

Chip Fuller

AD Memoirs

For the past seven years I have been working for a virtual advertising agency that I founded. During this time, I have had the good fortune to work for a number of great clients including, Disney, Taco Bell, the U.S. Department of Defense, MEG toys, the AD Council, and many, many others. I've worn the hat of a creative director, a writer, an art director, a producer and a director. I have also been involved with a number of start-up companies- helping them with their Brand Identification, Marketing Strategies and Business Plans- as well as providing consulting and advisory assistance. I have enjoyed working on the marketing challenges of these companies and organizations but I believe that I can best serve my clients by focusing more of my energy on the creative process. That said, I am certain that I am a better creative because of my understanding of the strategic marketing concerns of business- so my time in this area has been time well spent.

From 2000 to 2004, I worked at FCB in Orange County, CA where I was responsible for all of the creative and all of the creatives on the Taco Bell account. I led the National Value Team, the National Tie-Ins and Promotions Group, and the Local Store Marketing staff. Early in 2001, I was asked to pitch Taco Bell's Merchandising business. Since I had never worked on merchandising before, I approached the assignment as if it were an ad campaign.

First, I studied the history of Taco Bell's merchandising as well as McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's and others and I determined that NONE of them even had a campaign! No consistent color palette. No steadfast treatment of the food photography. Just a sea of ugly 99¢ signs. Through some investigative work, I found out that our competition, the incumbent (Y&R) had a staff of 15+ art directors working on the business. They'd tackle each new assignment by having their army of AD's develop a new logo for the food offering that month. I suspected that they would follow this path for the pitch. They did. I presented a style guide to Taco Bell complete with a color palette, background textures, a proprietary typeface (I called "Taco Bell Rumba") a commitment to food photography and a simple, elegant, powerful way to feature the food. Finally, I explained to them the importance of having a "voice." I sold them on the idea that their customers were essentially guests coming over for a visit. And so screaming 99¢! 99¢! when they'd walk in would be rude- so we shouldn't be doing this in Taco Bell restaurants. I explained the need to welcome their customers in and offer them a drink or a joke.

They liked the idea. I told them I would hire a full time merchandising writer and I only needed 4 art directors because we had a campaign idea and weren't going to waste time and resources designing "new food logos" that were only going to be used for a month. The money we'd save on a smaller staff would be used for better food photography. We won the business. The National Merchandising campaign was added to my list of responsibilities. Six months after we launched the campaign I went to cities across the country doing focus groups on our merchandising. Signs from major QSR's (quick serve restaurants) without food photography or product names were shown and the Taco Bell merchandising was by far the most recognized and respected in the entire QSR category. Merchandising, when done correctly, can be rewarding to work on.

Now, the 3 years prior to my arrival at Taco Bell they had experienced a steady decline in sales each quarter. The creative was really memorable (it was the days of the dog) so everybody remembered the commercials but that did not translate into greater burrito sales. Taco Bell's President wanted a change. After careful examination of the "dog" agency's work, I realized that they had really not given much thought to the way the food was being presented. In most of the spots, the food was more of an afterthought. Often, the food would only be shown "heroic" at the very end of the commercial. And never shot very well. It was apparent to me that the live-action comedy director was also shooting the food "beauty" shots.

I saw this as a way to turn things around for Taco Bell. Focusing on the food. We got to work, spending a couple of weeks coming up with innovative ways to feature the food. We came up with a great one that Taco Bell used for years. It was an idea that no "comedy" director could pull off, so we did a careful search of all of the best food shooters in the country and had them submit spec treatments of our idea on a taco. The way we featured the food, along with a great tagline: "Think Outside The Bun," some really nice music, and a consistent VO, were the four major campaign elements we used to turn the corner for the Bell. The clients were great too.

They wanted work that was bold and clever and interesting. I loved working on this account. Because I was so busy running the creative for Taco Bell, I didn't have a lot of time to work on projects for our other clients but I was given the U.S. Forest Service pro-bono assignment one year. FCB had had the account for decades but they had not done anything with Smokey Bear for years. We brought him back and the client loved the work. So did the Ad Council creative committee in New York.

