

Contributed by John J. Nosta

IT'S THE CREATIVE, STUPID

YEP ... **IT'S THE CREATIVE!** That magical stuff that takes a molecule and makes it into a brand. The stuff that sticks to the roof of your customers' brain. And interestingly, it's really one of the only things that pharmaceutical companies haven't been able to create for themselves. Creativity is what an advertising agency should provide to its clients and instill in its clients. It's the magic, the fun, and the excitement. And, by the way, it's one of the key ingredients to selling brands. But, it seems that creativity has taken a back seat to other "hot buttons" in our industry like integration or globalization. Creativity has been pushed aside as some "commodity" left to those "creative" people who, as myth would have it, don't understand strategy or always show up to meetings late.

IS CREATIVITY DEAD?

Take a look around. Look at some recent journal advertising. Pandering headlines to physicians with "unsurpassed efficacy" subheads. It's pitiful. The result of this half-ass, second-rate effort, is to make much of our work the laughing stock of the advertising business. Our creative product is decades behind, and new talent generally makes its way here after failing in the consumer world. Further, our industry consistently fails to produce advertising leaders with a real voice. Sadly, many agencies are cut from the "concierge school" of account management.

THE REAL TRAGEDY

The pharmaceutical industry is an American innovation that sets the pace for the world. We lead the world in drug discovery and stand tall as a growing and profitable business. But we stand even taller with the diseases treated and lives saved. One would think that with all this clout, our communications would be world-class. Sometimes they are, but more frequently, they're not. Quickly, think of a favorite or memorable campaign — a campaign that makes you smile and stays with you forever — a campaign that has become part of the very fabric of American culture. Think of the jingles that you haven't heard in decades and that spring to life after hearing just a few notes. Are any of those from the pharmaceutical industry? Too bad, they should be.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE CREATIVE

How do we change this? Stand up and shout! Fire your agency. Question authority. Ask tough questions of agency principals, who seem to know less and less about the details of the products and more and more about menus and four-star resorts. Demand creative thinking that knocks your socks off. And as someone once said, "think different."

Today, more than ever, the healthcare business is about knowledge — tons of facts and figures — there may be no other industry that is so steeped in information. But here's the central issue: Knowledge is only fully brought to life when it's empowered by imagination — filtered by

a brain that's tuned to a creative frequency. People who look at things differently don't just reinterpret the data, they change the world. But along the way, they tend to ruffle a few feathers. And as Copernicus taught us, most great ideas start off as blasphemies.

Creativity is not just a clever headline (If I hear "unsurpassed efficacy" one more time I'll puke.)

or a journal ad with a smiling patient pandering to physicians ("You're OK, doc!"). Creativity is a way of THINKING, a mind-set, a vocation, a life-style. It's the "it" that makes us smile, makes us think, and makes us act.

Creativity is not the domain of the copywriter or art director. However, our industry often creates an infrastructure that squashes comprehensive creative thought and pushes it away. The separation of "creative people," and hence the creative process from marketers or account people, creates a "split-brain" phenomenon that fractures this process at its core and builds a wall of misperception and even mistrust. The "suits" versus the "jeans." It's a battle that starts in the agency and winds up right in the product manager's office. A battle that nobody wins.

IT MUST STOP!

We all need a good shot of creativity to drive the engines of growth and innovation. We need creativity in all aspects of our business. It's the application of creativity to strategic thinking, medical education, and even things like clinical trials that can result in that "ah-ha" that so many seek, yet rarely find.

Agencies are the keepers of this magical thing called creativity. And when it's not there, there's no one else to blame.

So, how do we make magic? Find some smart people who are empowered by imagination and who can be inspired by bold, dynamic leadership. Gee ... is anybody out there?



JOHN NOSTA

John J. Nosta is a partner in MDC, a New York-based advertising agency. His title is Unconventional Wisdom. ♦

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