

AdvertisingAge®

[Advanced Search](#)

More from Ad Age: [Creativity](#) [Ad Age China](#) [Insights](#) [Jobs](#) [Ad Age On Campus](#) [Manage Your E-mail Newsletters](#)

AGENCY NEWS

Stay on top of the news, [sign up for our free newsletters](#)

[E-mail](#) [License](#) [Print](#) [Comment](#) [RSS](#)

Creative Exodus in Adland: It's Just Not 'Fun' Anymore

Graf, Montague, Bogusky, Hirshberg -- a Parade of Top Talent Departs Big Agencies, or the Industry Altogether

Posted by [Matthew Creamer](#) on [09.20.10](#)

1K people



NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- Late one night about three weeks ago, Gerry Graf had a bit of a freak-out.

The highly respected and much-awarded creative director had left a fat-salaried, high-profile job at a very large ad agency for the vagaries of the start-up life and he was, understandably, feeling edgy. The next day he phoned up David Droga, who had taken a similar risk four years ago, and went over to Droga5's New York office on Lafayette Street, which now hosts 120 people serving a client list that includes Puma, Unilever and Microsoft. Mr. Droga's advice for Mr. Graf went something like this: Not all the stars will line up at once, you don't need a wacky point of view, get yourself a strong business partner and don't pitch unless you get paid.



Katja Heinemann

The mind behind noted campaigns such as Snickers left the big agency world because it was no longer satisfying. He says he'd rather be 'making stuff.'

In other words, as Mr. Droga put it to me in an interview recalling the meeting, "You're nobody's bitch."

That might as well be the ad business' motto in 2010. Since the beginning of the year, a veritable Cannes jury worth of senior creative talent has shrugged off the leashes of big agency networks for their own start-ups or for creative pursuits outside the ad industry. A month before Mr. Graf's news broke, Ty Montague and co-CEO Rosemarie Ryan announced their departure from JWT's North American office and later started a collaborative brand studio dubbed Co. In July, Alex Bogusky told the world he was leaving MDC Partners to do ... whatever it is he's doing.

Meanwhile, Eric Hirshberg ended a highly successful run at Deutsch, L.A., to go into the video-game industry. And just this month, Eric Silver left DDB, New York, to buy a majority stake in a small agency.

RELATED STORIES

Longtime agency watchers will say this kind of churn has



AD AGE INSIGHTS/CREATIVITY

Who were this year's big winners?



Creativity editors analyze what work broke through and why

RELATED CONTENT

[Why New-Hire Creative Bigwigs Barely Make It Through the Appetizers](#)
[More...](#)



What if you could join **8 of the top 10** media companies and **achieve results** that others can only wish for?

You can. [Read more.](#)



THE POWER TO KNOW.

Why New-Hire Creative Bigwigs Barely Make It Through the Appetizers
An Insider's Take on That Curiously Revolving Door

conservative clients; procurement officers; more competition from small and midsize shops; newfangled concepts such as crowdsourcing agencies; and a business model still very reliant on the production of ads, not ideas.

"I can't quantify this, but I have a strong feeling that the business is getting harder," said Kevin Roddy, chief creative officer at BBH, New York. "Clients don't strongly believe we're capable of doing things that they can't, and they're more inclined to view us as vendors rather than partners."

The result is that big agencies aren't the most hospitable place for the creative mind, but, then again, they never really have been. That's why "Mad Men" makes all those jokes at the expense of Grey and its ilk, depicted as places to cash in your chips and lounge with models, or perhaps with all the "retarded people" said to work at McCann. The difference now is that the paychecks and the profile aren't making up for the deficiencies as incubators of breakthrough commercial ideas. And it's getting more difficult to retain the big names who can do the thousand things that now make up the role of creative management.

The new reality

You can't, of course, talk about this stuff without talking about the economy. Last year was brutal for ad agencies, with the world's 10 largest suffering significant -- in some cases double-digit -- declines in revenue, according to the Ad Age Datacenter. Psychologically, it was a bottoming-out, a period in which people were either just happy to have a job or too busy firing other people to quit.

In 2010, reports of a recovery have been, in the best case, mildly exaggerated, and in the worst contradicted entirely by fears that the economy is once again slipping. Jobs haven't come back and neither has consumer spending, so marketers are being conservative. You can see this in a number of trends: the decline of secure agency-of-record relationships and the consequent rise of looser arrangements that see clients parcel out work to a large group of agencies forced to compete for project work; the proliferation of specialist shops expert in one discipline, especially true in digital marketing; marketers' willingness to experiment with non-agency solutions like crowdsourcing.

One agency CEO, who remained anonymous for fear of jettisoning all revenue from his company, put it like this: "Hal Riney and Phil Dusenberry were treated differently. Business then was much more civil and respectful. Now we work in an incredibly disrespectful environment. Clients are know-it-all assholes, with the exceptions being few and far between. There's a lot of greed operating under the guise of ideas like 'efficiency' and 'creating shareholder value' and that grinds away at character."

I asked Mr. Roddy what all this does to your typical hyper-talented creative manager. "Creativity used to be put on a pedestal, and I don't think that's the case anymore," he said. "Creative people have become more of a commodity, and I think that takes the wind out of them. The creative ego is a very important thing, because it drives talent. But it's also a very fragile thing."

Mr. Graf might be the best example of this struggle. Known around the business as a relentlessly innovative creator who, as one executive put it, "doesn't want to play the game," Mr. Graf has, in a long career that's spanned Goodby Silverstein, BBDO, TBWA and most recently Saatchi & Saatchi, racked up plenty of breakthrough ideas, among them stunning work for brands such as Snickers and Skittles. That's not easy.

He came out of his Saatchi experience with the realization that, "I'd just rather be making stuff." With that, it's not surprising that Mr. Graf isn't now armed with a complex new model or anything approaching one (though he is interested in exploring new compensation models and intellectual-property arrangements where it makes sense). "We live in a time when the best idea wins, and scale doesn't matter much to the idea." To that end, his new shop, Barton F. Graf 9000 (a reference to his father and to a weapon from the video game "Doom," the BFG9000), due later this year, will strive for agency-of-record relationships and also do consulting and writing projects.

always been part of agency life, but to dismiss the trend as part of some cycle is ignoring some key questions that agencies need to answer. After all, the pressure on these companies' business model is intense. While the economic gloom might be lifting, for most it still lingers and, besides that, agencies are getting hit from all sides: Cost-cutting,

ENTER NOW!

