

BY TAREN GROM

# THE CREATIVE challenge

Creativity in **medical advertising**  
is a lot like **that old saying** about the **weather...**

**EVERYONE TALKS ABOUT IT BUT NOBODY DOES VERY MUCH ABOUT IT.**

According to industry experts, good advertising is first and foremost strategic in its ability to differentiate and create a brand. But good creative healthcare advertising seems to have hit a bump. Bound by strict regulatory parameters, clients who don't understand the creative process, and an unwillingness on the part of agencies to push the envelope, many in the industry have been left frustrated.

For most industry executives, truly creative work brings a lifeless product to life, it turns a brand into a living, breathing entity that people can relate to on an emotional as well as an intellectual level.

To begin the process, agency executives say the core message has to be brought down to its simplest essence. The message then must be grounded in good, insightful strategic thinking. Execution must be innovative and out of the box. And, agencies must be champions to the creative process.

#### CHARLENE PROUNIS

Our clients are afraid to take risks. The original concept often gets very watered down and loses its flair. There are so many people who are involved in the decision-making process, by the time an ad gets approved it's defaulted to the lowest common denominator.



## CREATIVITY, more than just talking the talk

**NIEMIEC.** Why do we in the healthcare advertising industry continue to place so much emphasis on our formulas, our structures, our services, our alliances, and our acquisitions? Is this really what we are all about? Are these the things that represent the core of our being? Why do we not emphasize, and to an even greater degree, promote our intuitions, our unparalleled creative agility, and our objective insights into the interpretation of the mind of the audience? This is what supposedly we do so well. This is what supposedly we do that no one else can mirror. And most importantly, this is something that our clients can't provide for themselves. This in itself is a strategic weapon and we fail to promote it as such. We dust it under the carpet. Why is creativity merely tagged on after everything else? When was the last time an agency principal stood up and announced to the industry he or she was going to make a commitment to the creative product, or make a commitment to ensure that their agency has the strongest creative product in the industry? Creativity should be the philosophy by which we live, breathe, eat, and sleep. Great creativity has become rhetorical, it's lost its meaning, it's become trivialized. But creativity is truly what we need to live by as agencies.

**NOSTA.** We need people to step up and be bold forward thinking leaders. We have no one in this industry who goes to bat for the creative process, no one who yells, screams, rants, and raves about it. Healthcare ad agencies are becoming dinosaurs. What frightens me is large pharmaceutical companies that are going to consumer shops for their advertising. That should be a red flag for people in our industry. If we want to compete in the future, grow, prosper, and do the very best work we can, we're going to have to think differently. As creative young Turks climb up the ladder and become more responsible for the financial bottom line they become more hesitant to rock the boat creatively. When I look at the consumer side, I see 50 and 60-year-old rebels still out there standing in the street with their fist in the air yelling and screaming about the creative product.

**LAZUR.** We don't sell ideas well enough. At the end of the day, we often compromise. We can blame our clients, but as an agency we need to sell good, solid ideas that are strategically on target.

**NIEMIEC.** This is an industry that's not comfortable with originality. We hear all the time that people don't like creative that makes them nervous. People don't like creativity that's edgy. That's merely a symptom. What's at the root is that this is an industry that's very uncomfortable with originality.

**WISE.** Good creative means having extremely strong creative leadership within an agency and having

## THE CREATIVES ...

**RYAN ABBATE.** President and managing director, Pacific Communications, Costa Mesa, Calif.; Pacific is a full-service healthcare advertising agency

**THOMAS ABRAMS, RPH.** Director, Division of Drug Marketing, Advertising, and Communications, Food and Drug Administration, Rockville, Md.; DDMAC is the division in the FDA that regulates promotion of prescription drugs

**ED BERGER.** Marketing director, respiratory, AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals, Newark, Del.; AstraZeneca is a pharmaceutical company

**ELLEN BRESH.** Marketing director, Sigma-Tau Pharmaceuticals Inc., Gaithersburg, Md.; Sigma-Tau Pharmaceuticals is the U.S. subsidiary of Italy's leading research-based pharmaceutical company, Sigma-Tau S.p.A.

**TOM DOMANICO.** Worldwide creative director, president of FCBHealthcare New York; FCB is a full-service healthcare advertising agency

**THOMAS GREENBAUM.** President, Groups Plus Inc., Wilton, Conn.; Groups Plus is a focus group research and consulting company

**DIANE HARRI.** President, LM&P Group EuroRSCG., New York; LM&P Group is comprised of three full-service healthcare advertising agencies — Lally, McFarland & Pantello EuroRSCG (N.Y.); LM&P Questar EuroRSCG (N.Y.); and LM&P Westar EuroRSCG (San Diego)

**RANDY ISAACSON.** Senior VP, executive creative director, Williams-Labadie, Chicago; Williams-Labadie is a full-service healthcare advertising agency

**STEPHEN KING.** Chairman of global creative integration, Nelson Communication Worldwide; Nelson is a full-service healthcare communications agency

**MIKE LAZUR.** CEO/chief creative officer, worldwide, Torre Lazur McCann, Parsippany, N.J.; Torre Lazur McCann Healthcare Worldwide is a global healthcare advertising network

**PATRICIA MALONE.** Creative director/copy, Stratagem Healthcare Communications, San Francisco; Stratagem is a full-service healthcare advertising agency

**MICHAEL MATIN.** Director of marketing, Schering-Plough Corp., Kenilworth, N.J.; Schering-Plough is a research-based pharmaceutical company

**CARLEEN NIEMIEC.** Senior VP, creative director, Dudnyk Healthcare Group, Horsham, Pa.; Dudnyk is a full-service healthcare advertising agency

**JOHN NOSTA.** Unconventional wisdom, MDC, New York; MDC is a full-service advertising agency

**CHARLENE PROUNIS.** Managing partner, Accel Healthcare Communications, New York; Accel is a full-service healthcare advertising agency

**AHNAL PUROHIT, M.D.** President and CEO, Donahoe Purohit Miller Inc., Chicago; Donahoe Purohit Miller is a full-service healthcare advertising agency

**ROB ROGERS.** Executive VP, chief creative officer, Grey Healthcare Group, New York; Grey Healthcare is a full-service healthcare advertising agency

**JOHN SCOTT.** Executive VP, chief creative officer, The Corbett Healthcare Group, Chicago; Corbett Healthcare is a full-service advertising agency

**JOHN J. SPETRINO.** Executive VP, chief creative officer, Thomas Ferguson Associates, Parsippany, N.J.; TFA, a division of CommonHealth, is a full-service communications agency

**BRENDAN WARD.** Creative partner, Regan Campbell Ward, New York; Regan Campbell Ward is a full-service healthcare advertising agency

**TED WHITBY.** Senior VP and creative director, Pace Inc., Parsippany, N.J.; Pace is a full-service healthcare advertising agency and a unit of Lowe Healthcare Inc.

**ED WISE.** President and CEO, Cline, Davis & Mann Inc., New York; Cline, Davis & Mann is a full-service advertising agency

unswerving standards. It starts from the top of the agency and works its way down. Agencies need people who really believe they are on a mission to do really great advertising and don't tolerate anything less. The road to hackdom is paved with giving in and giving up.

**NOSTA.** Good creativity is the fruit of sound strategic thinking. And good fruit does not grow on a rotten tree. There can't be inspired creativity when senior management sits back running the agency in a concierge school account-management style.

**HARRI.** The biggest barrier to good creativity is fear, especially with products that have a lot of potential. There's the expectation and pressure to create a billion-dollar baby. The stakes are very high, and the higher the stakes the more fear there is to take risks. Great advertising tends to have an element of risk

associated with it. This fear gets in the way of creativity and a high-quality product.

