

create

M A G A Z I N E

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EXPRESSION

WE DON'T WANT TO BE LOSERS



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We don't enter award shows. Because we don't want to lose.

We don't want to lose focus of our target audience. We don't want to lose sight of our promise to our clients to apply all of our energies to growing their brands with inspired ideas. We don't want to lose our reputation for integrity. We don't want to lose our original voice.

We don't do work to win awards. Work created specifically to win awards is focused on judges. Makes sense, since they're the ones who hand out the awards. Our only target audience is our clients' consumers.



Illustration by Ben Henderson

How many times have we all told our clients that in order to be most effective, an ad has to be single-minded? One message, one target. Our work is based on an insightful positioning and a solid strategy devised from research on our clients' products/services, the target audience and its media consumption. If we're distracted even a little bit, we dilute the chances of getting this daunting task accomplished.

If an ad is focused on getting awards, why bother doing research on the consumer audience at all? It would be more effective to simply research the show judges. Create a focus group: Give them a cold sandwich — okay, sushi for this crowd — and an hour later you'll know exactly what they want from the ads, increasing your chances of winning.

So if you're determined to win awards with your ads, which master do you answer to? This is the question that led to the invention of the mock ad. Mock ads are those created by an agency that knows the work that actually ran in the media isn't quite what the judges are looking for, so they do some minor surgery: nipping the copy (often cutting out "the sell" the client insisted on), perhaps doing a bit of lip on the hefty logo and then entering that as the ad that supposedly ran.

What does that say to the client? "Hey, the ad we did for you was

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judges — and it's important for us to win awards — so we did a little touch-up even though it's against the show rules, but everyone does it to some extent and we did put your name on the award so here's a platinum Double Helix for you, congrats!"

No wonder ad agencies have a trust rating below politicians. With hundreds of award shows out there, we shouldn't be surprised if clients are wary of our claims of 100 percent dedication on helping their business when it appears we're really dedicated to advancing ourselves.

When I started in the business, my creative director said that gold and silver were all that mattered. To survive at the agency you had to win in the shows. Was that what was told to the clients as well? If so, perfect. But I never saw that goal written on a brief under the ad's objective.

Hey, I like awards too. I have bowling trophies and golf trophies, and even a Best Dad in the World trophy. I earned them because I knocked down more pins than my competitors and shot a lower score on the course. (As for the Best Dad in the World, I admit I bribed the judges with candy.) That is the sole purpose of each competition. Simple and single-minded. I would have won even if I didn't get an award. Just add up the pins, count the strokes.

But the judges of creative award shows are not counters of strokes or pins; they are following a set of rules that are different than the ones we started with when we created the ad.

Judges are big award winners themselves — that's how they got to be judges. They know how to build award-winning ads. Talented and smart as they are, though, they don't know our target as well as we do, and they don't know precisely what the client wanted to accomplish. So how are they going to judge the merit of our work? In effect, they don't know the real score.

Winning ads are powered by both a brilliant brand and consumer-relevant strategy and charged by inspired executions that take a bold leap at the heart and mind of the target. They're the only kind that will win consumers over, win the trust of your clients. And if you're into that sort of thing and want to enter the shows for industry recognition, they might well possibly win. Great ads can win awards.

Come to think about it now, I just might start a new award show — everyone is a guaranteed winner. No losers. Completely single-minded and true. Don't even bother sending in the ads. Just send your \$50 entry fee, and you too can bring home a shiny new gold-plated statuette (for platinum it's only \$99.99). Ladies and gentlemen, I present: the EGOs. ■