawing lines between what is and is not “advertising.”¹⁰ While academics often define that word quite narrowly, distinguishing it from closely related concepts like direct marketing, sales promotion, and public relations, consumers typically group all promotional methods under the rubric of “advertising.”¹¹ The implication is that whether or not the IMC terminology is adopted, programs must either embrace a broader, more inclusive, view of advertising or face being marginalized.

The danger in taking such a wide perspective is that it requires more topics and more skills be taught. This, in turn, demands more resources. Programs already stretched to the breaking point trying to teach print and broadcast advertising can extend their reach to other marketing communications only by trimming their traditional course or content offerings. At that point an entire program becomes little more than a survey course, an industry overview, providing little or no depth. Educators have three choices: (1) create bigger and more demanding programs that require more hours of study, (2) teach the basics and rely on most of the detail to be learned on the job, or (3) specialize.

Prediction:

More and more advertising programs will profess to include marketing communications of all types within their curriculum. The smallest of those will struggle with a shortage of faculty, resources, and credit hours. However, some small programs will recognize the benefit of specializing, whether in a specific medium (e.g., Internet), technique (e.g., direct marketing), or function (e.g., media). They, in turn, will flourish.

Clutter and Cacophony

Today we have more information at our fingertips than ever before in history. There are more people on the planet, with more education than ever in history, with a wider range of causes than ever, doing more research to generate more knowledge, and we are storing more of that acquired knowledge than ever before. We are buried in information. We also have freer access to that information than any of our ancestors enjoyed. We have digital databases and the ability to access repositories of information in all corners of the world, often from our desktop.

A consumer trying to learn about a product need only log onto the Internet and type a command into a search engine to find facts, figures, and opinions from a wide variety of sources. Of course, sometimes the information we want may be in the 7th listing on the 27th page generated by that search engine. Or we may have typed in the wrong word or phrase for the search. Sometimes finding what we need is akin to seeking the proverbial needle in a mammoth haystack.

Simultaneously, it is increasingly difficult for an advertiser to break through all the clutter to reach that consumer. Everyone is being bombarded with messages effectively screaming for attention. Spam and pop-up windows on the Internet, piles of unsolicited flyers in the mailbox, telemarketers and “junk” fax, ads above and even in urinals, and so much more, all teaching consumers to either feel overwhelmed or tune out this noise. Advertisers feel the need to scream just that much louder.

On top of that, American consumers today do not share a single culture in the way they did, to a large extent, a generation ago. Forty or fifty years ago most children grew up watching the same television shows, because there was such a limited selection. They read the same comic books for the same reason. They were all familiar with Beaver and Captain Kirk and Superman. There was a universality to their experiences that made them speak the same language, draw from the same body of knowledge and experience. But that variety has since expanded exponentially. Our experiences are diverging to an extent never seen in this country. Advertisers can no longer speak with a single “language” and be understood by nearly everyone. So even if they are heard by consumers, they may not be understood by, or resonate with, many.

As a result of these changes, mass advertising is becoming less massy and more messy. We no longer can hope to reach enormous audiences with a single message, we must reach niche interests with tailored messages. We must better understand our consumers, and find better and more efficient ways to reach them. The implications are many, but clearly the direct marketing industry is the leader in highly targeted messaging. For decades that industry has collected and used a wealth of data on individual consumers, with database management becoming the foundation of that entire field. These same skills quickly proved their value in Internet advertising, as well, since this medium provided a perfect platform for both gathering and applying consumer data for promotional purposes. And more traditional forms of advertising, too, have begun to take advantage of database management, e.g., selective binding in magazines.

Predictions:

(1) Programs will need to add database mining to their core offerings, teaching students how to make sense of and apply the information we can gather about consumers. (2) Direct marketing,

with its well-developed practices and opportunities in this area, will become a far more common part of these university programs. (3) Account planning, which is all about understanding the consumer, also will become an integral part of most advertising programs.

Media

Life was simple growing up in a town with one city newspaper and three or four television stations. Life has changed. In that community of yesteryear it was possible to pull high school graduates off the street and hire them to do media planning. They could be trained on the job. Life has changed. The sheer complexity of the media environment today, with hundreds of television stations, national newspapers, online access to newspapers all over the world, targeted websites, and thousands of other options for placing an advertising message, makes media planning one of the most complicated aspects of the profession today.

And this specialty continues to undergo tremendous changes. Portable media, like cell phones and wireless PDAs, are adding whole new dimensions to what has been possible in the past. Real time measurement of media is a new reality in some cases. Moore's law, which originally stated that the number of components on an integrated circuit at a given price tend to double every year¹², has come to mean that the speed of computer processors tends to double about every 18 months.¹³ This same principle can be applied to media planning, since the complexity of technology used for delivering ad messages seem to follow a very similar growth pattern. And the computer programs to help planners also are gaining complexity.

No longer can media planning be considered unskilled labor. It is highly technical, demanding immense knowledge and creativity. As agencies try to truly integrate all of their marketing communication plans, this too will add to the factors contributing to an effective media plan. The ads, the press releases, the sales promotions, and so forth, must all be coordinated in pursuit of the gestalt. Unfortunately, most universities offer only a single course in media planning. If these programs are to remain valuable to industry, one class is not enough.

