

Kiss Your Hemorrhoids Goodbye

Before I joined BBDO in 1965, I worked for almost three years at a small advertising agency. It was my first job in the business. I had finished college and had taken the agency job for just one reason—the only other offer I had was from a publishing company for twenty-five dollars a week less.

So much for career planning.

The clients were all industrial manufacturers as opposed to companies that market everyday consumers products. They never advertised on television. Their customers were typically other businesses not requiring mass media to reach them. Television is not particularly conducive to selling conveyor belts, concrete, and other construction materials, so after a couple of years writing catalogs, brochures, and an occasional magazine ad, I had still never done a TV commercial.

It seemed a good idea to at least take a course in creating television advertising, which I did during evenings after work. The class consisted of me, a few other advertising wannabes, and some obviously bored housewives looking for something supposedly amusing to do. It was taught by an advertising executive from the Ted Bates company, a large advertising firm known for its “hard sell” commercials, mostly for household products that cleaned everything from teeth to toilets, and

pharmaceuticals for relieving a variety of aches, pains, clogs, itches, wheezes, and sneezes.

This was not the kind of advertising my classmates and I had in mind when we signed up for the course. We were hoping to learn about sexy, humorous beer commercials or the fun and games of soft-drink advertising. But our products would be remedies for hammers in the head, sickness in the stomach, bacteria in the bathroom, or as it turned out one evening, pains in the posterior. It was on this subject that one of the women took our teacher to task.

“Why do you guys do those disgusting hemorrhoid commercials?” she asked.

“Well it’s true that Preparation H is one of our clients,” he answered with a patient and knowing smile, “so let me explain how the advertising works.”

“Those shitty commercials *work*?” she retorted, the pun not lost on the laughing class.

“Oh yes, and here’s why,” said our professor of pain relief. “A commercial for Preparation H is seen by about fifty million people. Forty-five million of them are probably like you,” he said, pointing at her. “They don’t have hemorrhoids and they don’t like watching our advertising. But the other five million do have the problem. And of those,” he went on, warming to his subject, “maybe twenty percent, say about a million of them, are suffering from pain and itching at the very moment they see the commercial. So you can bet they’re paying attention. And if just half of those, let’s say about five hundred thousand people, are convinced by our commercial that Preparation H can relieve their problem, we’ve got a sales success and a happy client on our hands. So,” he concluded on a note of triumph, “we don’t really give a damn if you and the other forty-nine million, five hundred thousand people don’t like our commercial!”

I should have known right then what I was in for.

It should have been obvious that any business that could

boast of success even when it failed ninety-nine percent of the time—and turned most people off—would have a large quotient of craziness.

But like most people in advertising, even had I known, I would have had no idea what else to do with myself.

I think that explains a lot.