The decline of the traditional CWAD team and the rise of the "generalist"

BY ELEPHANTH RAGGIS

On their first day of work at Goodby, Silverstein & Partners, Fred Raillard and Farid Moktar walked into the San Francisco agency and, much to their displeasure, found two empty offices waiting for them. The senior team, recruited from London’s Bartle Bogle Hegarty, was used to a chummier work environment. “We were almost upset with this. We wanted to be in one office,” says Raillard, serving as spokesperson for the team known as Fred and Farid.

Working in a single office is one way, they believe, to keep their partnership and work thriving. In Paris, where they met, they lived in the same building. In London, only a church separated their flats. Now they live on the same block in the Marina district. “Passion is very important,” says Raillard.

That philosophy applies to their work habits as well. “We both do everything,” says Raillard. “We do copywriting and art direction together, and we get excited as much as each other.” While the French duo have been working that way for nearly a decade, it’s becoming an increasingly common way to collaborate as agencies try to demonstrate that they’re purveyors of big ideas rather than traditional ads.

“Not one has any idea by which one is the art director and writer. I can’t tell,” says agency cochairman Jeff Goodby, who hired Raillard and Moktar after their work for Microsoft’s XBox won a gold and a bronze Lion at Cannes in 2002, the year Goodby served as jury president. He adds with a chuckle: “I tend to see that Farid writes a lot of things down, but I’m not sure what that means.” Raillard bristles at the importance U.S. creatives place on titles, explaining simply that “our job is in a creative agency is just to produce.”

Goodby, noting that it’s not uncommon for his team to avoid distinguishing between copywriter and art director, says many creatives who walk into the agency looking for a job now claim they can do both. “They explicitly come out of art school with no idea of what they are.”

Are the days when the advertising industry produced legendary teams like Ammirati and Puris, Seacrest and McCabe and, in more recent years, Wieden and Kennedy and Goodby and Silverstein coming to an end? Not only are art directors writing more and writers art directing, but the traditional copywriter/art director pairing that sticks together for the long haul and builds agencies is itself becoming something of a rarity.

“There aren’t a lot of real teams anymore,” says Anne-Marie Marcus, partner and CEO of New York-based recruitment firm Marcus St. Jean. “‘Married’ teams that don’t work without each other are no longer predominant.” In fact, Marcus reports that most of the job orders she gets from agencies are for single creatives, not teams. “Only 20 percent ask for a team, which means they are making the pairings themselves,” she says.

Creatives are becoming generalists, and agency creative departments are the labs testing the new mix. The definitions of a creative team has expanded to include copywriter/copywriter and art director/art director pairings, and any combination of as many people a creative director sees fit. “It’s about getting the chemistry right,” says Michael Pasti, worldwide creative director at Young & Rubicam in New York. “I’ve got this, that, and the other. It sounds like I’m a porn director.”

The blurring of the copywriter and art
The Richer the Better
Ditch single-minded positioning and build brand equity

Single-minded positioning is widely touted as a universal truth. Yet many brands in consumer and b-to-b markets defy it. They engage or eschew it altogether and still succeed. There are three examples.

IBM: From “Internet in a box” to “Solutions for a small planet” to “Business on demand?” IBM never really owned the key language or ideas. They were co-opted by branding from the marketplace. Yet IBM keeps forging ahead.

Nike: To observers and consumers alike, this brand never embraced a discernible single-minded positioning. Imagery borrowed from sports celebrities combined with relentless investment drove this brand to its monolithic status.

Yahoo!: The upfront brand that wanted to embrace “everything and everyone” on the Web is glazed together only by a wacky name and persona. It became a profitable Internet colossus unimpeded by the lack of narrow-positioning.

Distinctiveness and distribution, flaring geographies, dominant market shares, massive budgets and grand aspirations are the hallmarks of superstar brands. If you reach this level—or aspire to—different principles apply, just as they do in quantum versus Newtonian physics.

Maturity, scale and breadth of vision matter when it comes to developing brand strategy for players at this stage in the game—and change the way the game is played. The cheat sheet is no longer simply to stick to the customer’s mind—that’s a fact accomplishment. It’s to sustain the customer’s belief that your brand is best and reinforce customers’ confidence in that brand decision.

RICHARD CLINE’S Agency Life

“I don’t want to alarm you, but we are showing a profit this year.”

At this point, it is unlikely that your brand can be captured in a single word or catchphrase. This kind of oversimplification can coarsen perception of brand value instead of expanding it. It can also make the positioning vulnerable to misattribution to other brands (broad and consumer) and to outright appropriation by the competition.

These dynamics play out in the marketplace all the time. The preeminent research methodologies demonstrate the point quite well. These techniques depend on the customer’s ability to conduct fast analysis of detailed benefit and attribute inventories across multiple brands. This really exposes the cheat sheet behind the will of the simplex.