Ad Age's Agency A-List: How to Enter

Deadline Is Nov. 22

AD AGE OUTLOOK PODCAST

Ad Age Outlook Episode 13: Running Commentary, Running for Office and... Just Running



Aris Georgiadis and Ken Wheaton join host Bob Knorpp to discuss criticism in hyperdrive, marathons as big business and a last look at election 2010.

SPECIAL REPORT

Small Agency 2010



Profiles on the Award- Winning Agencies and Highlights From the Conference

SPECIAL REPORT

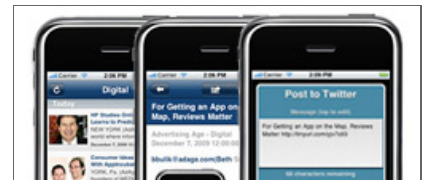
Agency A-List 2009



Our annual look at the 10 best agencies in the business--and those that might make the list next year. Plus, Creativity's top shop.

TRY IT NOW!

Ad Age Launches Mobile App for iPhone, iPod Touch



Includes In-feed Search, Easy-Tweet Feature

MOST READ MOST E-MAILED

1. [Nielsen Admits Undercounting Web Traffic](#)
2. [As NBA Begins, Nike and Adidas Ads Battle For The Web](#)
3. [Activision Readies Blitz for 'Call of Duty: Black Ops'](#)
4. [Best Buy Consolidates Media Account Under Starcom](#)
5. [Starcom Names Chris Boothe COO](#)

BRANDED CONTENT

Search and Disolv Advertising Leads a

Roger Camp, who's earned his fair share of hardware -- including more British D&AD awards than any other American art director -- is leaving his chief creative officer post at Publicis Hal Riney on Oct. 1. "I did a couple of interviews at big places for jobs which are conceivably some of the best out there, and I left feeling like that's not really what I want. By all accounts, I should have been over the moon, and I wasn't. Those big-agency jobs were already defined, and I'm looking to define the thing I want rather than fit someone else's mold of what's already been established."

Mr. Camp said that's the reason he's not the only one running for the exit door. "People are looking to create new models, and that's easier to do than taking existing structures and trying to reshape them."

For the unhappy creative mind still toiling in a big agency, there are two choices: You can either, in Freudian terms, sublimate that ego or, in Lebronian lingo, you can take your talents elsewhere. These days, there's a not-insignificant amount of funding chasing innovative agency models. One example is Jon Bond, a co-founder of Kirshenbaum Bond & Partners who recently left the shop and now has a \$100 million fund to invest in agencies. Then there are more traditional sources, such as holding companies like WPP, Omnicom and MDC, known to be out scouting for new models. MDC, the owner of Mr. Bond's old shop, has even started a contest that will award \$1 million for the best new agency concept, in which it'll hold a 51% stake.

The set of choices for agencies that need strong creative managers might be a bit smaller, stuck as they are between job requirements that appear to be in opposition. On one hand, agencies need the flash that a heavily awarded, famous chief creative officer can provide. On the other, there's the need for someone who wants to take on the many, many responsibilities that come with running a large creative department servicing big international clients. Generally speaking, people don't become copywriters or art directors because they want to someday sit in an endless rotation of endless meetings, hopscotch from airport to airport, handle clients, manage a profit-and-loss statement and only touch the work when it's time to put it on an awards submission reel. Those people got into the business because they want to make stuff.

When Ad Age reported that Eric Silver was leaving the New York office of DDB to take a majority stake in the 34-person Amalgamated, Mr. Silver had this to say: "I wasn't having that much fun at my last job, and when you're not having fun, you're not doing your best work." He added: "As you climb the corporate ladder, it's easy to lose sight of why you got into the industry to start, and this is as excited as I've felt in a long time."

By now -- and certainly after the news of the past few months that suggests a kind of burnout is going on -- it's becoming clear that agencies can't go on with the same job description. "There's a balance between hiring a star -- the 'kickass' creative director everyone's talking about -- and hiring someone who's ready for life in the big agencies," said Anne-Marie Marcus, CEO and owner of the recruiting firm Marcus St. Jean. "Too often, that is not the life these guys want. Big clients, a lot of meetings, not a lot of fun. This is not like working at Cliff Freeman. These are serious jobs."

Ms. Marcus' big piece of advice for agencies is that agencies decide whether they want someone who can be easily plugged into an existing culture or someone they're willing to build around. In the latter case, it's about "using them for what they do and surrounding them with the right support system." And that's not an easy task when so often one of the jobs of a big creative hire is to come in and quickly turn around a massive agency or, at the very least, its creative reputation. If agencies were easy to change, these guys -- or their roles -- wouldn't be necessary.

Another big question sitting before agencies is whether some of these roles have gotten too big for a single person to handle. Said Mr. Roddy, "It depends on the individual. Smart ones surround themselves with smart people who do the things they can't or don't have time for. The thing about creative management is that you've gotta let go and not try to do it all yourself."

By all accounts, agencies are not finding it easy to replace those who have left, with some searches going on for months and months. There are many reasons for this, from a paucity of good candidates to more practical realities, not least the housing-market collapse making it difficult for people who would need to move to take on a new role. While Saatchi quickly named a replacement for Mr. Graf, searches are still going on at JWT, McCann, Deutsch and Euro RSCG. Colleen DeCourcy, who left her role as chief digital officer of TBWA in July and

Search and Display Advertising

Strong First Half 2010



[More](#)

Making Sense of Video Impressions in the Era of Syndication



[MORE](#)

now has funding to start a shop, said she's received a few calls for various creative jobs, for which, she freely acknowledges, she is not qualified. "I've never made a TV spot in my life."

She has, however, strategized any number of digital programs, experience that's increasingly in demand and related to an important trend: the rise of specialists. The vast increase in the number of channels available to reach consumers means that no one agency can master all, opening the doors for experts dedicated to any number of disciplines, from mobile and application development to branded content to crowdsourcing to word-of mouth. The model unveiled last week by Mr. Montague and Ms. Ryan is in part an attempt to foster and manage that collaboration for clients, and you can bet Ms. DeCourcy's shop will take advantage of what she called the "many gaps in the market."