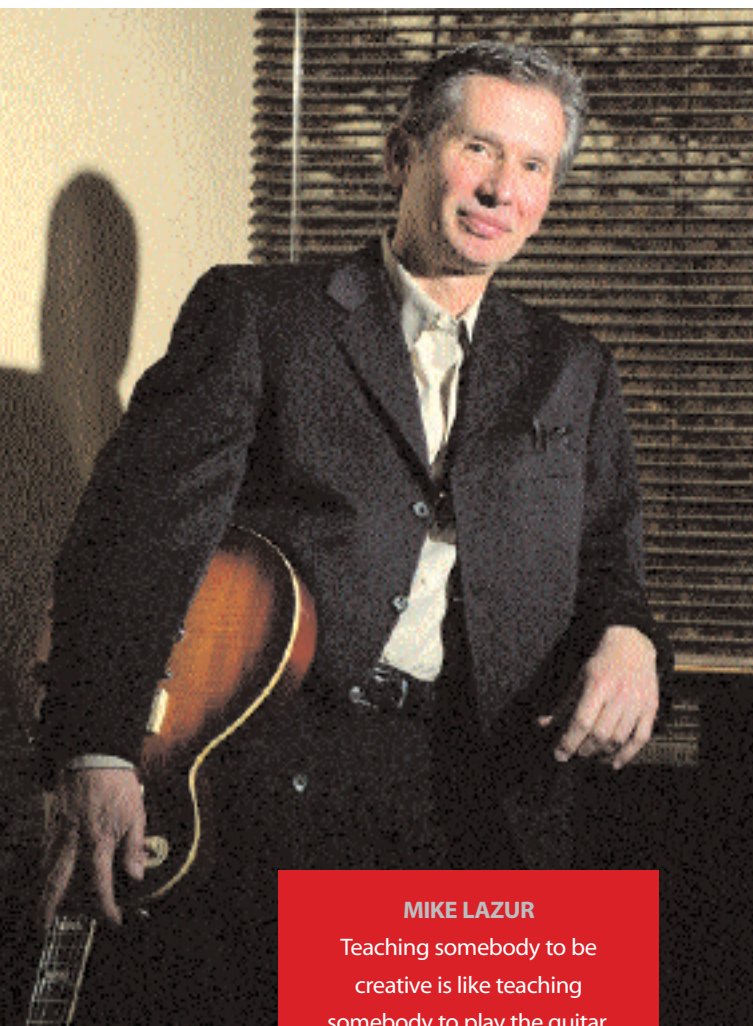
## Finding the CREATIVE focus

**NIEMIEC.** We are in the business of promoting and persuading. And, unfortunately we have done a very good job of promoting and persuading our clients to believe that creativity really doesn't matter all that much. We've done this by giving undue credence to the importance of agency formulas, structures, services, and then giving an afterthought to the creative. We, once again, have to validate creative as a strategic tool and begin to rebuild that concept within our industry.

**NOSTA.** We are supposed to be advertising experts. We should go to the client with the confidence of our conviction supported by sound thinking and market research. Clients pay us to think, to have an opinion. It's time for us to give clients their money's worth. If an ad is not strategic it should die. Creativity for the sake of creativity is silly. The true power of advertising is to craft a message that's strategically sound and creatively brilliant.

**WISE.** Clients are looking for strategic partners. They are looking for agencies to challenge their thinking and make sure it's as strong as possible on a strategic level. They also are looking to us to execute that positioning — the overall brand strategy. We are the experts in advertising, so they are looking to us to use our judgment and educate them on the advertising process.

**LAZUR.** We get consumed with selling data. We forget that doctors, nurses, pharmacists, etc., are customers — and they respond emotionally. If we send an emotional message, there is going to be an emotional reaction. Charts and graphs are important, but the emotional hook is what customers remember. Everybody wants an ad to say so many things — when we should be focusing on one simple, emotional message. Sacrifice is the essence of good positioning, but we're too consumed with the data — the so called reasons to believe — without tying it together in one neat creative package that customers will remember.



### MIKE LAZUR

Teaching somebody to be creative is like teaching somebody to play the guitar. They could pluck all day at the strings but if they ain't got rhythm, they're going to sound lousy no matter how much theory they know.



### TED WHITBY

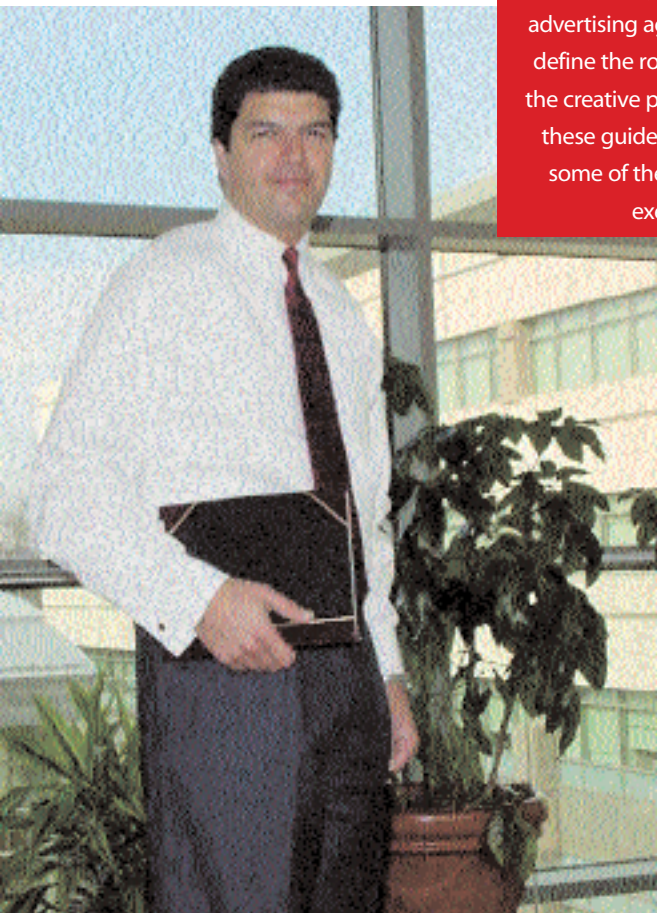
There have to be people at the client level who want the great work and who are willing at some level to take on the corporate culture and champion great work. People say they want great work, but ultimately they are afraid to embrace something that is breakthrough.

**ABBATE.** I get a bit upset hearing that creativity is not what it should be. That's been a knock on this industry for years, and it couldn't be further from the truth. Doing creative is very different in the healthcare industry than the consumer side. Healthcare advertising has a high hurdle rate for its strategic integrity and its ability to communicate to the final target.

**SCOTT.** It's important to understand the definition of creativity. I believe that most people mean execution when they talk about creativity — the images, the words, the physical package that the ad or the sales materials are wrapped in. I believe creative is much bigger than that. A communication — whether it's a sales aid, a journal ad, a video, or a convention booth — is creative to the extent that it is able to effectively convey a very good strategy in a compelling, persuasive, and memorable way. If it creates a strong identity for the brand or product that's what leads to success. The strategy has to come first. Creativity can't exist outside the notion of strategy. The execution doesn't mean anything if it's not grounded in a salient idea about the product, which in turn is grounded in some important learning about the target market. Good creative brings in the

**MICHAEL MATIN**

As clients we communicate very specific guidelines to our advertising agencies that largely define the role that they play in the creative process. To an extent these guidelines may rule out some of the "overly creative" executions.



to sales materials. Companies are beginning to understand that even a great drug isn't necessarily going to take off by itself, especially with the pressure to perform today. There is a lot pressure to make the curve

go straight up from the outset. The communication effort can have a big role in that. And that starts with the strategy. One of the reasons that work isn't more distinctive is because it isn't creative in the real sense of the word, it's more executional — an idea in search of a strategy.

**PUROHIT.** Companies are comfortable following a formula. There has to be a headline, the condition, the name of the product, a happy patient, fair balance, logos, charts — and everything has to be large. Clients think this approach is safe because it's been successful. I've heard so many times from our clients, that we can't go someplace different because it's not their company culture. Actually, it's riskier today to not take risks — to do the predictable.

**PROUNIS.** Clients should look to their agencies for creative leadership and not constantly direct the ad. The marketing team often wants to make a word bigger, or add a bullet point, or put in a chart — the ad then looks like a sales aid. One by one all these elements get added and the beauty of the idea is watered down. Marketing people don't always know what great creative is and that is

where the leadership of an agency can make a difference. Agencies need to lead their clients and help them understand what great creative is and clients need to trust that experience.

**NOSTA.** We are the single biggest barrier to creative. I believe that there is, to varying degrees, a great sense of inertia in the healthcare advertising community. Every product manager and every account executive seems to believe that bulleted copy is what every ad must contain. This is just a small example of how our mind set needs to be changed.