Marketers rightly want to know that their brands top out across the board on affirmative measures, eliminate or minimize the negatives, and address new issues and opportunities. Competitive, cop-op language, benefit, attributes and features and even clone each other’s products to stay aloft in the customer’s evaluative process.

Consumers have nuanced understanding of brands, aggregated from iterative meaning and experience over time. They evaluate them across complex sets of variables—mostly subconsciously. Reducing the brand’s value proposition to one lowest common denominator risks not matching with consumers’ own emotional or rational evaluation of the value proposition built up by the consumer.

Exceptions to the single-mindedness rule are legion. Just three are mentioned above, but also consider McDonald’s, Title, Microsoft, Coke and Toyota. The difference is that these brands backed up their accumulated brand equity and were able to represent much more than their idea. They communicate broadly, aggressively and persistently on multiple fronts to protect, leverage and grow their investment. They succeeded because they didn’t fight their multiplicity; they embrace it.

Many brands can overlook this and hence fail to sufficiently grow and leverage their equity. As a result, their full value is not reflected in the extractable from the markets. If you need help with this, because the bearer of the single-minded proposition is your best strategic option. It may only be the best way to strangle your brand.
be costly—and some managers prefer to keep the creative "power" on an account democ-
tratically dispersed. "People are very fearful of teams," observes Lennon. "It's not some-
thing that's being inspired and grown by management."

That's also because management, grap-
pling with the rules that agencies will play for
their clients in a rapidly changing industry, is reserving the roles of who does what. "It's a natural evolution from post-print-focused work to TV to Internet to out-of-home ideas," observes Harry Cascio, creative director and partner of Sas, San Francisco.

Seven years ago, when Raillard was a strat-
geic planner and Mokot an account manager at Euro RSCG BETC in Paris, agencies were far more set in their ways. After the pair sold a client a campaign idea that came from them, not the creatives assigned to the account, theirhaarcode was caused a ruckus at the agency; Raillard says, They had to undo the situations by giving the creatives their brief to execute against. "We were so upset, we decided to resign and become cre-
atives," he says.

The creatives that are going to succeed the best are the ones that don't build walls.

Today, a planner and an account manager might have an easier time making a creative contribution since agencies try to impose fewer barriers among departments. "As long as they come through with the ideas, I have absolutely no time or regard if that comes from an art director, planner or media person, for that matter," says Saoud. "Creative people, being who they are, have bosses." Aids Mike Hughes, president and creative director of the Martin Agency in Richmond, Va.: "The creatives that are going to succeed the best are the ones that don't build walls, and open up the departments, and find ways for people, so they can think of not just a good 30-second TV spot or just a print campaign, but something that is big enough platform to work in all kinds of places."

That job may be too big for one team. "For the kinds of campaigns we're expected to build today, it's impossible for any two peo-
ple to have all the talents and skills they need to have," Hughes says. "Now, clients need to have an advertising platform that will carry over into interactive, that will inspire spon-
sortships, that will create a Broadway show or an online film. We're now expecting agen-
dies to do what they've been promising clients..."
Travel Tips

On set with ‘Schmoo,’ Noam Murro and Y&R for Orbitiz’s latest blitz

BY BRIE TAGADA
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAURA KLEINENZ

The Destination Orbitz marionettes have been stored away and in their place, Young & Rubicam in Chicago has unpacked a few new all stars: a Hawaiian dancer, a sea lion, some showgirls and a drug queen named Coco.

They’re all metaphors for travel destinations: Hawaii, SeaWorld, Las Vegas. Coco runs Orbitz’s gay microsite. The four spots, shot by Noam Murro over two days in Los Angeles, are the centerpiece of the travel site’s “Find It” campaign, which breaks Friday.

In the downtown L.A. highrise where the team is shooting two of the commercials, marketing chief Michael Sands says research showed Orbitz’s niche is the existence of its search results. “Everybody allows consumers to search for travel,” he says. “It’s not about the search, it’s about surfacing the relevant option for that traveler.”

The spots use a hula-dancer theme, which the new Orbitz and go! tag plays off. The client liked the line, says advertising director Jeff Marsh, because it makes Orbitz almost like a verb—almost like Google.”

A distinct smell of fish is in the air, coming from a conference room with a sign on the door that reads “Seal Holding Room.” “It’s the temporary home of Schmoo and her minions, four students and a professor from America’s Teaching Zoo at Moorpark College.

Active Reef Fabian plays an office worker taking on the creature in a game of hide-and-seek, coming to 10 as Schmoo shuffles up a hallway to hide. Just as Orbitz provides search results quickly, Fabian soon finds the sea lion.