A full break

Different from the mind-set of the creative director who decides to go smaller is that of the one who leaves the business altogether. Cue Eric Hirshberg, a rare ad creative who has successfully moved on to a parallel creative industry -- in this case, the video-game business. In an interview, he said his decision to become CEO of Activision Publishing was a tough one, even though it's a dream job for a gamer. Mr. Hirshberg was very insistent that his move did not come from dissatisfaction with the agency business but, at the same time, he spoke admiringly of some of the disruptions going on in the market.

"This is not a comment on Deutsch or Interpublic, but the startup trend is great because it recognizes that, at its heart, this is a boutique business based on creative personalities. The holding-company model naturally tries to mechanize and systemize things. Agencies need to continue to be boutiques. I think that is one of the reasons Deutsch L.A. has always thrived. We were always allowed to be us."

Mr. Hirshberg gives no quarter to suggestions that the ad-agency business has gotten too rough. "Advertising can be a fatiguing way to go through the world. It's a high-stress, high-intensity path, but it's always been like that. To me, changes to the business model or economy haven't changed that. The challenge has always been to get a great piece of work through the labyrinth. That's hard, and rewarding, but nothing new."

That might be true, but for the up-and-comers who are the ad business' future, it also might not be especially relevant. I recently had separate chats with two ad guys in their 20s who have good strategic jobs that keep them close to the work at growing digitally-focused shops with full client lists and strong case studies. These are smart, ambitious thinkers with the right understanding of where the business needs to go. Each has already flirted with the idea of taking important roles at big agencies and the future will probably be relatively kind to them, but instead of focusing on that, they echo the same complaints associated with these senior folks: the limits of client-service models, difficulty to find the time or buy-in for innovation. Neither can really imagine long careers in this or any other client-service business -- not when there are Facebooks to be built. Platform and product-development is where it's at in their minds, the kind of work that allows you to make money while asleep. And advertising will pay the bills until the right idea -- and the right deal with the right backer -- comes along.

This, of course, might be idle kvetching that falls squarely into the category of "first-world problems" -- what the Urban Dictionary defines as "problems from living in a wealthy, industrialized nation that Third-Worlders would probably roll their eyes at."

Or it might be the beginning of a cascade of decisions that will lead them to go the route of an Alex Bogusky, whose oft-told tale does not need to appear here. His recent change to his Twitter bio says it all: "I worked in advertising for 20-plus years. That was fun. Still enjoy culture jamming."

~ ~ ~

Contributing: Rupal Parekh

49 Comments

Sort by **Date** | Popularity



By PATRICK | ATLANTA, GA [September 20, 2010 09:37:35 am](#):

'Fun' is in low supply everywhere these days. Why?

CMO tenures are 18-23 months. They're expected to perform miracles in a flash when all too often marketing doesn't even have a seat at the adult table of corporations.

The mindset of corporations is to cut expenses to profitability and marketing budgets are viewed as an expense, not an investment.

Fear permeates everything. CYA is the rule for all decisions.

Into this environment, creativity is thrown into the lion's cage with a lawnchair, a wet noodle and a cap gun.

Tiny Tim said it best: "Bless us all, everyone."

<http://www.asoy.com>

<http://www.thelintscreen.com>

+20 -6

By JudyGShapiro | new york, NY [September 20, 2010 01:51:26 pm](#):

I agree -- the exodus suggests a trend that in IMHO is summed up like this:

1) Brilliant creative does not ONLY come from the "agency" anymore - creative crowdsourcing lets the best idea rise no matter who created it.

2) Brilliant messaging does not come from the agency anymore - non linear media, e.g Twitter, carries messages farther and faster.

3) Brilliant media does not get bought by agencies anymore - little/ no efficient way to buy "many to many" media - FB notwithstanding.

4) Brilliant marketing strategy can not be delivered anymore without a brilliant technology plan to match - not an agency competency.

The days when a "creative guy, a copywriter and a sales guy" hung out a shingle are long gone. Let's really embrace the fact that that the ad business of the next 30 years won't look much like the ad business of the last 30 years.

Wanna have fun again? Help create this new agency business. Those of us that are doing it are having one heck of a good time.

Judy Shapiro

+19 -10

By sharon | New York, NY [September 20, 2010 11:59:18 am](#):

Sharon Spielman, NYC

For the last 10 to 15 years, agencies have thinned the senior account management roles that used to be the real business partner/client relationship builder and channeler. There are less seasoned account people overseeing clients' business up and down the chain and so clients are seeking all forms of advise anywhere they can and often- not from agencies. This fact put new burdens on creative to be a more visible part of the team including attending more meetings, client phone calls/conferences and forging strong client relationships. Added to this the fee based system gave clients more clout to want these creatives at their call. So how much time do senior creatives have left to do their real job?

+9 -1

By HarryWebber.com | LOS ANGELES, CA [September 20, 2010 01:09:07 am](#):

What Is Wrong With This Picture?

"...events, threats and opportunities aren't just coming at us faster or with less predictability, they are converging and influencing each other to create entirely unique situations. These firsts-of-their-kind developments require unprecedented degrees of creativity-which has become a more important leadership quality then attributes like management discipline, rigor or operational acumen."

That statement was made by Samuel J. Palmisano, the CEO of IBM after the firm's annual global survey of 1400+ CEO's resulted in 74% stating, "organizational creativity" as one of the three topics they would be focused upon within the next five years.

Right before that, on May 23, 2010 (according to Dow Jones) the following history was made. With a slide in the value of Microsoft Corp. (MSFT) on Wednesday, Apple Inc. (AAPL) took over its long-time rival in terms of market capitalization, another notch in its impressive 2010 performance. The move by Apple, despite its own shares slipping 0.5% to \$244.11, makes it the second-largest U.S. company behind oil behemoth Exxon Mobil Corp. (XOM). Apple's shares have soared during the year, pushing it first past retail giant Wal-Mart Stores Inc. (WMT) and now past Microsoft, two highly regarded blue chips. Apple, one of the world's most creative corporations now Number two in the U.S. Right behind Exxon.

And at this most demanding point in the relationships between agencies and their clients, agency management cannot seem to be creative enough to hold on to the one thing their clients want above all else. "Creativity."

And those who have the responsibility for providing that valuable asset, cannot find the heart or intestinal fortitude to help those employers who have already invested millions in lavish compensation packages, to weather the storm.