**MALONE.** It's critical to boil the main message down to its simplest essence to get the idea across. Marketing managers often want to get too many ideas in the communication, and that really bogs down the creative process. If the strategy is not focused, the campaign can become diluted, generic, conservative because it doesn't communicate one single point.

**WISE.** Good advertising is first and foremost strategic in its ability to differentiate and create a brand. Truly creative work brings a lifeless product to life, it breathes life into a product and turns it into a living thing that people can start relating to on an emotional as well as an intellectual level. The brand is the thoughts, feelings, and associations that an individual has when exposed to a logo, a color, a sales rep, an ad, a convention panel, or a commercial.

Those thoughts, feelings, and associations live only in the mind of the customer. How we guide that process is critical.

audience and creates an engagement with them so they are part of the communication process.

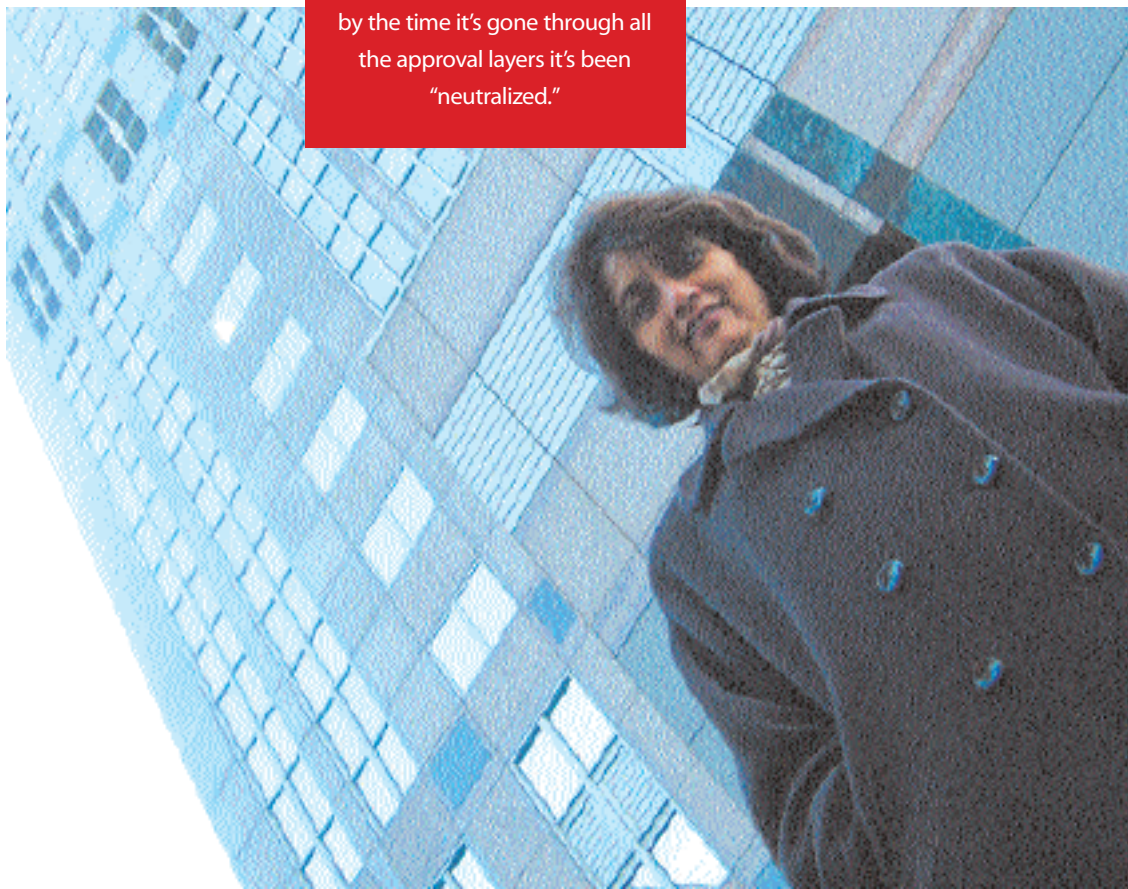
**ABBATE.** The right creative formula is based on a strategic underpinning that is focused, containing no more than one or possibly two points. It's the balance of the compelling message with some form of breakthrough creative that resonates in a way that will cause the doctor to stop, pause, look, read, and then engage.

**ISAACSON.** Focus is critical. So often, ads are filled with a lot of copy that covers a lot of points. We need to get away from this. We need to help promote the value of a single, insightful idea. Agencies have to have the skills to help persuade the client to see the value of a focused message.

**SCOTT.** Creative has to come out of an idea, it can't just be an interesting image on a page. That's what's wrong — there's no grounding for the work. There are cute images — executional and rootless — that are meant to be provocative but they don't have any relevance whatsoever to the product or the category or the product's advantages. Images shouldn't simply be for shock value or to grab attention. I think the creative work is not anywhere near what it could be. I believe we're lacking in both strategic insight and execution. Creating a distinctive image for the brand hasn't been a high priority. Even to the extent that it applies

**AHNAL PUROHIT, M.D.**

Marketing people want the best and most creative concept that we can come up with, but by the time it's gone through all the approval layers it's been "neutralized."



**CREATING the right relationship**

**SPETRINO.** There are some clients who can't get past the fact that we're more than just a vendor. And no matter how much they feel that we're a partner, sometimes we are just there to listen and respond and not add much to the thinking. Good executions can't be done without having an entire understanding of where the brand has to go.

**MATIN.** As clients, communicate very specific guidelines to our advertising agencies that largely define the role that they play in the creative process. These guidelines are a manifestation of our interpretation of the regulatory environment under which we operate. We want to make sure that the creative execution of our communication messages are within label. To an extent, these guidelines may rule out some of the "overly creative" executions.

**WHITBY.** There have to be people at the client level who want the great work and who are willing at some level to take on the corporate culture and champion great work. People say they want great work, but ultimately they are afraid to embrace something that is breakthrough. Great creative that is going to be memorable and compelling has to be different than what everybody else is doing.

**HARRI.** Do we fight as hard as we should? Probably not, and that's our own fault. We have to teach our people how to stand up for a great piece of advertising, how to handle objections, and how to get the client to see it from a different perspective — their customer's perspective.

**MATIN.** Somehow we have to allow our agencies to perform their function as creative partners as opposed to being a job house. We have to allow them to be the creative partners that we have hired them to be.

**BERGER.** The pharmaceutical company has to bring in the advertising agency and have a true partnership. That means the executive from the agency is not totally subordinate to the product manager, who was a district sales manager a month ago. The industry has a long way to go, hopefully we're getting better.

**WISE.** There's a point when an agency has to push back and say this isn't good for the brand. I think clients want to hear from their agencies when they've gone too far. They want to hear when their agency doesn't believe in the advertising any more.

**SPETRINO.** It comes down to trust and the right chemistry. Brand teams that are com-

**BRENDAN WARD**

It takes a lot of courage and a lot of ownership, as an agency and as a client managing a brand, to take something that looks different and is challenging and go with an idea that's going to break through the clutter.



fortable with each other, and I'm talking about agency members who feel comfortable to push back and disagree, who won't later be labeled as uncooperative by clients. Clients who feel that they are really listened to produce the most exciting work. When the team respects

one another, and they can leave the layers behind, the result is an idea that can truly ignite an audience.

**WARD.** Clients have to own the work, too. The best experience is when we work to discover

**Rewarding Creativity**

The Rx-Awards, the In-Awe Awards, and the Globals are a sample of the healthcare advertising awards that have come to be the showcase for outstanding creative effort.

The Rx Club, based in New York, holds an annual industry show that recognizes creative aspects of pharmaceutical product advertising and promotion. The show is judged in various categories by a panel of industry experts and is based solely on creativity.

The Medical Marketing Association's IN-AWE Awards are presented annually as acknowledgement of creative achievement in healthcare-related marketing and advertising.

Founded only eight years ago, the Globals rank as one of the most outstanding prizes in healthcare communications due to the high creative caliber of its judges. "These elite members of an international panel are well-known creators of work recognized as definitive in worldwide healthcare," says Mike Lazur, chairman of the Globals and CEO/chief creative officer worldwide, Torre Lazur McCann, Parsippany, N.J. "They are tough but fair and all have earned worldwide acclaim as best in their craft. There are only 35 globals given out, the winners are as elite as the judges.