Drug queen Coco Peru is hiding in another cubicle with James Geoff-Bradken’s Bay Men Beyond Pam Woody of PFLAG (Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays). They represent faces one might see in a gay-pride parade. Marsh says tens of thousands of people travel near or far to such events. And, adds Sands, the gay and lesbian community is “a highly lucrative, highly active group of customers for us. It’s a terrific target market that nobody else in the online travel-agency community was focusing on.”

A gay-themed marionettes ad that ran on shows such as “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy” and “My Big Fat helped increase traffic to the gay section of the site by 50 percent, says Marsh.

On day two, the production moved to a home in Northridge, a suburb of the San Fernando Valley. Moira Beady is playing a woman who finds Schmoo hiding in her kitchen, representing her dream Hawaiian vacation. Lia- faus was supposed to be a fire dancer, but insurer prohibited fire in the home, so she plays a ukulele instead. Technically, Liafaus is of Samoan descent—she was born in Hawaii—but then, the “Seal” spot actually stars a sea lion.

Today, Murro’s looking very Hollywood, dressed all in black on set, a sunny day. “I think it’s a fantastic concept,” says Murro, asked why he signed on. “It’s very funny, original, smart—that’s good enough for me.” He says he’s not one for giving his actors deeper motivation for their actions. “The idea is to tell ‘em where to go and what to do, and they’ll do it,” he says simply. When it’s pointed out that he’s been doing a bit more than that, he says with a smile, “I guess I’m slipping a little bit.”

In the afternoon, Murro and his Biscuit Films crew shoots J.J. Williams as the lucky man who finds a trio of Vegas strongmen in his backyard. One of them is a little too sexy, and some strategically placed feathers are used to adjust her décolletage. Director Paul Thomas Anderson drops by to visit D.P. Robert Elsbet, the cinematographer on Anderson’s four features (three of which are also set in the valley).

Asked whether he prefers humorous spots, Murro says he chooses himself a comedy guy. But he adds, “I wear life as a very dark thing, and I guess that makes it very funny.”

The day before, sitting on the floor in an empty office before filming gets underway,rd, and coproducer Ken Erek noted that the campaign will be “a little bit more original and unconventional” because Orbitz is “the bigger brand.”

“They encourage you to push,” adds writer-director Sona Goewey. “I think it’s going to be some different stuff on TV.”

SCHMOO AND-CREW: Top Y&R senior art director Sona Goewey (in account director Chris lid, CD Ken Erek and Jeff Marsh; Orbitz director of social listing below) Schmoo and Director Noam Murro on set in L.A.

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While no one argues that specific skill sets aren't viable or needed, the hope is that boosting the reigns on art directors and copywriters will lead to stronger creative products. "I would hope the difference is that the work gets better because you are giving people a little more freedom to go places that make them feel they do their best work," says Souder.

But some agency creatives say there can be too much freedom. The downside of not being tied to set craft, the skeptics argue, is an overall diminishing of specialized skills. "You have writers who really don't write sentences and art directors who don't break out over type," Schwartz says. "You don't have people who have a love or reverence for their respective disciplines. The craftsmanship is fewer and farther between."

Goodly, a writer who got his start as a journalist, argues that while he's also "pretty good" with art direction, "it's good for people to have a strength. It makes them focus on it and Wyatt to be better at it. It's hard to be better at everything all at once." But that's what the new creative manna seems to be, he says—to know a little bit of everything. And as an employer, he's finding it harder to pinpoint the relevant versus the creative with an array of serviceable skills.

Judy Holm, director of Wadlen & Kennedy's new ad school, 12, notes that he's highly suspicious of creatives who say they can do both copywriting and art direction. "I roll my eyes at, I'm not an art director or writer, I'm a thinker. I don't think you need to lean on it too much," he says. "It's just like on the baseball court—a good pitcher gets a rebound occasionally, but it's not like suddenly he's a center."

Those who consider themselves creative juggernauts may then decry they're better off alone than in a pair. But Dick Bovio of the VSA Advocates argues that collaboration is still the best way to solve creative problems. (But he advocates expanding the traditional team to include a media planner, and the school is starting a student track for creative media planning.) "I've always found that a team was better than doing it all on my own," says Bovio, the longtime chief creative at Ogilvy & Mather North America. "Not everyone is going to find that perfect person, but when you do, it's terrific."

Fred and Farid certainly seem to have found their better halves. While their unorthodox pairing works well for them, Raillard concludes, there is no right or wrong model when it comes to forming or leading a team. "Sometimes it's better to have two art directors working together; sometimes copywriters work much better alone; sometimes a creative and a planner make a very good team," he says. "Agencies should let creatives choose what's best for them, but creation about breaking the rules'