How can a skill that appears to be in such blistering high demand in the c-suite be so woefully out of stock in the advertising industry's menu of deliverables?

Well this is what I found out just by scratching the surface. Companies would rather grow their own. Schools like MIT and Harvard B-School are filling their classes on "Organizational Creativity" and "Building, Leading, and Sustaining the Innovative Organization." Six months ago I started consulting with companies who wanted to "go creative." The response has been exceptional.

The outdated brand of creativity practiced by advertising agencies and digital shops is becoming more illogical as time passes. And harder to pass off as having any sustainable value to brand or organization. But when we talk to a CEO about building a more creative component to enable a seamless customer experience across their global supply chain, they are all ears.

The fact of the matter is, creativity has outgrown the typical Worldwide Executive Creative Director. Alas, Creativity has also outgrown Chief Marketing Officers. To remain viable and competitive, entire organizations have to be made ready for this world of relentless change. And relentless change requires relentless creativity at every level of the organization from mail room to board room.

Alas, advertising has run dry of creativity.

<http://CreativeAccountability.com>

+15 -8

By ryangiggs | Chicago, IL [September 20, 2010 12:08:59 pm](#):

Not one comment about the oversized pay packets that these folks have been receiving over the years. Mr. Graf say, 'I don't want to play the game', but the only way he's going to get paid the whopping salary is to take the responsibility that comes along with it. Suck up the money for years and then do something small, entrepreneurial and make the grand statement, 'It's just not fun anymore.' What courage it must take to take millions from the big holding companies and then say, I don't like holding companies. Real edgy stuff. If you didn't like it, you should have bailed years ago.

+14 -7

By beadwife | forest hills, NY [September 20, 2010 12:03:30 pm](#):

Great article. When agencies connect directly with the CEO, like Dusenberry with Jack Welch and Roger Enrico, and Riney with the Gallo brothers, or Clow with Jobs, the results are usually great. That is less the case today.

Avi Dan

www.avidanstrategies.com

<http://avidan.squarespace.com/thinktank/2010/9/19/take-me-to-your-leader.html>

+5

By ROBIN | LONDON [September 20, 2010 12:20:57 pm](#):

Despite all the brains and talent in the advertising industry, they still can't create a 'product' that their clients will value. Sounds like a good brief to me. Hence all the talent getting fed up and leaving to set up on their own. Expect more people to leave, until the industry solves the fundamental problem.

Robin Azis
E-factor
London

+6 -1

By rockfanNYC | Bronx, NY [September 20, 2010 12:32:51 pm](#):

Yes, yes and yes.

So many people, including me, wanted to be in this business because we get paid to be creative. Creativity is fun. Raw ideas are fun. Making TV spots is fun. Photo shoots are fun. Ideas that work for your client, and win awards, are fun. We wanted to have a career when we couldn't wait for Monday morning.

And now, it's not fun. Not anymore.

We stare at small budgets, surf the Internet, and wonder if it'll ever be the same. It won't, and no one has the answers.

But if there is another industry that lets the creative mind do its thing, and values the ideas that are presented, sign me (and thousands of other creatives) up.

+8 -3

By STEVE | CHICAGO, IL [September 20, 2010 10:20:22 am](#):

This story is one for the keeper files. Nicely done, Ad Age. A great recap on where the industry is at and why.

As an industry, we should continue to keep an eye out for new ways of defining the client/agency relationship: scopes, financials, outcomes. Calling attention to these kinds of changes can help us all identify elements of the new model.

Steve Congdon
<http://thunderclapcg.com>
new business tips and more

+5 -1

By jreckseidler | San Antonio, TX [September 20, 2010 12:14:21 pm](#):

Hey NewBusinessHawk....:

"Some very old tactics are working better than ever" caught my attention. Seriously, they are. Example: all this talk about the Old Spice campaign being the social media darling of the year - started on TV. The spots aired, people liked them, then sought them out on YouTube for another glance. It just so happens W+K had the aptitude to think through opportunities to capture that attention and extend the campaign's life via digital.

I don't intend to make this a social media discussion. All I know is that success for a brand can still be found. Via an agency of any size. It comes from a brand's trust in the recommendation and via a talented crew that has been assembled on behalf of that client. Could be in big agency, a boutique, digital agency, whatever.

BTW, this article was superb. Thanks AdAge and @rupalparekh

Jeff Reckseidler
<http://jreckseidler.posterous.com>

+4

By Robert A. B. | New York, NY [September 20, 2010 12:31:55 pm](#):

From my perch, which admittedly isn't very high, I suspect one can't separate the changing roles of creatives from the changing nature of industries; and from the changing nature of the economy and from changes wrought by increasingly intrusive government, accelerating technology and globalization. It's all grown very complex. And, a lot of the people mentioned above, began work when life was a little simpler... why, when even the prospect of travel was pleasurable.

I would say all the changes discussed here began with the contagion of mergers that began in the mid-80s and continue through today. These mergers, and the question of how to pay for them—who actually picked up the tab when Mr. Bond walked away with \$100 million dollars?—changed everything. Against this background, is it reasonable for Mr. Graf, best known for "stunning work for brands such as Snickers and Skittles," to be happy working for clients that demand something other than "stunning" to compete in their marketplace. The fact may be that what Mr. Graf is good at doing, while undoubtedly valuable, simply can't be valued by, say, a General Motors trying to sell Buicks to American men between the ages of 35 and 45, or Campbell Soup to new moms.

With the exception of creatives, such as the much maligned Peter Arnell, most people I've worked with have found their work increasingly joyless to the degree they experience it as detached from "creative." On the other hand, I've found a distinct correlation between those who simply focus on producing their best work—in spite of or despite of their clients—and a high level of satisfaction with their jobs.

In the end, it's the rare creative individual, say a Bob Greenberg, who can balance his love of good, smart work, with the insufferable demands of clients disfigured by MBAs and corrupted by the need to report quarterly earnings.

I think if the Messrs. Graff, Silvers, Droga, et al, found they could "play" to their hearts' content, while earning large salaries and generous perks, they would continue to seek fame and fortunes in large shops, controlled by information conglomerates, but unfortunately, and with apologies to Delmore Schwartz, dreams come with responsibilities. And, it goes without saying, responsibilities are not fun.

What there is, and will always be, are smart, funny, creative individuals who believe advertising is really closer to art than business, and more like entertainment than accounting. At some point these people are faced with the reality that they are businessmen/women and not artists or entertainers.