"Beginning with the 2001 winners and finalists, we convinced the Globals organizers that healthcare winners belong in the company of major consumer award show winners," Mr. Lazur says. "Accordingly, beginning this year, the Global Award winners and shortlisted finalists will be published in full color in a special healthcare section of The New York Festivals Annual of Advertising 10, the premiere hardcover showcase publication of exceptional award-winning consumer work. It is my hope that such stellar exposure will serve to motivate, inspire, and direct us toward more creative healthcare communications. In my opinion, no other healthcare competition is as coveted as this one."

**A nod to CREATIVITY ...**

**LAZUR.** For many clients to win prestigious awards it's an opportunity to get some great press and increase visibility for both the client and the agency. The Globals has the highest standard for judging creative and marketing excellence.

**HARRI.** It's wonderful to see great creative be recognized. But at the end of the day advertising has to sell product. We believe our mission is to do both and do it successfully.

**ROGERS.** The value of awards provides recognition to some very talented and hard-working people. In addition, awards programs expose us

the strategic idea together. Then the client and the agency are on the same page. We've gone on a journey together and they are more willing to go to their management to defend the concept. We have to make them believe in it. If this doesn't happen the work is going to be vanilla.

**KING.** Everyone needs to nurture, feed, and embrace the creative process. Creative directors have the responsibility to sell the client on the importance of good creative and what it takes to develop good creative. I find that when a client has a good relationship with their creative directors and really believes in the creative product, they will find the time for the creative product to be developed and find the money to execute it properly.

**MALONE.** It's vital that a client understands what the power of good advertising can do, and what good advertising is – what works. Many product managers don't come from an

advertising or marketing background, and use as their standard the mediocre ads that are running in the journals they read.

**WHITBY.** Great work needs champions at the agency, on the account side and on the creative side, and a champion at the client. Somebody has to say, "that's the one I want," and be willing to fight for it when it's challenged internally within the company.

**ABBATE.** It takes an open-minded client to allow an agency to do great work. Most of the more sophisticated companies aren't making executive decisions on the creative, they are using protocols through research to make some ultimate decisions on the creative.

**BRESH.** The agency should be a partner on the strategic side of the marketing communication plan. That alleviates them from just executing the tactical elements. A client is really foolish not to take advantage of their agency's wealth of experience, their frame of reference, their perspective, and really partner with them in developing strategy.

**STEPHEN KING**  
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to the diversity that comes from all the different markets.

**MATIN.** Winning awards may help an unknown agency get a foot in the door in the pitch process, but we don't necessarily go down the list and pick the top five creative agencies as a first step. Not that creativity is not a valued component in the mix, but other considerations come into play. At the end of the day, whatever creative output is produced needs to go through our medical/legal review and the ability of agencies to navigate those waters is important.

**ISAACSON.** As long as the people who judge the awards continue to be tough critics of the work and shy away from stuff that seems repetitive or fits the mold of healthcare advertising. Awards are as good as the people who judge those awards.

**KING.** Awards programs are very valuable. They help expose people to what goes on in this industry and attract new talent to it. They help keep the people who are in it incentivized, and they should also help our clients see the value of good creative and want to champion good creative. They are valuable, not so much in who wins, but because they exist and expose our work to each other and to the outside world.

**WARD.** I have historically not been a big awards participator. I'm a real believer that an ad needs to talk to a specific prospect in a specific marketing context. I don't think that people removed from that context can judge whether a piece of work achieves its objectives.

**MALONE.** As long as people are paying attention to the awards, and going to them, entering them, and being excited about them, and trying to raise the bar every year, I think they are a good thing.

**ABBATE.** Everyone knows the creative awards are fraught with a certain amount of ambiguity. Sometimes they ask for marketing information to accompany the ads so they can somehow be put in a frame of reference to where they can be appropriately judged. Awards are given for the sake of creative, and there's nothing wrong with that. Good creative is wonderful to see.

**BERGER.** When I see ads that win awards, it has an affect on me. It demonstrates the quality and the track record of an agency. What I think would be helpful, and I don't know how they would do

it because it's so hard, is to do an ROI on an ad. I recognize that it's hard to do.

**SPETRINO.** The Global Awards, the In-Awe Awards are interesting. But I wonder how political some of them are.

**SCOTT.** There really aren't any award shows that have anything to do with market success. It's all about the package, the execution, what does it look like. One of my biggest problems is that's what people perceive as creative. If it's on a very subjective level, appealing and interesting, funny, or provocative an ad wins awards. That doesn't mean it worked. That doesn't mean it was effective or did its job vis a vis that product's problems in the marketplace. Awards aren't about success in the marketplace, they are about successful design and execution in a narrow sense.



**PATRICIA MALONE**  
 People are scared to try something new, because it puts their job on the line. They don't want to rock the boat. Breaking away from the formula mold of advertising that they are comfortable with is hard for them to deal with.

contribute to the lack of creativity, but in my opinion fear is the biggest. Especially now, with more and more products on the market, fierce competition, and more dollars at stake. I think we are going to see the pharmaceutical industry be even more inclined to take the safer route when it comes to the creative.

**BRESH.** There are tried and proven ways of effectively and successfully marketing products to the professional audience. I've been in this industry for 27 years, and the approaches and concepts I see now are no different than what was done in my first year. It's been pretty standard fare, but what else can be done?

**BERGER.** We are fairly risk averse, and the reason for that is we've been so successful. As a company, we need to be willing to step out of the box — 90% of the ads in medical journals are quality ads and are done well, but they still look pretty darn ordinary to me. We need to empower our agency to guide us.

**PROUNIS.** Our clients are afraid to take risks. The original concept often gets very watered down and loses its flair. There are so many people who are involved in the decision-making process, that by the time an ad gets approved it's defaulted to the lowest common denominator.

**HARRI.** Unfortunately, we've gotten to the point where the safer route is the route to take. As an agency, it's safer to roll over and be an order taker for a customer than it is to stand up for what you think is right, which is, after all, the expertise your client is paying for. It's safer for the product manager to go with something that makes them less nervous or has less risk associated with it — then there's less likelihood that they will be blamed if the product isn't as successful as they had hoped.

**WARD.** With so much at stake, there's a natural tendency toward a much more conservative posture. When clients are looking

at a big launch (which might be their only launch for the year) they are reluctant to take many risks. Therefore the work has to be approved at every level. When people are scared you get creative at the lowest common denominator.

**MALONE.** People are scared to try something new. They don't want to rock the boat. Breaking away from the formula mold of advertising that they are comfortable with is hard for them. Conservative is what gets their drugs out the door. I believe clients in their hearts want to be "out of the box," but they are just not ready. It's a lot of work to change all of the stakeholder's mind sets — from their customers to their salesforces to their internal people.

**SPETRINO.** From a creative perspective, one barrier is not having an internalized, single-minded gut feeling of how powerful a brand can be. Many clients are afraid of letting their true visceral responses to things rule the day. They are fearful of what upper management might say.

**NOSTA.** I'm not sure the problem lies within the context of the client. I think that's an easy out to say "the client made me do it." I don't think that's the case. I think there's a collection

**PUROHIT.** Marketing people want the best and most creative concept that we can come up with, but by the time it's gone through all the approval layers it's been "neutralized." Regulatory people see the marketing department as their vendor. Often the client looks at the agency as their vendor. A client/agency relationship needs to be strong enough to collaborate over ideas.

### Taking a CREATIVE risk

**SCOTT.** People talk about doing risky advertising, but I've always said the most dangerous ad that can run is the one that no one sees. If the ad is invisible, we're wasting the client's money. Putting every possible bit of information about the product on the page is the surest way I know to be invisible.

**NOSTA.** I believe that if your advertising doesn't make people a little nervous, throw it away and try again. Most great ideas start as blasphemies. And I think it's about time we started creating a few blasphemies.

**WHITBY.** There's pressure on every company to perform. New products don't come along all that often and they have a limited life cycle when they do. There's always the opportunity to do better, but if nobody's done it before then there's an element of risk to that.

**NIEMIEC.** There tends to be a lot of fear out there. There are many complicating factors that

### RYAN ABBATE

I have news for the consumer people who come over — until they've walked a mile in some of our creative shoes, they can't possibly know what the creative process is like on the medical side.





