

Advertising: A Scientific Art

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PRAD 553: Advertising Foundations

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March 7, 2016

As I reflect over my first quarter in DePaul's PRAD program I realize that I have a much better grasp and understanding of the field of advertising. I came into the program knowing a little about public relations because of my personal interests and work experience, but I had very little knowledge of advertising. The readings, presentations, engaging dialogue, guest speakers, and even the Twitter assignments in my Advertising Foundations class all helped to familiarize me with the field. One of the biggest takeaways for me is that advertising is both a science and an art, and I would go one step further and personally describe it as a scientific art.

I began the quarter writing about a theme of "morals vs. metrics" as I compared the writings of Luke Sullivan and Gerard Tellis. I concluded that the *human factor* and how people "feel it in their gut" can never be quantified and encompassed by researched technical means. I also applauded Sullivan's passionate command to engage in ethical advertising and choose the path that "gets there without costing anybody their dignity" (Sullivan, p. 14). Ultimately, I stated that in my mind the advertising scale was tipping towards morals over metrics; which relates to the dichotomy of art vs. science. In fact, in a later week I even wrote a reflection titled "Account Planning: Not a Science" which, through title alone, one can glean my opinion on the dichotomy at hand. As the quarter winds down, however, I have much better appreciation for the fact that advertising is indeed both a science and art.

In our conversations about the creative side of advertising, for example, we talked about how "effective advertising is the product of both science (persuasion) and art (creativity)" and that each element comes together in the phrase "creative strategy" (YK week 7 slides). Similarly, Adi Ignatius wrote a short piece titled, "Advertising Is an Art – and a Science," for the Harvard Business Review. He begins the piece by quoting the famous William Bernbach; "Advertising is fundamentally persuasion and persuasion happens to be not a science, but an art." (Ignatius

2013). Ignatius acknowledges the field has shifted and references a move towards science; “The biggest change, of course, is the explosion of data now available to advertisers as they try to connect with consumers across a multitude of platforms. The big question: How do managers make sense of all those metrics?” (Ignatius 2013).

Our course materials also address the question of measuring advertising effectiveness. For example, Calder, Isaac, and Malthouse’s reading during our Media week explores how to measure consumer engagement. However, the authors recognize the imprecise nature of understanding human behavior by stating in their conclusion; “As a caveat, it is important to note that the findings reported in this article are derived from surveys, which are limited in their ability to establish causality” (Calder, p. 12). Rayport’s reading from the same week about human experience also tackles the question of engagement and offers a series of spheres (public, social, tribal, and psychological) to guide advertising; “In a media-saturated world, persuading through interruption and repetition is increasingly ineffective. To engage consumers, advertisers must focus on where and when they will be receptive. This requires strategically embedding ads in four domains of human experience” (Rayport, p. 79). Throughout the semester our readings covered a vast array of useful tools and formulas to help guide the creation of effective advertising.

Going along with the theme of measuring effectiveness, Keenan Beasley wrote a popular Forbes article earlier this year titled, “How Agencies Are Putting Themselves Out Of Business And What We Should Do About It” which has over 119,000 views. Beasley details how an outdated compensation model, increased marketing burdens on agencies, and other issues are challenging the advertising industry. He argues that an important problem has to do with the fact

that agencies don't know how to measure what they do. In fact, even if analytics and measurements are available it won't necessarily do the trick in terms of measuring effectiveness:

“I've had marketing executives look me in the eye and say, “when you can analytically prove that the money I spend with you is providing a return, then I have an unlimited budget.” But that's the problem. The traditional “media marketing mix” is flawed. It's a pinpoint in time, usually compiled long after a campaign is complete, and rarely takes into account anything that takes place before the swipe of a card. Online advertisers are to blame for a lot of this poor analysis. Just because I click a link and buy a product, doesn't mean Facebook is the sole reason for that purchase... To really understand the impact of our marketing, we need better tools.” (Beasley January 2016).

Beasley shows that there aren't always simple solutions concerning the complicated reality of advertising. However, in a follow up article Beasley also highlights the importance of relationships with the case of Team Epiphany and its founder Coltrane Curtis who “consistently provides real value to clients and charges a premium for that service” (Beasley March 2016).

Beasley quotes the founder:

“You could call it being effective,” Curtis says. [Team Epiphany](#) connects brands with the right celebrity relationships, produces large-scale events, and sets the standard for relevant, influential social media. A creative agency, their value isn't in a big idea or a funny video—it's expert understanding. They keep their thumb on the pulse of culture, and they're active participants in creating culture too. “Respect from the community comes from a belongingness to the community,” Curtis says. “With every client, we've started small and built trust through results. They slowly come around.” (Beasley March 2016).