Once they accept this truth, they can hold on, jumping from shop to shop, collecting ridiculous salaries for work that can't be repeated, or they can take their money and join Mr. Bogusky—there's plenty of room for culture jammers, etc. Whatever they do, I wish them all the luck in the world.

+5 -1

By Benno | Melbourne [September 23, 2010 07:25:48 am](#):

Eggshells are what's ruining our fun.

Account people, with good intentions, are too scared to present anything they feel the client won't like. It's natural, they don't want to risk revenue or their bonuses.

Creatives, naturally naughty shit stirrers, face the choice of being seen as 'difficult' by challenging the status quo, or dulled down into the giant bell curve of boring that makes up most of the advertising we see today.

Clients are only interested in good work if they believe it's going to help their business. Unfortunately, many still religiously follow the book of Ogilvy and apply principles set in the 60's to a much more sophisticated, savvy audience.

If one was to define the role of a creative in today's market, it's working within the parameters to create something truly brilliant. But as we all know, consumers never see the brief, only the ad. And briefs are getting tighter and more fearful.

Research has the unfortunate side effect of every company trying to say the same thing to please what they think consumers are looking for. As a result brands are changing their message so often nobody knows what they stand for. And most of it is a knee-jerk reaction to a competitor or new research finding.

So what's the result?

We all tread on eggshells. Creatives don't want to piss off the suits, suits don't want to piss off the client and clients don't want to piss off the consumer which leads to the ultimate enemy of creative. Fear.

The worst thing is what all this fear of upsetting anybody leads to.

The creatives let the suits do the creative, the suits let the client do the account handling, and the client lets the consumer tell them the brief.

Result? Nobody who is qualified to do their job is actually doing their job.

What we all need to do is skull a big glass of harden the fuck up, remember we're here to tell the consumer what they want, not the other way around and stop reflecting popular culture when we should be creating it.

That's when the fun starts.

+4

By tjeffrey | Charleston, SC [September 20, 2010 01:21:09 pm](#):

A lot of what's happening in the industry right now comes down to size. Huge agencies and enormous clients mean layers and layers of hurdles and roadblocks. All these layers result in "by committee" thinking. That's not the case at the smaller shops. We're dealing directly with decision makers and work much closer with clients. The result is a much more fun and exciting environment for all. When it comes to ideas, small is the new big.

+3

By rockfanNYC | Bronx, NY [September 20, 2010 02:33:32 pm](#):

Most of us creative types got into this business because the thought of getting paid for being creative sounded pretty sweet. And, despite all the meetings and corporate bureaucracy, we still could do what we do - come up with big, out-of-the-box ideas for our clients. That made coming to work on a Monday morning fun. So did the promise of a big TV shoot. And now it's not fun anymore. Things have changed in a big way. It's foolish to think any client is going to dump any more money into dying (print) and sinking (TV) mediums. That ship has sailed. So now most of us work on projects with limited budgets and don't leave our computer screens to create anything. What was once an unorthodox career path is now a regular office job. No wonder people are fleeing.

+4 -1

By Markstout | Denver, CO [September 20, 2010 03:33:47 pm](#):

The mystery CEO's statement about the attitude of clients is well put in this video that went viral almost instantly: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2a8TRSgzZY>

We have all seen this in our jobs. Unfortunately, many of us then push it down to those we contract with as well.

It's time we demand the respect we have earned (or in some cases, start earning the respect we demand).

+4 -1

By jbenet | Singapore [September 20, 2010 09:05:08 pm](#):

Great article Ad Age!

MBA's MD's and CCO's all have lost the plot:

In the minds of consumers, the creative idea IS the product.
In the minds of the viewers, ALL media is social.

To the bean counters and performance report talliers, the creative idea is an unquantifiable cost center.

To the clients and media planners, only measurable media is valid media.

In between these two perceptive realities lies the poor creative, trying to come up with something new and effective while pressured to "play it safe" and "keep costs down" and above all, kowtow to whatever the client says!

As someone who has split a career between media and creative over the past two decades, I've seen the effect of digital on content, driving down the costs and quality of creative further and further until the diamonds sink in the oatmeal.

Along the way, "the idea" has been tossed aside in a chase for "the gimmick" and text has merely become "texture" in most executions. And while appealing to clients (who often edit the copy themselves) and client services (who check all the boxes), the message is easily ignored by consumers and viewers, to everyone's detriment.

True creatives, the ones who turned copies into Xeroxes and adhesive strips into Band Aids, etc, have fallen to the wayside, replaced by a big band of overpaid megastars whose "great gimmicks" becomes just more blips on the 1000 channel screen, forgotten before the quarter's profits are paid out in dividends.

This is why you see a revolt amongst the creatives; their most precious asset, the creative environment, must be reclaimed. The tree is rotten from the root up. Big tree holding groups best keep in mind the seeds they shed; for today's might oaks are tomorrow's compost.

JBenet

www.think-magazine.com

www.revolt.sg

+4 -1

By AHRL | CHICAGO, IL [September 20, 2010 01:39:19 am](#):

And there is NOTHING about holding companies that allows for large scope creativity or innovation. Time to return the resources to private status--and stop sucking the toes of clients, shareholders and sold out management (as well as those who suck management's toes to forward their personal brands. Omnicom comes to mind first)
Time to have fun again.

+3 -1

By JGreenhouse | Philadelphia, PA [September 20, 2010 07:48:35 am](#):

The advertising industry has always looked at itself as somewhat untouchable (and it's not the first industry to feel that way), but a lot of this IS the result of an industry that is becoming more and more competitive. Supply is outstripping demand. When you couple that with the severe economic pressures mentioned in the article, you end up with a meat grinder that really isn't as much fun as it used to be, at least in any scenario where you're chasing the dollars (or euros or pounds, or yuan).

On the flipside, the torrent of new technologies, tools and resources opens up huge potential for creative people to be creative. It's just the monetization of that creativity that's becoming the challenge.

- Jeff Greenhouse

<http://www.JeffGreenhouse.com>

<http://Twitter.com/JeffGreenhouse>

+3 -1

By Susan Schaffer | Whitestone, NY [September 20, 2010 09:25:51 am](#):

Agencies blame clients...and clients blame agencies. Will it ever change?

