

The Advertising Age Encyclopedia of Advertising. Edited by John McDonough and Karen Egolf. New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003. Three volumes, xxiii + 1873 pp. Illustrations, references, index. Cloth, \$385.00. ISBN: 1-579-58172-2.

Reviewed by Daniel Pope

In an age of irony and cynicism, much contemporary advertising shies away from boastful claims and superlatives. However, to promote *The Advertising Age Encyclopedia of Advertising*, one would be tempted to revert to a gigantic typeface and a liberal sprinkling of exclamation points. Years in the making! Nearly two thousand double-columned, large-sized pages in length! Hundreds of illustrations, scores in full color, mainly from the wonderful Hartman Center for Sales Advertising and Marketing History at Duke University! Well over two hundred contributors from academia and business! Almost six hundred entries covering topics from “Abbott Mead Vickers/BBDO” to “Zip Code”!

Sophisticated audience research suggests, however, that the readers of the *Business History Review* will want to learn more. Some would-be readers will want to know whether the three volumes are truly encyclopedic. For example, since advertising today covers the globe, does the encyclopedia reflect this? The editors aimed for volumes “international in scope” (p. xiii) and achieved a measure of success. Over fifty entries treat the current state of the advertising business in specific nations (“Argentina”; “Australia and New Zealand”) and regions (“Africa, Sub-Saharan”; “Asia, Southeast”; and so forth). Coverage grows less comprehensive as it moves away from the North American and Western European hubs, but these national and regional summaries are capable treatments of developments around the globe.

One may wonder, however, how well these contributions will age. For example, the entry on “Europe, Eastern” provides meaty summaries of media, clients, and agencies in the former Soviet-bloc nations, along with an intriguing comment about an emerging tension between employing skillful production techniques and appealing to distinctive national identities. But, in a rapidly changing region,

European Union membership may so alter the advertising landscape that today's agency leaders and regulatory climate may be ancient history in a few years. In this respect, the entry on "Russia and the Confederation of Independent States" should fare better in the long run. Barbara Mueller, its author, provides much of the same information about the advertising business today, but she accompanies it with a broader and deeper treatment of the history of advertising in the Soviet economy and a more nuanced consideration of both the positive and negative elements that emerged after the collapse of communism. The historical perspective will remain instructive, even as the proper names and numbers change.

Although articles in the encyclopedia range from biographical sketches to essays on concepts like "stereotyping," "humor," and "cultural symbols," the largest category of entries treats individual advertising agencies. In his introductory comments, editor John McDonough maintains that advertising agencies' histories have gained too little attention from historians. This will likely strike a sympathetic chord with institutionally oriented business historians. Ralph M. Hower's history of N. W. Ayer & Son, first published in 1939, remains the most comprehensive and scholarly history of any individual agency. Those who stress the cultural significance of advertising rather than its business role may be less disturbed by the paucity of agency histories. Also, those who believe that clients exercise the effective power in their relations with agencies may consider McDonough's call for more studies of agencies misguided.

In the articles about agencies, the effort at an international perspective is valuable. American readers will probably know something about the U.S. giants but will likely be less familiar with Sweden's *Paradis* or W/Brasil Publicidade, unless they have business interests in those countries. Another virtue of these articles is the inclusion of sketches of agencies no longer in existence. There are some surprising omissions. Volney Palmer, usually credited as the first agent in the United States, and George P. Rowell, turn-of-the-century industry leader and publisher of *Printer's Ink* trade journal, both lack entries. However, articles on important early twentieth-century firms like Lord & Thomas and J. Sterling Getchell provide solid information and thoughtful perspectives on their roles. By contrast, some of the

essays on contemporary agencies are uncritical chronicles of accounts won, campaigns mounted, awards received. They will no doubt interest employees of those firms, and perhaps their direct competitors, but probably few others will care a great deal. The sometimes dizzying successions of mergers, splits, and other organizational changes that produced current agencies' configurations are recounted in the introductory paragraphs of these articles. One suspects that a decade from now many of these genealogies will be outmoded and that newly coined corporate names and unpronounceable strings of initials will populate the agency landscape.

To an historian, the pride of place that agencies assume in this encyclopedia is a bit ironic. Full-service advertising agencies, nationally based though sometimes with offices abroad, emerged about a century ago in the United States. Now they are buffeted from above and below. Transnational networks and firms promising "integrated marketing" services have broader geographic and functional dimensions than conventional agencies. At the same time, firms specializing in one part of the advertising business—account planning, media buying, creative "boutiques"—have sprung up, and specialized agencies have established niches in financial advertising, pharmaceuticals, ethnic marketing, and other areas. In a few publicized cases—notably the early-nineties "Always Coca-Cola" campaign—a leading advertiser has bypassed ad agencies entirely, employing Hollywood's Creative Artists Agency to design its commercials. Until a generation ago, agencies could count on an entrenched commission system to compensate them for their labors. Today, the commission system no longer holds together the advertiser-agency-media triangle.