Every TV commercial, radio spot, print ad, billboard and web banner that I presented was approved with NO changes! I loved working with that client, too. We did some great work with and for them.

Before joining FCB in Orange County, CA - I spent a year with an agency in St Louis called, Kupper Parker Communications. When Bruce Kupper hired me, he asked me to do three things for him: 1. Improve the agencies creative reel. 2. Better the relationships with his agencies four largest clients. 3. Improve the creative department's morale. Less than a year after I accepted Mr. Kupper's challenge, I had achieved all three objectives. Number one took care of itself when I fixed numbers 2 and 3. My philosophy on how to get the best work out of creative people is not at all like the majority of creative directors. Most CD's, when they get an assignment, will put 2 or 3 or 4 teams on it. I've worked for some CD's who would have 7 or 8 teams work on one TV spot. That means 6 or 7 teams are going to be disappointed. If they are disappointed enough times, you end up with morale problems. That's what had been happening at KPC.

At my first meeting with my new creative staff (17 writers, art directors, digital designers and producers) I told them how I was going to help them to do great work. I told them that they were all going to get a chance to shine because the days of the "gang-bang" were over. One team on each assignment. Some of their faces had the look of disbelief. Some had an expression of joy. And some were in shock. But they all left the meeting with a sense of hope. During my first two weeks at KPC, I met with each creative (sometimes for more than 2 hours) and discussed everything from what they wanted to get out of the next year, to where they lived and if they had

kids. They each brought in their portfolio and I was able to understand what they did best. I noticed that none of them had a TV reel and when I asked why, they told me that the CD before me went on all of the shoots by himself. No wonder morale was so bad. This guy, like a lot of CD's, would have 6 teams working on a project for two weeks (on a side note: they do this, I believe, because they are insecure about their own ability to "direct" ideas and make them better-or to leave good ideas alone. Gang-bang CD's believe that there is safety in numbers- if they get 5 ideas from 6 teams they have 30 ideas! Sounds good, right? Wrong. Many teams working in this environment do not give you their best effort. After a while they realize it's a waste of their time to work on something they probably will not "win." So, the CD ends up getting 30 mediocre ideas.) Here's the way I work: I assign one team to each project. If they are working as a creative at our ad agency, I assume that they can do the work. I have found when good creatives know that the CD and the agency are counting on them and have given them responsibility and believe in them- well, I've found they will do ANYTHING and EVERYTHING to honor your trust. They come in early. They stay late. They will run through walls for you. In fact, since they are not competing against 5 other teams, they are open with their ideas too (not hiding or locking themselves in their offices) and the other creatives will offer advice on improving their ideas. This approach makes us all team mates not adversaries. They also will work hard to come up with really creative ideas because they know they're going to be able to add this spot to their creative reel.

Finally, I serve as a safety net for the creatives. I work with them and mentor them as they learn the craft of developing, presenting and producing GREAT work. By getting to know the men and women in my charge and by helping them to be successful, I am able to develop their overall job satisfaction and drastically improve the morale at an agency. I did it at KPC. My other objective was to improve the agencies relationships with their four largest clients. I talked with my creatives about the clients and then with the account staff in order to determine who were the decision makers and who were the influencers in the marketing departments of our biggest clients. I then looked at the work that had been done for them. Scary stuff. The ideas were weak and the execution was even worse. Many of the TV commercials were shot on video which immediately says, "low quality." I first met with each client at a lunch meeting- not there to "sell" them on anything. I told them I was there to listen to them talk about their objectives. I asked them what the agency was doing that they liked and I asked them to tell me something that we could fix. They all responded very positively to this. I went back to the agency and spent around a week processing all of what I had learned at my client lunch meetings. I put a specific presentation together for each client focusing on what was critical to their success. I also talked about the importance of creating ads that were both strategic as well as impactful, memorable and well produced. I showed them a reel of some of my spots along side their videotaped spots. Three of the four clients asked why they looked so different. They wanted to know why their commercials looked "cheap." The next time I presented to each of these clients I sold them advertising that built their businesses. Advertising that sold product. Advertising that won awards. Advertising that had their friends at the golf club tell them how much they liked their new television spots and their billboards and their radio commercials. Before my first anniversary with KPC, I had achieved all three of the things Mr. Kupper asked me to do. KPC had a great new agency reel. Agency morale was at an all-time high and the relationships with KPC's biggest clients was steadfast and strong.