From the client side, too often we see clients who provide little or no direction, run in fear of being 'too creative' and look for safe solutions. From the agencies, we see many creative & account teams who ignore the client, are convinced they know best and and want to showcase their creativity more than address the challenges at hand.

The problem lies within both clients & agencies. Where there should be partnerships, respect

for different perspectives and a willingness to create synergies... what we actually get is contentiousness. The uncertainties of the economy only helps to build the contempt.

Clients who hire agencies for creative solutions and then block creativity are running scared...and will never really get what they truly need. And agencies who think they know better just might - but first they need to convince (educate?) their clients.

If we ever needed creative solutions, it is now. Hopefully, advertising isn't losing creatives, but transforming agency structure to be more responsive better suited to true creativity.

+4 -2

By MarkTrueblood | Geneva, IL [September 20, 2010 10:24:27 am](#):

I've spent my whole career working at small, entrepreneurial boutiques and I am glad for it. I am not surprised big creative names are ditching the gigantic places for a more nimble and passionate outfit. I wish them all the best, and think it's good for the industry.

However, many of the job openings I see are only interested in people with experience working at BIG Agencies on BIG Brands and BIG Budgets. Looks to me like the top folks are seeing the benefit of boutiques, so why are accomplished boutique-type people not appreciated in the marketplace?

It seems the forks and the spoons aren't in quite the right order in this industry.

+2

By champers | Toronto, ON [September 21, 2010 10:26:53 am](#):

Wow, I guess I don't have it so bad. I ain't stinkin' rich and famous, but I'm happy writing freelance and my wife and kid still talk to me nicely.

Thanks, Matthew, for an incisive article. Sometimes one needs to see how the other half lives to truly get a measure of one's own lot.

As for you young, well-paid big agency creatives who feel betrayed and unloved, go do your own thing. A corporation cannot love you, it is not human. Independence is no scarier than agency life, is just as many hours, but you get to own and control what you sweat to build. Beats watching helplessly as ignoramuses smash down all you are, day after day.

+2

By PatrickWest | Dallas, TX [September 22, 2010 01:56:47 am](#):

So much is wrong with the concept of this piece that I don't even know where to begin. Perhaps, I'll begin with the title. Or one word in the title: Exodus.

I'm curious. How is this an exodus? Sure, we're seeing a few high-profile people leave an industry (or simply shift away from the golden handcuffs they slipped on years ago to work for a major agency). This isn't an exodus on any massive scale. This is a few folks leaving a place where they were paid incredibly well to go ... someplace else where they will likely be paid incredibly well (though not quite as well). Most likely also creative, just not for a huge ad agency.

Economy must be looking up for these folks to suddenly grow a pair. Although, with a 7 or 8 figure buy-out, any economy must look pretty good.

There's no large group movement. There's nothing on a massive scale here.

The massive scale was an exiling, not an exodus. Tens of thousands of people forced into the desert of unemployment. This is just a few who are fleeing into a desert of soul-searching narcissism. In fact, many of these people are fleeing the holding companies that sent the "fun" folks away in order to preserve bonuses, stock options, shareholder value and all the other financial-wizard, hedge-fund nonsense. All the stuff that makes the introspection possible.

"It's just not 'fun' any more."

It hasn't been fun for several years. Ask some of people that were sent to exile.

First boss I ever had told me, "They don't call it work because it's fun every day. Savor the days it is." He was right. And I do.

For the record, clients aren't just being "conservative." We (yes, I'm on the client side after being sent into exile) aren't willing to pay for the lavish lifestyles of holding company or agency figureheads with whom we'll never work/interact. It is much easier (and yes, more cost effective) to hire others who were sent into exile, pay them well, treat them well, and then reap the rewards of their creativity each and every day.

+3 -1

By PAUL | NEW YORK, NY [September 20, 2010 09:01:40 am](#):

Bravo Ad Age for writing this article. The reason why creatives are leaving is because client's don't value their contribution. And why should they? The fear of standing up for the work pervades most of the network owned agencies. They are more concerned with profitability than with creative that cuts through and sells. Consequently, creative directors and account people are tacitly taught not to fight too much for fear of being fired (both corporately and personally). And in turn, the corporate purchasing people have cut every bit of fat out of the business. And with that fat went a lot of the creativity. Too many years ago to count, when I was a young account guy, a staff memo went out to the agency warning people that when there were water fights in the creative department, when the creatives had their feet up on the desk and were seemingly napping, that it was creativity at work. None of that today. Too bad. Clients and the business are the worse for it. Paul S. Gumbinner, President of The Gumbinner Company, www.gumbinnercompany.com. Blog: www.viewfrommadisonave.blogspot.com

+5 -4

By 1day1brand | Toronto, ON [September 20, 2010 09:48:25 am](#):

IBM Global Services recently wrote that the next five years in advertising will see more change than the last fifty. Thanks Adage for this great piece.

+1

By Thoracic | Warsaw [September 20, 2010 10:11:50 am](#):

Never in the field of adage was so much truth owed by so many to one article. Matthew, you're Winston.

+2 -1

By digschulman | NEW YORK, NY [September 20, 2010 10:19:15 am](#):

Nice article AD AGE. But this isn't really about fun. It's about making stuff versus just making meetings. About people who want to spend their time creating big brand building ideas... not collaboration offsites. Anne-Marie Marcus is correct - agencies who buy a name with a bunch of metal, also buy an attitude - one that clients don't necessarily want to hear because, as the article points out, they believe THEY ARE Don Draper already. Then they bring in procurement, integration, digital collaboration and lots of other prerequisites and the job is different. A lot different. Been there, done that is the conclusion for more and more like myself who have chosen to go it alone and trade AOR status for making stuff instead of just meetings and metrics work. My advice? Shortcut the whole process by getting closer to the media agencies where the inventory resides. At least then, you can develop big idea based programs and actually partner with the media folk instead of waiting endlessly for agencies to re-bundle. Nic Brien has the opportunity to do this... and I'm rooting for him. Thanks for the article.

Alan Schulman
Chief Creative Officer
U.DIG > The Digital Innovations Group

+3 -2

By TSiebert | San Diego, CA [September 20, 2010 10:35:50 am](#):

Fear holds sway across the country, as it has since 9/11, largely by design. In a culture driven by fear, creativity is a victim -- whether it's part of a business culture, an entertainment culture, or a neighborhood culture. What's happening in the advertising

business is not an isolated incident, but part of a larger picture that has affected the United States.

