

Editors and Editing

By Burke Moody on October 13th, 2009

The editor is the person who transforms a stack of dailies-film, tapes, files-into a compelling and effective piece of marketing communication. The editor is a storyteller and artist, a designer and technician, and often a diplomat. The editor is the fresh set of eyes, the 'director' of post production, the third and final author of a spot.

Directors and agency creatives understand this very well.

Independent creative editorial companies are mostly small, privately held shops, many still owned and managed by editors. They provide the expert support structure, staff, producers, assistants, technicians, equipment and technology infrastructure which enable their editors to ply their craft, to tell their stories, to make magic.

For years, advertising agencies have had their own in-house editing facilities, a necessary convenience for reels, pitch videos, the occasional animatic, simple spots and other in-house projects. But all that changed in the last few years. The consolidation of multiple agencies into large, publicly traded holding companies focused on share value and profitability, combined with advances in technology and the crush of the worst economic downturn in 70 years, has spawned an unprecedented expansion of agency in-house editorial which poses a powerful challenge to independent editorial companies and their editors.

Stuart Elliot in the New York Times (5/23/2005) quoted Jonathan Bond, co-chairman of Kirshenbaum Bond & Partners: "In the 80's, we used to fight with clients over creative. In the 90's, it was about strategy. Now, it's only about money."

Four years later, magnified by the recession, it is even more about money. The continual pressures from advertisers to reduce marketing costs and from agency management to protect margins and retain profits have reduced budgets, narrowed choices and shifted a significant amount of work away from independent editorial companies to agencies in-house shops. These forces may well alter the long-standing relationships between advertisers and agencies and between agencies and their creative partners in the editorial business. Time will tell.

Over the last 4 years, research commissioned by AICE suggests quite clearly that many agency creatives and producers believe they should be entitled to work with their editor of choice. Most agencies which work with independent editorial companies place a great value on the editor's contribution. And significantly, agencies that regularly work with independent editors know that price has rarely, if ever, been an obstacle because most independent editorial companies will work hard to meet budget requirements. So unless it is mandated from on high (an increasingly common phenomenon), nearly all agency creatives prefer to



work with their editors of choice, the men and women with whom they have established long and trusted relationships.

As a head of production, as a creative director, as a writer or art director, when your client spends a million dollars on a campaign, your choice of editor is as important as your choice of director. It is not about equipment. It is not about assembling shots to the storyboard. It is about the work. It is about the art and craft of storytelling. It is, pure and simple, about a talent. That will always be the case for those who value the quality of their work above all, no matter how the industry shifts and changes.

There are some signs that the advertiser/agency relationships are beginning to change. Coca-Cola and P&G are exploring value-based agency compensation models, a shift from the time-based compensation models which are common. This new paradigm suggests that value-the best quality at the best price-is what moves product. We will have to wait and see if the value proposition will trump cost alone.

In the meantime, it is my conviction, that independent editorial companies and their editors will always deliver the best value because the incentive to produce excellent work is always there. "You're only as good as your last job" drives creative excellence and superior service in the editorial and post production business.

Finally, I believe that independent editorial companies are uniquely positioned to capitalize on the opportunities offered by the changes in the media production process and multi-channel marketing. They have the technology, the infrastructure and the experienced support staffs in place. And most importantly, they have the editorial, design and technical talent with advertising chops. A tough combination to beat.

Burke Moody is the Executive Director of AICE, the Association of Independent Creative Editors.