These themes of respect, belongingness, community, and trust cannot be measured and show how science and art, encompassed in part by the human element, are both crucial to advertising.

Overall, I have learned that scientific-based strategies for effectiveness are increasingly an important part of the advertising field. These strategies span from before the ad is created, such as the readings for understanding your audience back in week 2, to the assessment of the ad

after it is released. The implications for advertising's future also relate to the ability to leverage scientific data for benefit. Just today a piece in VentureBeat titled, "Skyhook launches its new Personas to help solve a \$100B industry problem," which represents a breakthrough in location-based marketing:

"Skyhook's mobile location technology processes trillions of location signals annually. Rather than focus on the current location and what intent signals it may or may not offer the marketer, advertiser, or publisher, Skyhook looks at location signals over time and applies its venue data to these broader movements. This information allows for the creation of personas, and the three new offerings are designed to identify these different types of consumer. This, in turn, means more relevant mobile advertising for the consumer. Importantly, it also means more accurate location, venue visit, and customer persona data for advertisers and publishers. This is good news in an industry that is expected to spend \$100 billion on mobile ads worldwide in 2016, one that wastes money every day on poorly targeted messaging..." (Rogers 2016).

Effective advertising will have to keep up with the constantly changing world of technology and consumer demand. It must even tackle tough questions and dilemmas such as ad-blocking. For example, Advertising Age reports that The New York Times has begun testing ad-blocking efforts including new pop-up messages:

"One such message prompted an ad blocking user to either exempt the Times' website from it through a process known as "whitelisting," or to sign up for a digital subscription."The best things aren't free," the message read. "You currently have an ad blocker installed. Advertising helps us fund our journalism. To continue to enjoy the Times, please support us in one of the following ways" (Ad Age 2016).

It is clear that advertising as an industry that is constantly in flux. From measuring effectiveness to constantly being aware of changing consumer needs and desires, the field has a lot to keep up with. Even internally there seem to be changes. During our visit to Leo Burnett last month Michael, a business development director, encouraged us to look up a video titled, "Say No to Spec," by the Zulu Alpha Kilo agency that humorously challenges the advertising industry's unpaid spec culture. Along with industry culture and needed changes we can look to our readings about advertising and society, which inspired my paper and class presentation on diversity as an ethical dilemma within the field.

Ultimately, the art vs. science conundrum concerning advertising proves to be a false dichotomy. Advertising does indeed encompass both. While I'm personally obliged to break down barriers and dichotomies – related to both my personal identities and the transformative organizing work I've been engaged with – I still think there is space to view various aspects on a spectrum. Throughout the quarter I've gained much knowledge about the important scientific elements of advertising and yet I would argue that almost nothing can be purely split 50/50.

Beasley's scale likely tips toward the scientific:

“Creativity still matters, but unless you can anchor the discussion in measurable data and results, your creative idea is worth nothing. That's why I hate the traditional term AOR—Agency of Record? What does that mean? To survive into the future, agencies must become Agencies of Return. To do that, you have to be prepared to measure everything that you do, and take an honest look at your own results” (Beasley January 2016).

While I appreciate the importance of measurable data and results, there is something about great, effective, and creative advertising that both *speaks* and *stays* with people that cannot be measured. I remember Gina's advice from our visit to Leo Burnett. She described her work as a strategist and planner as being a “cultural anthropologist and problem solver” and she mentioned the importance of always being curious. She explained that she uses a phone app called Flipboard every day and that she is constantly reading about psychology, anthropology, culture and other topics to “feed” her brain. She also mentioned the importance of thinking and building arguments like a lawyer, among other tips. Her presentation really showed that her job is both scientific and artistic, even if she's not developing creative. Furthermore, in our discussions it was interesting to see how people reacted to ads and that an ad being *meaningful* really seemed to resonate with my classmates and I. Meaningfulness, like many other qualities of effective advertising, cannot be measured.

Humans are extremely complicated and one lesson we learned throughout the quarter can attest to this. I began the quarter a bit confused about the difference between advertising and public relations and I've heard, over and over again, that the lines between the industries are quite blurry. I think this attests not only to the rise of social media and online platforms, but to the fact that the PRAD fields are deeply and intimately connected with human behavior.

In an earlier paper I quoted Neil deGrasse Tyson as tweeting, "In science, when human behavior enters the equation, things go nonlinear. That's why Physics is easy and Sociology is hard" (1/5/16 Twitter). Science can, and should, inform our advertising but I have come to the conclusion that advertising, to me, is not just both a science and an art-- it is a scientific art; art encompassing the final emphasis.

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Zulu Alpha Kilo's #saynotospec <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=essNmNOrQto>