+7 -6

By galenbernard | New York, NY [September 20, 2010 11:11:34 am](#):

Excellent article.

+1

By NewBusinessHawk | Evans City, PA [September 20, 2010 11:33:48 am](#):

Outstanding bit of writing...

And I hope many leaders pay attention. We all need to be creative, learn to ask more questions. The game is changing. Many of the old tactics no longer work. Some very old tactics are working better then ever.

I see these times as being more creative then ever, just not in the creative department. But new opportunities for creative people are popping up every where.

<http://sandersconsulting.com/newbusinesshawk/bid/45817/The-Creative-Age>

Cheers,

Bob

+2 -1

By UNCLEWALDO | TUCSON, AZ [September 20, 2010 01:37:08 pm](#):

A well done and interesting article. One note to pass on: I happened to receive both this article and one from AAF on the "30 Best Places to Work" <http://bit.ly/bhN8ou>

As expected, all of the companies listed in the above article don't appear on that list. My question is: what is it that makes those companies so much more attractive than the others and what can the other companies learn from them?

+1

By troyhayes | lawrenceburg, IN [September 20, 2010 01:49:17 pm](#):

The truly sad part is these are the "good old days" for the young creatives working today.

<http://brand-adrenaline.blogspot.com/>

+1

By TIM | SALT LAKE CITY, UT [September 20, 2010 06:25:24 pm](#):

One of the primary reasons agencies don't feel like partners is because of how they're compensated. Despite the fact that agencies consistently use the words "marketing partner," clients feel that the relationship doesn't qualify as a true partnership. That's because the nature of a partnership is shared risks and shared rewards. In partnerships, there must be both an upside and a downside to both parties; in other words, skin in the game.

To get serious about becoming partners with their clients, agencies must stop being so risk-averse and start having more confidence in the in the power and value of their work. When a firm is willing to tie its compensation to the same metrics that CMOs and CEOs are judged by, then they are entering into a real partnership.

More importantly, having "skin in the game" can profoundly change the dynamics of agency-client relationships, leading to increased trust and mutual respect. That's because you have aligned the economic interests of both parties. In other words, you have a partnership.

Tim Williams

Ignition Consulting Group

twilliams@ignitiongroup.com

+1

By gcouncil | New York, NY [September 21, 2010 11:58:26 am](#):

Most of my friends non ad jobs haven't been fun for years and they look at me like I work at Disney Land.

Having said that, I don't think anyone could expect that the industry, the models or the compensation would stay the same due to the attitudes of the different generations (Boomers, X-ers, Millennials) passing through that change everything with their different expectations and views.

It's unsettling yes, but still very exciting. In other words, change is good...the seemingly destructive force of a raging fire creates rich soil for a new forest...roll with it, or roll home

+1

By Jeff | NEW YORK, NY [September 22, 2010 01:10:58 pm](#):

It sounds to me more like creatives trying to make a statement more than being the brave entrepreneurs, venturing off into the hinterlands. It also sounds like more and more people are realizing they no longer need the large agency infrastructure to deliver their talents. With wonderful things like the Internet and desktop design programs, who needs a whole production department, when freelancers are more than capable of delivering. Just look at the newly launched co;, or the already established Think Cannon [www.thinkcannon.com]. These are people who have seen the light and the future of the agency model - or lack there of...

Think

www.thinkcannon.com

+1

By glenclif | Taipei [September 20, 2010 10:08:27 am](#):

"Ms. Marcus' big piece of advice for agencies is that agencies decide whether they want someone who can be easily plugged into an existing culture - or someone they're willing to build around."

I can see that there are many reasons for this problem... Most seem valid. Speaking from the perspective of a radio producer, the above quote (from the story) says it all.

By michaelconrad | Berlin, IL [September 20, 2010 12:04:50 pm](#):

Great article Rupal!

It's a call for creative leadership.
Leading your creative company to a competitive future.
Leading your clients and partners.
Leading product quality.
Leading people.
Leading yourself.
Leading the industry.
Getting good in dealing with complexity, analyses, strategy, alignment, implementation will help.

The Berlin School we established is focused on the dilemma of your findings.
Turning great creatives into great creative leaders - our mission.
A Creative CEO in Every Creative Company - our vision.
www.berlin-school.com

Cheers,
Michael Conrad

By troyhayes | lawrenceburg, IN [September 20, 2010 01:51:55 pm](#):

In 2003, I had to quit my own agency with my name on the door and a giant salary to get away. Being a minority partner is worthless. If you want to do it your way, you have to be in charge.

<http://brand-adrenaline.blogspot.com/>

By creativeo | London [September 21, 2010 05:04:31 am](#):

I'm still loving it.

Tip: start your own agency.

Do what you want to do and not what you don't.

Have fun, life's too short.

Chris Arnold
Founder
Creative Orchestra
London

By Michael | New York, NY [September 21, 2010 11:36:01 am](#):

Clients were always buying talent (read: people). Now, technology and some other coalescing factors allow people (read: talent) to work with clients without the agency super-structure, with its frequent emphasis on expediency, utilization, and profit.

By bobant33 | London, NY [September 22, 2010 10:28:56 am](#):

This also kind of sums it up...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vB2E5LZcSbU>

Though I hear this guy is now gone out of JWT. Go figure!

By pancakes | Centreville, VA [September 22, 2010 01:58:58 pm](#):

Isn't this article more about being burned out?

Staying on the edge of creativity and innovation is nerve wracking, hectic, and when successful greatly rewarding, but... the pressure takes a toll. You can only do something so demanding for so long until the exciting details of the job become mundane, and the "work" part of the job turns into a manifestation of hate and a good excuse to leave. Not to say this overblown "exodus" of major creative people in the industry have lost their touch, it's just that you get fed up and tired of the grind. Sometimes you need something new to renew your spirit.

Compensation entices you to stay longer, but when you get to the point that you dread walking into the office more than the commute, you'll know you've overstayed. Props to everyone that recognized their lack of fulfillment and ventured off to start their own thing, or with another company. Life's too short to hate half the day you're awake 5 days a week (cause we all know 8 hour days are rare in advertising, and you're lucky if you're only working 5 days)

Not to say the industry has gone sour. It'll evolve like anything else does, with new people, new ideas, new great minds. People will come in hungry to do great work, grind their way to show it off to become a name, and eventually say they're tired of it all and move on to the next one.