**JOHN SPETRINO**  
There's a hesitancy on the part of clients to push the envelope by something provocative or humorous, because it might trivialize the condition and turn the physician off.

of people who permeate the industry who are complacent, who don't want to redefine an industry.

**WHITBY.** I don't know that many corporate environments in big pharma reward risk. In order to increase the odds of a big creative idea there has to be an environment that encourages some risk. However, the downside is big, and the upside is less known. This encourages more conservative behavior across the board.

**NIEMIEC.** Companies are involved in pursuing original agents, compounds, breakthrough therapies, but there is a lot of parody among products, too. Taking an original approach that can't unequivocally be validated scares the living daylights out of clients. But it's not just the client, it's us too. I see this as a prevailing mentality among agency executives.

**WARD.** It takes a lot of courage and a lot of ownership, as an agency and as a client managing a brand, to take something that looks different and is challenging and go with an idea that's going to break through the clutter — as opposed to a generic idea like "A new dimension in fill in the blank therapy."

**Pushing the CREATIVE envelope**

**ISAACSON.** We have to be careful that we don't push outrageous creative just to entertain ourselves, rather than to sell the product. Finding that line is an ongoing challenge.

**SPETRINO.** Today it's about not offending the physician audience, because that script is such an important part of market share. Every brand script is vital and all too often a brand will suffer if the physician perceives that he or she is blind-sided by information that may trivialize the condition. There's a hesitancy on the part of clients to push the envelope by using an idea that is provocative or humorous, because it might turn the physician off.

**PROUNIS.** In the sea of ads, in both the professional and consumer journals, there's a lot of slice of life — happy, smiling patients, walking on the beach, dancing, hugging a friend, hugging their spouse, playing with a grandchild. This is the norm more than the exception. To push beyond that, to get to where great creativity really lies, is the mission of all agencies.

**ROGERS.** We need to look at creativity from a 40,000-foot view rather than constantly dwelling in the day-to-day tactical environment with our clients. A mindshift is required to start looking at creativity in the broader context.

**CREATING a difference**

**SCOTT.** A brand is not more successful just because of the advertising. It's very important to be able to separate the three or four other drugs that are parodies on one level or

another. It's important to develop sales materials that stop the doc. The value of really good advertising and promotion has to do with time, which has become more a premium. Reps have three or four minutes to make a case for their product. In five minutes or less, you better be really good, interesting, relevant, surprising, and emotional. You better reward the doctor for those few minutes.

**MATIN.** Creativity is not a performance metric that is defined, and as a result is not rewarded within our industry. A starting point is to develop creativity-based performance metrics for our marketing personnel. The question is how to define them and measure them. Once we start rewarding marketing on creativity, we are likely to see an improvement.

**ROGERS.** I'd like to see more experimentation. The cry around here is, let's push it and see where it goes. We have to continue to work to expand the boundaries of what is acceptable.

**HARRI.** Science and innovation are always going to be what this industry is all about. But it's not often appreciated that if you marry science and innovation with a really creative campaign you can make a brand more successful.

**BERGER.** The question we have to ask, is do we want to entertain or do we want to communicate? Maybe

**DIANE HARRI**  
Asking a customer what they like about advertising is like asking a mouse to design its own trap.





we can do both. Maybe we can be more creative and communicate at the same time. But at the end of the day we want our messages to resonate and not be beer ads.

**WARD.** I think creativity has always been a weak sister in pharmaceutical advertising. We are always being challenged to be more creative, and we meet that challenge with mixed results. It's always been harder to be truly creative on high-profile products. That's a rule in any business. The higher the profile, the more conservative the client is going to be. And nowadays, clients seem to be supporting only high-profile products.

**PUROHIT.** Creativity is seeing what everyone else has seen, but thinking what no one else has thought and doing what no one else has dared. Being creative is thinking in a different way. However, clients look at creativity more in terms of sales. They believe physicians are not quite as human as they are — that they are only scientists, only able to appreciate that which is concrete. But they are human. They are persuaded by humanity and creativity.

**KING.** I've been in the business 32 years, so I've seen a lot of changes. There are three major issues. One, there is a lack of belief and knowledge and experience in the fact that advertising can help drive a brand. Particular-



ly on the client side, they don't always understand the power of good advertising. Part of that has been demonstrated by the sameness found in our ads, sales aids, and mail pieces. A brand's message should be crafted for the individual medium which carries it. Second, over the years, many of our clients have lost the people who were most experienced in advertising, and the process that is required to make effective promotion. Today, most of the advertising is managed by product managers, it's an added duty to everything else they are responsible for. This is an apprenticeship business. So we are constantly teaching new people the value of advertising and what it takes to do it well. It takes awhile to gain trust. This trust directly correlates to the quality of good creative. Third, are tighter budgets, shorter time lines. Everybody wants immediate gratification. I know people who love to throw around, "better, faster, and cheaper." It's an empty promise. One of the three will be sacrificed.



**THOMAS ABRAMS, RPh.**

When reviewing a promotional piece, we look at the entire presentation. I think the pharma industry is quite creative in its advertising and promotion.

**BERGER.** Part of our problem is that we communicate to the scientist in a lot ways, but not as a consumer. We forget these are people who enjoy life and that their buying decision is an emotive reaction, not just a rational reaction. I think our ads and the creative things we produce for the most part have poor stopping power. A physician may only have a few seconds to glance at something. The question is what imagery and what words do we want to communicate? And are we conveying things that really stop the reader? Do they feel as though they want to use the product or learn more about the product?

**NIEMIEC.** We have to begin to be willing to go out on a limb and position ourselves as agencies that are going to be creative — that are going to take well-reasoned and well-calculated risks.

**KING.** If the people at the client aren't going to stand up to their own regulatory people or stand up to preserving the right idea, the agency isn't going to have much hope. The agency should be supporting their creative every step of the way as much as possible. If we don't keep control every step of the way, we'll lose it.

**PRONIS.** We have over intellectualized our creative advertising. Our ads are mini detail aids. How many subheads and charts are on most ads? Rarely do you see an image-driven campaign. An ad is an ad — it's not bullet points, copy, a graph, and a chart. A doctor won't spend more than one to three seconds on an ad, so its imagery, its branding sensation, the association that might be tied to the brand is vital. A sales aid

is meant to deliver the complete message — an ad isn't.

**HARRI.** It's hard for some people to see how strategy can translate into a compelling piece of persuasion. People think that if there are certain words in their positioning statement those same words have to appear in the headline. Basic words often used in positioning — such as power, efficacy, tolerability, or safety — are not the means to create great advertising. Creative people have to translate the strategy into an original concept so that the idea gets into the customer's mind in a more meaningful, more compelling, and more memorable way. I think that's where the breakdown comes.



