

PharmaVOICE

THE FORUM FOR THE INDUSTRY EXECUTIVE

Volume 2 • Number 2

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by PharmaLinx LLC, Titusville, NJ
Printed in the U.S.A.
Volume Two, Number Two

PharmaVoice is published eight times per year by PharmaLinx LLC, P.O.Box 327, Titusville, NJ 08560.

Postmaster: Send address changes to PharmaVoice, P.O. Box 327, Titusville, NJ 08560.

PharmaVoice Coverage and Distribution:

Domestic subscriptions are available at \$106 for one year (8 issues). Foreign subscriptions: 8 issues US\$220. Contact PharmaVoice at P.O. Box 327, Titusville, NJ 08560. Call us at 609.730.0196 or FAX your order to 609.730.0197.

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Letters

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Where has creativity gone? That's the question that 18 healthcare ad agency executives address in this month's Forum — The Creative Challenge.

They are almost unanimous in their collective thinking: creativity within the healthcare arena is on life support. Some say this is an area that always has been weak, others say the downward spiral is more recent. Either way these executives give voice to their frustrations and suggest ways to improve the creative process.

Agency creative directors want the industry to know that "creative" can no longer be "swept under the carpet" or be an "add on" to the myriad services that their organization offers clients. Creative thinking and creative strategy must be a priority, not an afterthought. Creativity is the "service" that they can offer clients that clients can't do for themselves. Agency executives conclude that there needs to be a paradigm shift in attitude and attention.

Agency creative directors and presidents assume some of the blame, saying for too long there has been complacency surrounding this core competency. After all, they say, "we are supposed to be advertising experts, we should be going to the client with the confidence of our conviction supported by sound thinking and market research."

They believe it is their responsibility and their obligation to work around the various outside barriers that can impede the creative process, whether the roadblocks are thrown up by their clients or by FDA guidelines.

For these agency executives, good creative means having extremely strong creative leadership within an agency and the agency must have "unswerving standards" to its commitment. But this cannot be a philosophy that is merely given lip service, "creativity should be the philosophy by which agencies live, breathe, eat, and sleep."

Concurrently, agencies must hire people who really believe they are on a "mission to do really great advertising and don't tolerate anything less."

The industry needs champions, creative



The best ideas may never see the light of day, but that doesn't mean that the creative process can deviate from an unswerving commitment to developing and executing the highest quality product strong creative thinkers and strategists are capable of producing.

and management executives, who are willing to "step up and be bold forward-thinking leaders" — leaders who are not afraid to go to bat for the creative process; leaders who are not satisfied with the lowest common denominator; leaders who crave a flavor other than "vanilla"; leaders who are willing to stand up for good, strategic, solid ideas; leaders who are not afraid to present original, edgy, and provocative communications; leaders who can teach and persuade their clients to accept out-of-the-box thinking.

Agencies are in the business of promoting and persuading, and according to one executive, "we have done a very good job without realizing it of promoting and persuading our audience to believe that the creative really doesn't matter all that much."

Good, strong, grounded creative is a strategic weapon in and of itself. Agency executives say it's time to stop blaming the client. The time has come to start looking internally at ways to more effectively wield one of the most powerful pieces of artillery they have in their arsenal.

Taren Grom
Editor

Taking a Stand