The world will keep moving, with or without you. That's life.

By rubertucci | Nyack, NY [September 22, 2010 02:15:29 pm](#):

Amazing piece.

Watch all these ads.

Either we are not proud of our jobs or we have let client's talk us into self-deprecation at the

hope of making them a buck.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRf35wCmzWw>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bs5SOB6tn44&feature=related>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OWo0vvggWWk>
http://adsoftheworld.com/media/tv/haribo_gold_bears_favorite_color
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ta0EIPM-kU0>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stzmHm6eF-0>

The main takeaways here are that anyone can do what we do, and most days we do not work very hard.

By Wisey | New York, NY [September 22, 2010 07:00:24 pm](#):

Is it really that complicated?

How about the fact that with new media now in play advertising AND marketing just isn't what it was... end of story

By ActionAd | Grand Rapids, MI [September 23, 2010 10:36:03 am](#):

I think we need to be careful about our assessment of the good ol' days of advertising.

When you wipe away the layer of dust obscuring the memories underneath, the good ol' days weren't all that good.

There were just as many know-it-all assholes, agency hopping, and climates of fear back then as there are today.

If you go into any business looking for "fun," you probably won't find it outside of being a game show host.

But, when it comes to the ad biz, if you look towards the proven advertising methods that make ads SELL, a funny thing happens. Your ads DO sell. People take notice. You look forward to the next challenge.

And advertising is actually fun again.

<http://actionad.wordpress.com/2010/09/03/how-to-write-a-tagline-that-sells/>

By Michael G | Atlanta, GA [September 24, 2010 11:42:54 am](#):

I'm a latecomer to this conversation. The headline seemed so familiar that I didn't pay much attention. After finally reading it and the comments, I couldn't resist putting my two cents worth in. My first reading was correct: "so what's new?" After almost sixty years in the so-called ad game, the laments of this article haven't changed one whit.

I began my career in advertising in 1949 at a small NYC ad agency. After a tour of duty in the US Navy during the Korean War, I joined a medium sized NYC shop, Paris & Peart. I joined McCann when they won the Coca-Cola account in 1956. I left McCann in 1964 and went to JM Mathes. IPG hired me back to work at the then hot shop Marschalk. In 1969, I started McDonald & Little with Tom Little and a secretary and no accounts. When we sold to Ted Bates in 1982, M&L was the largest independent agency in the South. I am still at it today, consulting with global brands.

Plying this trade was never a breeze. It was unbearable if you didn't have the goods. It was sheer ecstasy when you did. We defined the goods as a sharp differentiated strategy, brilliantly executed. We celebrated our victories and buried our losses. At the end of the day, it all came down to the talent and commitment of the players on the field from both the client and the agency. That, too, will never change.

Mike McDonald

Co-founder, McDonald & Little, Atlanta

By cmandelbaum | New York, NY [September 21, 2010 11:00:42 am](#):

Indeed, creative has become a commodity.

This pretty much says it all:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECmxh2RNDjA>

+1 -2

By MICHAEL | LA GRANGE, IL [September 22, 2010 04:49:48 pm](#):

Cut to the chase. Clients finally got called on to generate MEASURABLE results and the artistes and "creatives" who couldn't hack it (ie, thought their "craft" was being denigrated) bailed into the safety of their boutiquey new agencies for clients who might still be mesmerized by their brilliance. The days of awards = business are long gone. Results (whatever the objectives are) reign. Those who can deliver remain and thrive. Those who can't whine in AdAge.

-1

By Bradley | undefined, NN [September 21, 2010 03:19:33 pm](#):

Quit whining, quit complaining, and quit assigning blame. Get back to work and make something worthwhile.

-2

By BenThere | Gotham, NY [September 20, 2010 03:25:47 pm](#):

Waaah, sounds like a lot of whinging.

Its called a job, its where you do work. Be thankful for the ride you've had superstars. There have always been people in the trenches at agencies, sorry that you are part of them now.

This is called reality.

+4 -10

Comment:

comues shari'a

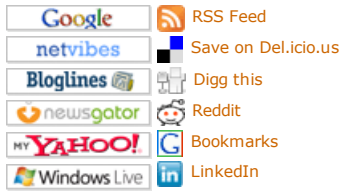
Type the two words:



Post Comment

Note: Comments submitted to AdAge.com are posted automatically and will include the user name with which you registered. Ad Age reserves the right to delete comments that are insulting or personal in nature. Comments may be used in the print edition at editorial discretion. **Comments are restricted to 500 words or less.**

Share & Save (2)



Stay on top of the news and stay ahead of the game—[sign up for e-mail newsletters now!](#)

>> [MARKETING AND ADVERTISING AGENCY NEWS](#)

[Advanced Search](#)

Advertising Age: Your Online Source for Marketing and Media News

FEATURING **104** MALLS IN THE TOP **10** DMAs

eye

NEWS | [Latest Marketing and Advertising News](#) | [Marketing and Advertising Agency News](#) | [Best Ads From Creativity](#) | [CMO Strategy](#) | [DataCenter](#) | [Digital Marketing and Advertising News](#) | [Global Marketing and Advertising News](#) | [Hispanic Marketing](#) | [Madison+Vine](#) | [MediaWorks - Media and Marketing News](#) | [People & Players](#) | [This Week's Issue](#) | [Your Opinion](#)

COLUMNS | [Rance Crain](#) | [The Media Guy](#) | [Bob Garfield](#) | [Al Ries](#) | [Guest Columnists](#)

WHITE PAPERS | [2010 Creativity's Awards Report](#) | [Building Brands Online](#) | [More...](#)

RESOURCES | [TalentWorks](#) | [Advertising Age Events](#) | [Industry Events](#) | [White Papers & Marketing Information](#) | [360 Multiplatform Media](#)

SERVICES | [Subscriptions](#) | [Media Kit](#) | [Help Center](#) | [List Rental](#) | [RSS \(What is RSS?\)](#) | [Archive](#) | [Get the issue digitally \(Texterity\)](#)

More from Ad Age: [Creativity](#) | [Ad Age China](#) | [Insights](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Ad Age On Campus](#) | [Manage Your E-mail Newsletters](#)

Copyright © 1992-2010 [Crain Communications](#) | [Privacy Statement](#) | [Contact Us](#)