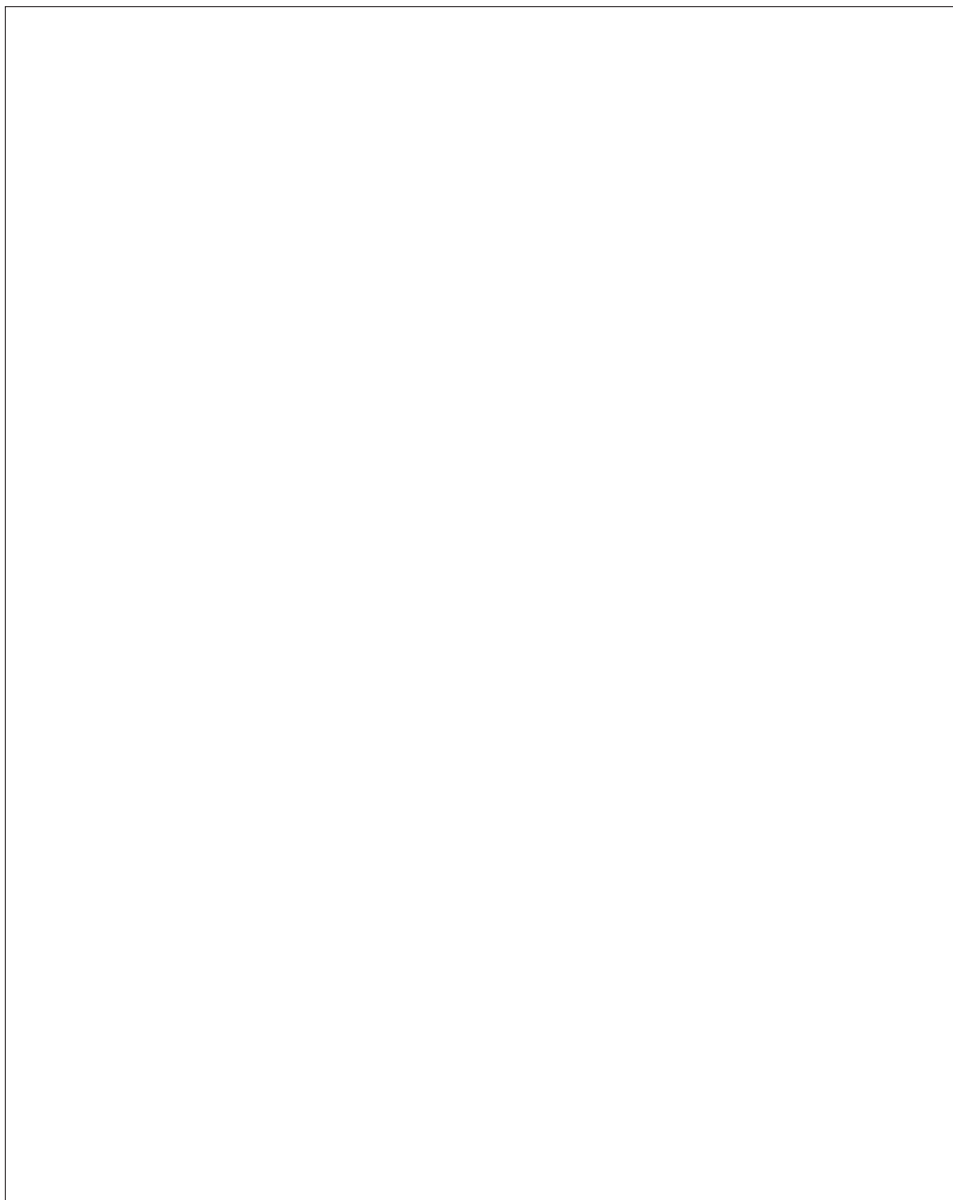
**RANDY ISAACSON**

I'm not satisfied when someone blames outside barriers — whether it be the client's review of the creative work or regulatory barriers. Part of the challenge is figuring out ways to solve the problem.

**WARD.** To quote David Ogilvy, "Clients get the advertising they deserve." In the end, it's their dollar, their decision. As the agency, we have to deliver the more creative idea, and then we have to stand up for the more creative idea. Finally, we have to explain to the client why the creative idea will achieve the marketing objective. It's not enough to walk in and say, "we like the type face" or "we think this is cool." We need to demonstrate why being "cool" relates to making the brand more apparent, more present, and more attached to its users.

## Finding CREATIVE solutions

**ABRAMS.** We provide comments on proposed materials that companies request that be reviewed, although there is no requirement for companies to submit their materials for comment before using them in most cases. We also review materials that are already used in the public domain by the pharmaceutical industry. If we have concerns about the materials that are in use, we would take an enforcement action. All these actions are based on the Federal Food, Drug & Cosmetic Act. As for common violations, the most common that we see are a lack of fair balance, unsupported comparative claims, unsupported efficacy claims, and unsupported safety claims. Lack of fair balance can occur if the pharmaceutical company omits the warning or risk information. If they minimize it in some way



### ED WISE

Good advertising is first and foremost strategic in its ability to differentiate and create a brand.

Truly creative work brings a lifeless product to life, it breathes life into a product, and turns it in to a living thing that people can start relating to on an emotional as well as an intellectual level.

by making it real small or use language to minimize the importance of the risk information, this would be misleading. The existing regulations that were written mostly in the late-1960s are what we use. If there is need for new laws then Congress would make that determination. I think the pharmaceutical industry is quite creative in its advertising and promotion. When reviewing a promotional piece, we look at the entire presentation no matter how creative it may be. What we are concerned about are misleading and unbalanced presentations. We look to see if the presentation is misleading, as far as pictures or graphics. If the ad has pictures that are attractive and get people to read it, we would not object to that. But the picture has to be representative of what you would expect of a patient for that drug to be. But other graphics are fine.

**SCOTT.** Regulatory restrictions are a challenge, but I don't think they are an excuse. It's very frustrating to come up with a creative solution, only to have a lawyer or the FDA says it can't be done. But we have to find a way to do the best we can.

**MATIN.** I'm not sure if it rests squarely on the agency's shoulders. We have a very restrictive regulatory environment in which we operate. That, to a great degree, dictates the extent to which

agencies can demonstrate more creativity. We have a process by which our target audience's sensitivities are added to the mix, and that further steers our direction. Those two factors lead agencies to go in a certain direction, which is beyond their control.

**DOMANICO.** We can help clients by sticking with them as they move the work through their own internal approval systems. By definition, anything that's new or innovative or creative is going to be perceived as risky and is going to raise objections. Often the work is left in the hands of an assistant product manager or a product manager who doesn't have the experience or perspective to defend it. Consequently, it dies within the client system and there's nobody from the agency around to hear its death rattle. If clients got the agency's creative team more involved in the process of clearing copy, not just presenting it to them, that could help us make the most of what we have to work with.

**ISAACSON.** One of the fun parts of this business is trying to figure out new solutions, especially under challenging regulatory conditions. I'm not satisfied when someone blames outside barriers — whether it be the client's review of the creative work or regulatory barriers. Part of the challenge is figuring out ways to solve the problem. Agencies can turn up the listening side a little bit more to find out what the real issues are with the client that get in the way of certain ideas or impede the process. It's too easy to say the client won't allow us to do good work or the system muddied things up. We're not victims in this process. Maybe it's a cliché, but one thing in this business that's motivating is that we always have to work as if our best work is ahead of us.

**NOSTA.** Picasso said good artists borrow and great artists steal. I think one thing we need to do is look at different advertising models. Look at ads we like, look at mainstream consumer advertising and see the type of brand identities, the visuals, the graphics, the typographies that are out there, and at least let that be part of the process to look at a new dynamic direction.

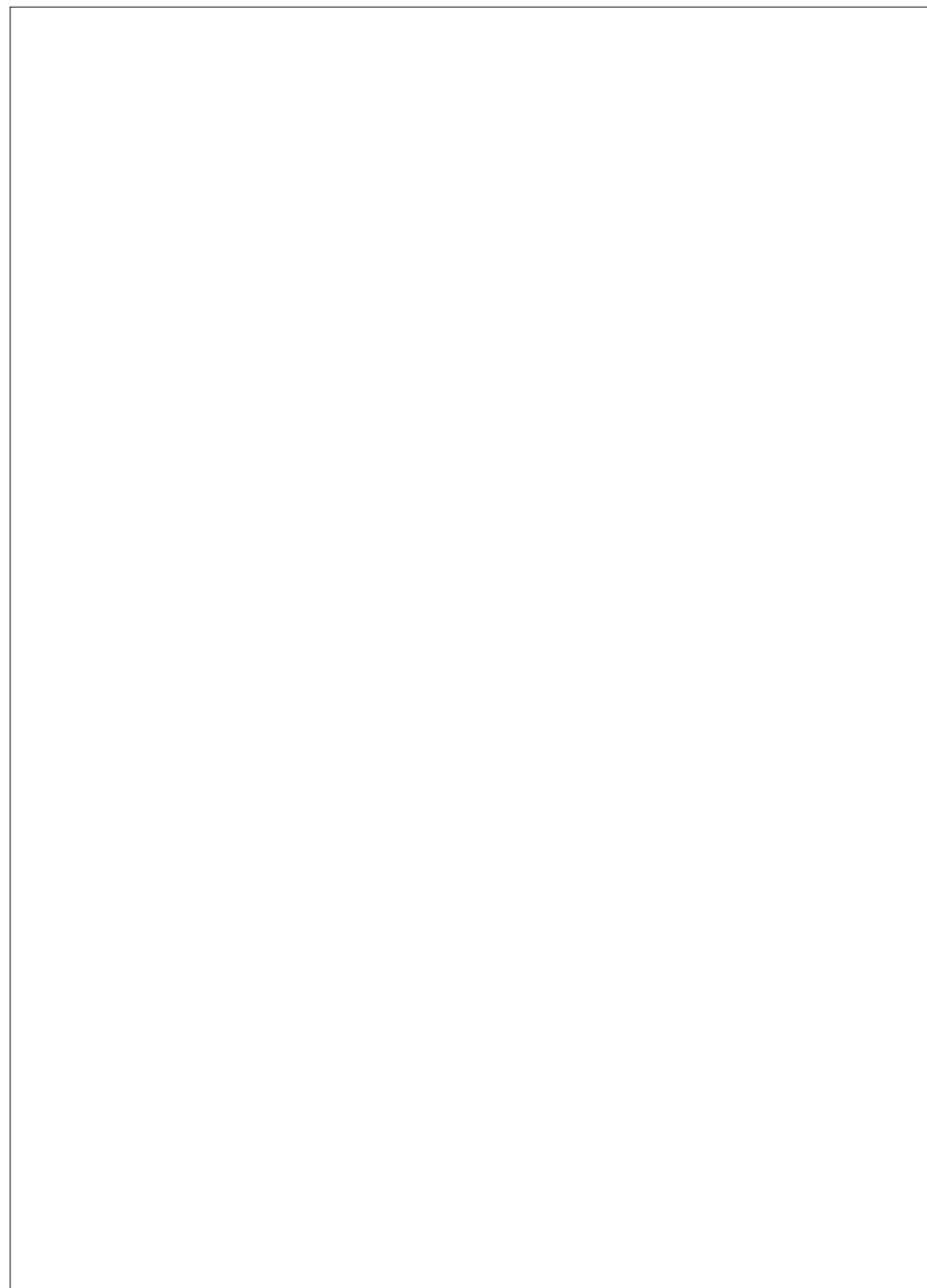
**DOMANICO.** Time is now at warp speed in terms of how clients want work done and how fast the turnaround has to be to keep up with market needs. That raises the bar. Like anything else, the more time you have to craft what the communication is, the better the creativity gets. We have to be fast and come to solutions much faster.