Predictions:

Media planning will begin to take a more integrated approach, encompassing more than traditional advertising methods, and become even more important and sophisticated than it is today. More programs will begin to recognize this need and make it a centerpiece of their curriculum, creating an expanded offering of courses related to media planning, buying, and selling.

Globalization

Over the past three decades China has moved slowly from a closed communist society to one with an emerging system of private ownership and capitalism.¹⁴ Russia, too, has opened its doors to a, still somewhat restricted, free market economy.¹⁵ Obviously, the same thing is occurring in Iraq.¹⁶ Free trade is on the rise, coincident with the rise of an Internet-driven international marketplace. The Internet has been open to commerce for only about a decade and a half¹⁷, but today virtually any consumer can get on a computer and shop in other countries, ordering products that are delivered to their door within a week or two. When the mom-and-pop store down the street spends a few dollars a month to maintain a virtual store on the World Wide Web, they suddenly become a global business.

No longer can advertisers take the myopic approach of thinking just in terms of local, or even American, buyers. By extension, this means neither can our students fail to consider the multinational and multicultural implications of their work product. Globalization, though, is not a single course. Advertising programs must do more to integrate these considerations into many, if not all, of their courses. Students must be sensitive to the different laws, different languages, different cultures, and different wants and needs of such a diverse range of potential customers. They must understand, for example, that the media planning tools that are so familiar in the United States do not even exist for many of those markets, and that freedom of speech is an unfamiliar concept in parts of the world. And they must recognize the most fundamental implications, such as the fact that competition may come from anywhere on the globe. Failure to incorporate this aspect of modern advertising into an ad education program, quite simply, will lead to poorly prepared graduates.

Prediction:

Almost no course within the advertising curriculum of top programs will fail to discuss advertising's global dimensions, and some programs will even have students preparing campaigns designed for an international audience.

New Forms of Advertising Programs

In 2004, the Wieden & Kennedy agency created its own advertising school, called 12.¹⁸ At about the same time the Crispin Porter + Bogusky agency partnered with the Miami Ad School, changing the name to CP+B Miami Ad School.¹⁹ Then, of course, there is the looming specter of e-degrees. By 2001, there already were 600 marketing courses available online, according to a report in *U.S. News & World Report*.²⁰ There is little doubt that online advertising degrees soon will be offered, if not yet available. The convenience of being able to pursue a degree without leaving home or quitting a job simply is too seductive for many potential students, and market demand inevitably will lead to such programs.

The methods of delivering advertising education are changing, and traditional programs are starting to face new competition. The quality of these new offerings will, naturally, be debated. Whether or not the criticisms have merit, these programs represent a form of innovation. And all of this follows on the heels of another notable change that occurred since the earlier studies by Ross: the opening of the Virginia Commonwealth University's Ad Center in 1996.²¹ This is a graduate program that was designed from the ground up, by and for industry practitioners. It was intended to better reflect the real world of advertising than previously existing programs, drawing on an advisory board of high profile ad executives and with sponsorship from The Martin Agency of Richmond, VA.

Innovation is the converse of stagnation. Failure to explore new program configurations or experiment with new delivery methods practically guarantees the education process will not improve. Although it certainly is possible to push too far or too fast or in ill-conceived directions, change is a condition precedent to advancement. These new approaches, therefore, are likely to lead to both successes and failures, but the former make these efforts important.

Prediction:

The new programs being developed will result in some “better ideas” heretofore unrealized in traditional advertising programs, which will force those older programs to mimic the newer ones in some respects, or else they will be seen as relics of “old school” thinking.

Faculty

Faculty training, in the end, is probably the most important issue facing advertising programs in the next few years. There currently is an inadequate supply of faculty trained in some areas of marketing communication, such as public relations, direct marketing, etc. Even within the narrower confines of “advertising” there is a shortage of doctoral-qualified faculty in some areas, notably art direction and copywriting. And there are few, if any, graduate programs with any such specialty, so almost no one is obtaining a terminal degree in these areas. Yet a look at the classified advertising in, e.g., the newsletter of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication makes it clear that there is immense demand in some of these disciplines. Faculty openings for public relations, alone, seem to outstrip openings for advertising. In the future there most certainly must be a greater focus on cultivating new faculty with these qualifications, or ad education will face a genuine crisis.

Too many programs attempt to stem this shortage by hiring practitioners on a part-time basis to teach those courses, if they offer the courses at all. But the industries represented by these specialties are enormous, and such stop-gap measures under serve those constituencies. The direct response industry, *alone*, was estimated to account for \$196 billion spent in the U.S. during 2001²², and those companies need a well trained workforce. Neither the programs, the students, nor the businesses are getting what they need under these circumstances.

Prediction:

The desire to create full service, integrated, marketing communication programs, combined with industry demand, will further escalate the need for qualified faculty in public relations, direct marketing, and other disciplines where programs currently have problems hiring. A few programs will recognize those demands

and create graduate programs aimed at filling the needs for those specialties.

Conclusion

These are but a few of the changes that can be expected over the next decade. The future, of course, is an elusive thing. It is not impossible to imagine a world where none of these predictions is realized, but each of these expectations is rooted in the changes already experienced over the past several years. The only prediction that comes with a guarantee, however, is this: advertising education will undergo significant changes by 2016.

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