In 1997, I worked at D'Arcy in St. Louis. I was the Creative Director for Pillsbury, working primarily on the Progresso Soup account. It was fun. I had a handful of teams working for me. I only wish we had more to do. I was also brought in to help D'Arcy win new business, but during my year and a half there we only pitched one new business client. A little over a year after I got there I was also made the Creative Director of the Southwest Bell business. I sold them a radio campaign and a few print ads during my first couple of months on the business, but D'Arcy lost the account before the end of my second month. Too bad, we had some big ideas they never got to see.

I moved my family (wife and six kids, 8 and under) to California in 1996 to be the ACD for Bozell on Taco Bell. I was responsible for developing Taco Bell's Kid's Meals and I was to head up the new "Healthy" menu team. From the time I was hired to the time I arrived in SoCal (3 months) the "Healthy" menu for Taco Bell was abandon. So, I threw myself into the Kid's Meals business. I was an army of one. I developed the concepts. I wrote the ads. I was the art director. I picked the animation studio to do the work. I directed the VO talent. Produced the music. Shot the live action "toy donut" sequences. Everything done for the Taco Bell Kid's business (Nacho & Dog) in 1996 and 1997 was done by me. That was a really fun campaign to work on. We won a bunch of creative awards and sold more kid's meals for Taco Bell than they had ever sold before or have ever since. I helped out often on the National TV work but the CD at the time was one of those "gang bang" CD's and he liked to take a little bit from everyone's ideas and make his own ads. Declining sales, uninspired creative and a poor relationship with the client were the major contributors to him losing the business in less than two years.

1987 to 1996 were the years I spent honing my craft as an advertising creative. I served at Foote, Cone & Belding in Chicago. It was there that I learned how to harness my "out there" ideas and turn them into "relevant yet unexpected" communication pieces. FCB gave me a lot of freedom and opportunity. Most young writers don't get a shot at doing a national TV commercial until they've been in the business for at least a year or two. I was shooting TV after my second month at the agency! I was so excited to be working in advertising, I would often be singing in the halls. This did not go unnoticed by the agency's Executive Creative Head who was a fun loving guy that cared about the well-being and morale of his staff. He also appreciated people who were different and loved what they were doing. He asked me to write and direct a fun video for the agency's annual breakfast.

The agency president called me to his office and told me he wanted me to "poke fun" at the people on the executive committee- including him. He didn't want to see the video before the breakfast- he wanted to be surprised with everyone else. It was a really big hit with everyone. Suddenly, everyone knew me. I was being invited to every new business pitch and working long and hard and loving every minute of it. In less than 2 years I had produced a full TV reel full of fun commercials, a bunch of radio, and a handful of print ads. I continued to do video's for the agency as well as for many of our clients sales and marketing meetings. I also did work for the presidents of some of our biggest clients directly. After 7 or 8 years developing my creative skills (I had been an ACD for 4 years) I told the new ECD that I'd like to be promoted to CD. In my performance review that year this is what he wrote, "Chip wants to be a Creative Director. I think that would be a mistake. We need to pay him like a creative director but not make him one. Chip is a very rare creative and any time he spends away from creating and presenting and

producing work is a huge waste of talent. We need to keep Chip happy. I think we should move him onto accounts that need a wakeup call and then move him to another while they are asking for more." He gave me a really big raise and asked me to work on the agency's toughest client, SC Johnson. These guys were very good at what they did and they had a proven formula for launching successful new products. To a creative, the work could best be described as "safe." Extensive testing saw to this.

My first assignment was for one of SCJ's flagship brands, RAID! Bug spray. They were launching a new RAID! called Unscented RAID! I reviewed all of our past work for them (mostly mom's talking to animated bugs- the bugs would scream RAID! and then the black arrow from the logo would smash them) and I thought about how to beat SCJ's testing gauntlet that has crushed good creative ideas for years. I watched a bunch of SCJ anamatics and I determined that the spots with good test scores all did two important things: they said the name of the product during the first 7 seconds of the commercial and they repeated the product's name as often as possible. I wrote 4 spots keeping testing in mind. None of them were typical RAID! spots and the one I liked the most was REALLY different.