**NOSTA.** It's important for the industry to embrace creativity as something beyond the confines of an art director or a copy writer. Creative thinking is not the difference between a creative person and non-creative person, it's the difference between a successful person and non-successful person.

**WISE.** When work looks like it's been destroyed because there's something critical to the concept that's gone awry or has not passed review committee, instead of saying "well that's it, forget it the idea is gone," creative people have to say, "I've got another idea." They have to say, "not only do I have another idea but there's an infinite amount of better ideas that I haven't thought of yet."

**WHITBY.** Great creative work doesn't come from process. Inherently as the stakes have grown, clients want to make sure they don't make mistakes. They want to quantify how to arrive at powerful creative work. They are always looking to put a process on it. While it's necessary to protect the investment, less process and more freedom is the way to encourage big creative ideas. The best work is not collaborative work; it has to retain the core of the singular vision of the work as conceived. Too much process just homogenizes the creative and makes the work ordinary and safe.

**SPETRINO.** I would suggest to clients to have all of the stakeholders — the folks that are going to make major decisions about the creative — to be in the meeting at the same time. Then we don't have to sell creative solutions to higher management meeting after meet-



ing after meeting. The momentum can only be sustained for so long. This allows an agency to have a clear direction and then they can go back and build versus having to go back and defend. Better work comes from having everybody in the room. We can see their eyes light up or see their eyes glaze over because we missed the mark; either way it's an honest reading.

## Research, a CREATIVE challenge

**WHITBY.** The best way to use physicians to guide the development of powerful and persuasive creative work is to gain their insights. From there it is up to us to make judgments based on these insights. Too often, research is used to develop the creative. Physicians are not the authors of the work, and frankly the client is not the author of the work, and most assuredly the research company is not the author of the work. As soon as they try to become authors, the work has very little chance of being great.

**ISAACSON.** I don't think our business has really concentrated enough on finding the insights that cause action. We need to test creative less

### CARLEEN NIEMIEC

Creativity should be the philosophy by which we live, breathe, eat, and sleep.



and strategy more to find real insights. We spend a lot of effort testing executions to doctors to get their reaction, but we don't do as much research upfront to develop the strategic insights that will lead them to action.

**DOMANICO.** We've moved from the golden age of advertising into some weird period of information overload. We have to encourage our clients to use techniques that not only evaluate and measure how well facts are communicated but how well the communication works on an emotional level.

**PROUNIS.** Clients need to separate their own subjective reactions from the objective assessment of creative effectiveness. Clients need to remember that testing reveals the lowest common denominator, that doesn't mean that's where communications need to live.

**PUROHIT.** We are hearing more that physicians view themselves as consumers. So, physicians are way ahead of clients and most agencies in terms of what they feel advertising should be.

**HARRI.** There's an over-reliance on market research and testing everything to death, to the point where it all becomes homogeneous, because we are not listening for the true customer response. We take everything literally. If the doctor doesn't like yellow, we change the color. If a doctor finds a word or expression unusual, we ask him how to say it "better" (meaning in a more familiar, less engaging way). We go through this process until at the end we have something we call "advertising" but it has been so dumbed down and is so boring and so safe — because we don't want to offend anyone — that every ounce of creativity and persuasive power has been wrung out of it. We've come to use market research as the tool by which we make decisions as opposed to using what we learned to guide better decision making. As an agency, we're paid for our judgment, and our abilities, and our talent, and our thinking. As much as we might like market research to make advertising a pure science, at its heart, effective advertising manipulates the emotions and doing that will always be an art.

**LAZUR.** Our challenge as creative people is to use research as a tool, not a crutch. It should be used as illumination — as a guide — to create a better campaign. Market research is insight, it's not Gospel. We sometimes allow the doctors to play art directors and copy writers. It



### ROB ROGERS

A mindshift is required to start looking at creativity in the broader context, asking is it entertaining, stimulating, and compelling?

is important that we listen to their input, but at the end of the day we all must decide how to tailor a campaign without losing creative impact.

**HARRI.** Asking a customer what they like about advertising is like asking a mouse to design its own trap. We only have a couple of seconds to get their eyes on the page and engage them.

**ROGERS.** Research tells us what's in the mind of someone today. Our job is to project forward and provide materials that will be appropriate, suitable, and stimulating for clients in the future. Every piece of research is out of date as soon as we get it. Our job is to find insights and creatively define the future.

**KING.** Research is death to a good creative idea. The key is to have the creative people's input into the questions and how the research is done. The right questions have to be asked, and they have to be asked in the right way to get a reasonably qualitative answer as opposed to a subjective answer. We have to remember that doctors are also consumers, but consumers are not always doctors.

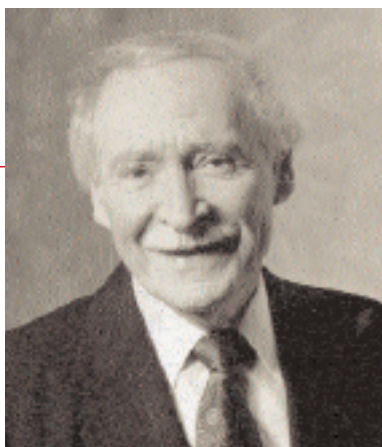
**ROGERS.** A lot of the techniques currently used for research are not effective in getting past the doctor's outer barriers. In other words, current research encourages physicians to act in a particular manner. Simply finding that a particular doctor doesn't like a particular image or headline is not particularly enlightening. We recommend using techniques such as collaging and laddering, where by through unconscious responses and choices doctors reveal much more about themselves and what is persuasive.

**WARD.** I try never to have advertising evaluated by the client in a focus group. Since the com-

**WHITBY.** We should never ask physicians what they like when we talk to them about creative. The problem with asking physicians if they like something is they are going to like things that don't challenge them to change their perceptions. They like things that are comfortable, that look and feel like what they expect and are accustomed to. What's best for the brand isn't always necessarily to give physicians what they like. When it comes to creative concepts, research is good at identify-

ing problems, but does a poor job of identifying good solutions.

**NIEMIEC.** Sometimes we get the reports back and I read them, and I ask, was I at the same market-research session as this guy? We see



**FRANK CORBETT**

Passion for creativity

Passion for science

A class act

A true gentleman

A mentor

Beginning in calendar year 2003, funds will be made available to undergraduate and graduate students who are pursuing academic credentials associated with healthcare marketing.