The ferment in the advertising-agency business reflects a broader change in marketing. Conventional advertising, mediated communications designed to sell products and services, now occupies a smaller place in the universe of promotion and marketing methods. The array of techniques to catch the attention and win the allegiance of consumers has broadened to include events marketing, point-of-sale display, product placements in movies and television shows, contests, coupons, telemarketing, and much more.

The blurred edges of the advertising business pose a problem for the encyclopedia's editors. This is not an encyclopedia of marketing or promotion,

much less an encyclopedia of consumer culture, but it cannot ignore areas that stand outside the customary scope of advertising. The editors have responded with articles on subjects like D. L. Blair, Inc., a leading sales-promotion firm that specializes in contests, and “Coupon,” a recognition of the fact that about a thousand of these are printed every year for every American (although, we learn, the redemption rate has sunk to about two percent since the 1970s). Although several of these articles are done very well, coverage of the marketing and social contexts of advertising is—forgivably—less than comprehensive.

Some overheated observers have proclaimed that traditional advertising is dying or dead—a premature obituary when advertisers are spending half a trillion dollars worldwide. Estimates vary widely, but an average American may be exposed to as many as fifteen thousand commercial messages a day. However, the omnipresence of advertising is also one of its banes. From the standpoint of any individual advertiser, other ads are competitors for the audience’s attention and interest. Meanwhile, technologies of commercial intrusion generate countertechnologies of avoidance—mute buttons, digital video recorders, pop-up blockers, or even “premium” commercial-free versions of Web sites.

The *Encyclopedia of Advertising*, despite some rather celebratory entries, does not neglect the challenges that advertising faces. Charles Pappas’s sophisticated entry on “Clutter/Ad Ubiquity” comments: “With biblical simplicity, ad creep only begets more ad creep as companies fight to get their messages heard over those of others” (vol. 1, p. 333). His perspective on the public’s reaction may offer false encouragement to advertisers. Despite pockets of resistance, Pappas asserts that materialistic consumers are more amused than offended by ad creep. However, even if consumers are not about to lead a mass uprising against consumer culture, they are skeptics and doubters. Advertisers cannot expect to win their loyalty without a struggle, probably an expensive one.

This is only one of several articles in the *Encyclopedia of Advertising* that stand out for their analytical perspective or critical edge. Some of these appear in the form of essays on individual organizations. Thus, the entry on the public-relations giant Hill and Knowlton not only confronts the agency’s role in supporting

a front group for the tobacco industry that resisted scientific evidence of the health dangers of smoking. It also concludes with the Gulf War episode, in which Hill and Knowlton coached Kuwaitis to give false testimony about supposed Iraqi atrocities following the 1991 invasion.

However, in general academic users of the encyclopedia are likely to find the more conceptual essays to be the most valuable. Among those that stood out to this reader are the treatments of “Blacklisting,” “Children,” “Culture of Consumption,” “Government Regulation,” “Museums and Archives,” “Ratings,” and “Television.” These are notable for balanced analysis and a sense of historical context. Unfortunately, the eleven entries, covering over sixty pages, on “History” are for the most part uninspired. Arranged chronologically, they are skewed toward the present. Since one of the central issues in the history of advertising and, more broadly, consumer culture is whether a consumer orientation took hold in the Western world in early modern times, the foreshortening of historical perspective begs an important scholarly question. Taken as a whole, the tone of the encyclopedia is generally positive and sometimes unabashedly enthusiastic, but these volumes amount to far more than a puff job.

Users of an encyclopedia usually consult it in a utilitarian fashion. They want to check a specific fact or to get basic information on a topic. For these readers, the *Encyclopedia of Advertising* will frequently satisfy their needs. It draws heavily on key sources—the archives of *Advertising Age* and the Hartman Center in particular. The editors recruited an all-star cast of scholars, who appear to have taken their assignments seriously. The illustrations lend a lively note in a genre (encyclopedias) not known for sprightliness.

For users with broader scholarly objectives, lists of sources for further reading will be a practical asset in any reference work. For this purpose, the *Encyclopedia of Advertising* is not as strong as it should be. Most bibliographies are brief, and some fail to include entries later than the mid-1990s. However, there is something for practically everyone in these volumes. They will be mainstays for future work on the history of advertising.

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