We drove out to Racine, Wisconsin to present the ideas and the account guy told me that the head of SCJ marketing was going to drop by for a couple of minutes. The guy ended up staying for the entire 45 minutes. The clients loved our "fresh" thinking. I presented the first three ideas pretending that was all we had. The recommendation was tucked away in my big black bag. The boss said, "This is great. We could do any of these!" I agreed with him and said, "We could produce any of these and they would be great and sell a lot of RAID! But none of these ideas are for sale. Because while these ideas are big, they are not big enough for this project." Then I picked up the storyboards and whipped them against the wall. Everyone flinched and the room went silent.

I suppose I scared them a little. I reached into my big black bag and pulled out the agency recommendation and said, "This is the spot that we have developed specifically for you." The idea was to poke some fun at the over-the-top perfume commercials (Calvin Klein) with a full animated spot featuring RAID! Bugs saying dramatic things in dramatic places. The first line was, "RAID! is now UNSCENTED!" It tested through the roof. I ended up selling SCJ on doing the bugs (for the first time ever) as computer generated images instead of cell animation. The result was big sales numbers for SCJ and big awards for FCB. Another fun group I got to work with at FCB was the New Business Team. I had great success with this team, winning literally hundreds of millions of dollars in new business for the agency. One of my favorite new business stories was the month FCB was working on two pitches at the same time. Toblerone Chocolates and Tombstone Pizza.

I was assigned to the Toblerone pitch but just two days before the Tombstone pitch, the agency president was reviewing the work and had a thought. He believed that the agency had three really solid ideas but none of them would "scare" Kraft (The company that owned Tombstone). He told my boss that he wanted me to come up with a "crazy idea" and be prepared to present it to Kraft in two days. I was given the assignment and like the video I had done making fun of our executive committee years earlier, the president didn't want to see the idea until Kraft did. I stayed up most of the night coming up with hundreds of concepts. I went home around 3A and

at 8A was in the shower when it came to me, "What Do You Want On Your Tombstone?" I wore a black suit, a black shirt, a black tie and black shoes to the presentation at Kraft. My opening line was, "Gentlemen, death. Death will sell pizzas." They loved the idea. We won the account. We took Tombstone national. They became the nation's largest selling frozen pizza. My tagline has been used for more than twenty years. What great fun it was to work at FCB back then.

In 1984, while a senior at Notre Dame, I was offered my first advertising job. It was to be a buyer/planner at the largest ad agency in Chicago, Leo Burnett. I was in Leo's young professionals training program- being groomed to one day be a Media Director or an Account Director at the agency. There was only one problem with that, I didn't want to be a MD or an AD. I wanted to be a CD. My college had only offered two classes on advertising and I took them both.

One dealt with ad terminology and the other featured case studies. Therefore, I didn't really know anything about how an ad agency worked. I only knew that I wanted to have a life like Darren Stevens on "Bewitched." I wanted to have a job like his. I wanted to have a house like his and I wanted to have a wife like his, too. I knew I wanted to be working on creative ideas, not finding great deals on cable buys in Atlanta. However, I had only been at the agency for a month and I did not want to let the people down who recruited me so I decided that I would give the young professionals a year to see if I would grow to like it. I did not. I met some Burnett creatives by playing on the company soft ball team and asked them how they got into the creative department. They showed me their spec portfolios and I got to work on mine. I had it all ready to go in just a few months. I scheduled a meeting with Burnett's creative recruiter and she liked my work. She told me that they were going to start a young creative professionals program in a few months and told me she wanted me to be in it.

A few months passed but the program had hit some snags and would be delayed for a few more months. A few more months passed and I was told they'd be ready in a few more months. I couldn't wait any longer. I shopped my book (portfolio) around Chicago and got a few nice offers. I ended up taking the one at Foote, Cone & Belding. As far as I can tell, Burnett never did get that young creative professionals program off the ground. Regardless, I shall be forever grateful to Leo Burnett for giving me my first advertising job.