According to Mr. Cotherman, there are a number of academic institutions that already have been identified, such as The Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, which has integrated marketing communications programs; Fairleigh Dickinson University, which has advanced studies in pharmaceutical marketing; and other schools that specialize in the graphic design area of healthcare communications.

"The scholarship foundation will be funded consistent with the longevity that we have with our clients," Mr. Cotherman says. "We are going to designate a \$500

investment for each year that a client has been with the agency. We have a number of long-term clients, most notably the dermatology business from Bristol-Myers Squibb Co., formerly Westwood, which has been a client for 40 years. We will be making a \$20,000 contribution in the name of Bristol-Myers Squibb to the foundation. We will be doing this for all of our clients, including Alcon Laboratories, which we have been associated with for more than 20 years, and Merck & Co. for 10 years.

"This also is a way for us to recognize our clients, the loyalty they have shown to us, and the longevity that we enjoy with so many of our client relationships," Mr. Cotherman says.

According to Mr. Cotherman, the scholarship also comes with paid internships at the agency, "This gives people not only the opportunity to advance their education, but also to get real world experience."

The disbursement of the funds will be governed by the executive director and a board of the directors of the nonprofit organization. The executive director, who will be named March 8, coinciding with Corbett's 40th anniversary celebration, is an elected position. Currently, the board of directors consists of Mr. Corbett, Mr. Cotherman, and Jack Fisher. Mr. Fisher, who is officially retired from the agency, had been president of Corbett for about 17 years.

The agency was founded by Mr. Corbett, who is now 84 years old, in the fall of 1961. He led the agency up until the time he brought Mr. Fisher on in 1978. Mr. Fisher became president in 1980. Mr. Corbett continued as chairman and vice chairman.

"At that time Jack had been given the leadership opportunity and really

the market research manipulated, twisted, misinterpreted. Compounding the problem are folks who I call "technicians." These are the people who are very good at validating a safer approach. They talk a really good game, they know all the rules. They will tell you that people in an ad will get you readership, they'll measure the eye track, they'll tell you a sentence should be short or long. They'll tell you that headline and copy should always be black, never knocked out to white. They'll

led the agency from 1980 to 1997, when he made me president," Mr. Cotherman says.

Although Mr. Corbett has no official responsibilities at the agency, he remains a constant presence, much to the delight of Corbett employees. "He's been a terrific mentor to many of us," Mr. Cotherman says. "Frank comes into the agency everyday and spends time with our people — he's a terrific asset to have. He is one of the last true gentlemen associated with this industry — a class act. He is highly respected and very passionate about creativity and science. He's a pharmacist by training. Frank has an extremely healthy respect for people, their talents, and how to nurture that talent. He is beyond

reproach in how he approaches people in business. And that is something that has been passed on through time to all of us who have 'grown up' at the agency."

"I've done a great many things personally and professionally," Mr. Corbett says. "I've accomplished most of the goals I wanted to accomplish. I've climbed the mountains that I wanted to climb. I think most retirees fade away because they no longer have mountains to climb. I'm one of the fortunate ones. Mountains are the life choices each of us must make. Life's too short not to have mountains to climb."

The core principles of the agency today remain very much the same as when they were instituted by Mr. Corbett 40 years ago. "Advertising is relatively simple when you think of it," Mr. Corbett says. "It is knowing your product, what it will do, what advantages over similar products it has, and who the target audience is. If you know these things, you should be able to develop good advertising. A creative person's job is to attract attention. Good advertising should never be complex."

Today, Corbett Healthcare includes two full-service advertising agencies (Corbett Worldwide Healthcare Communications and DDB Corbett Worldwide Healthcare Communications, which is a joint venture with consumer affiliate agency DDB Chicago), a medical education and scientific marketing company (Pragmaton), a clinical-trial, patient-recruitment, and retention company (Patient Quest), a media-planning and placement company (HMC Media Group), and a digital media and electronic production operation (Vis-U-Com).

give you fact after fact after fact, but the fact is that these people are merely scientists of advertising. The truth is, there are those clients, and I dare say even advertising agencies, who would like nothing better than for creativity to be a cut-and-dried science, but it simply isn't.

**NOSTA.** David Ogilvy said market research should be like a lamp post to a drunk at night, providing support but not illumination. Often we find that product managers and ad agencies look to market research to come up with a definitive answer, an ad concept. Research will never do that. We have to use our marketing instincts and our gut to select the concept that's based on data. Product managers often hide behind market research because they are afraid to take ownership of a concept that makes others nervous.

**NIEMIEC.** We continue to take our lead from the client. If we are creative thinkers, we should be able to come up with creative and innovative ways of doing more effective market research. We stick doctors in a contrived environment, and we expect that we're going to get a real-life response from them — a real-life read into how they perceive the work, the creativity, the message — it's completely ridiculous.

**SCOTT.** We cannot simply spoon feed physicians data. While it's certainly important to provide information, the form in which we present it is still very important. It's axiomatic in the business — the more single-minded the advertising or promotion is, the more likely the point will come across. The more you tell people, the less they hear.



## The CREATIVE pool

**LAZUR.** Teaching somebody to be creative is like teaching somebody to play the guitar. They could pluck all day at the strings, but if they ain't got rhythm, they're going

### THOMAS GREENBAUM

One of the biggest dangers that one can make in market research is to try to make the subject your expert. Just because the doctor is who he or she is, doesn't make them an expert in advertising.

to sound lousy no matter how much theory they know.

**HARRI.** Our obligation is to make sure we hire people who have the ability to produce the creative product and make sure folks in our organization understand how to recognize a great piece of advertising so they can see the difference between what's great, what's mediocre, and what's awful. They also need to learn how to sell it — how to explain to clients what an original, powerful piece of advertising can do for their brand.

**SPETRINO.** As creative people we're hungry all the time. We always want to do something different, we want to do something that sparkles, that gets noticed, that gets people talking. Everybody is so willing to judge creative, but so few people can do it. Everybody can play art director or copy writer. But left in a room with a naked pad, very few people can make something out of nothing. The world needs us. We show people colors that haven't been seen before, we provide sounds that haven't been heard before.

**SCOTT.** One of the reasons the industry's creativity isn't as good as it might be is that a lot of people have given up. I suspect they may not come with their best effort. It's easy to succumb to reduced expectations. The responsibility of a professional creative person is to always come with the strongest idea. When you've been kicked in the teeth a few times it's hard — there's a temptation to not bother when you know less than your best effort will be accepted.

**WHITBY.** Frustration is part and parcel of advertising. As a creative person to be successful in advertising you have to be extraordinarily resilient. You have to be able to let go of the work, let go of a bad situation, and not lose that sense of enthusiasm for what you are doing. People who are unable to let go or get terribly disappointed by their inability to bring the things that they create and they love to fruition don't survive in advertising. I will tell you, the best work is usually left on the floor.

**NIEMIEC.** There will always be that creative piece of work that just doesn't make it through the gauntlet intact. That's where the agency has to step up and not be afraid to fight. But we're afraid to fight for what we know is right, because we don't want to make waves. We can't afford to anger the client. There's a tremendous amount of fear that cripples us in this industry.

**ABBATE.** I believe that doing the kind of work that we do is more difficult than doing other types of work. There are some very good classic



### JOHN NOSTA

I believe that if your advertising doesn't make people a little nervous, throw it away and try again. Most great ideas start as blasphemies. And I think it's about time we started creating a few blasphemies.

healthcare creative people who could do very good consumer work if they chose to. I don't think the reverse is true. It's much more difficult for consumer people to do what we do. When I look at the very good creatives in our industry, they have this incredible innate creative ability and they have the ability to assimilate very technical issues. There are many healthcare creative people who have done exceptional work that no one outside the industry has seen. I have news for the consumer people who come over — until they've walked a mile in some of our creative shoes, they can't possibly know what the creative process is like on the medical side.

**NIEMIEC.** As creatives, we are not vocal enough. We have some of the most savvy, intelligent creative people that I've ever encountered. Most of us come from consumer backgrounds, and I can tell you I never saw the level of intelligence in that arena that I see in the healthcare arena. Our creative people can talk strategy, science, and marketing. It's not creativity for the sake of creativity, it's not fluff, it's not superficial — it's a powerful marketing tool. But we are so afraid to sell what we do. ♦

PharmaVoice welcomes comments about this article. E-mail us at [feedback@pharmalinx.com](mailto:feedback@pharmalinx.com).