DARE-DEVILS

THE AD WORLD’S MOST BUZZED-ABOUT AGENCY IS MIAMI’S
CRISPIN PORTER & BOGUSKY,
WHOSE EDGY, BRILLIANT CAMPAIGNS FOR
“TRUTH,” IKEA, AND MINI CARS MIGHT FOREVER
CHANGE THE WAY COMPANIES ADVERTISE.
BY WARREN BERGER

ON A WEDNESDAY MORNING IN LATE
January, as subfreezing gusts blasted the
length of Madison Avenue, the tempera-
ture was 70 degrees and rising at the red-
hot epicenter of the ad universe. Inside the sparkling
steel-and-granite Miami headquarters of Crispin Porter
& Bogusky, the agency was unveiling pieces of the cam-
aign for its newest client, Virgin Atlantic Airways (very
soon to be second-newest, but we’ll get to that). At
presentations like this, ad executives typically hold up
TV commercial storyboards and explain why everyone
is going to love this particular dancing
cat or flatulent horse. This morning, how-
ever, the presenters from CPB—led by a
pregnant woman, a young dude with a flag of unruly blond curls, and a guy with Elvis sideburns—had no story-
boards. But they sure had a lot of oth-
er stuff, and it came flying from all sides
at the three Virgin clients.

These ads were designed to look like
those flight safety cards found in air-
plane seat backs. There were samples of
a newspaper comic strip called “The
Jet Set,” as well as a mock-up for a
lifestyle magazine (titled JetSeteriusal).
Neither displayed Virgin’s name overt-
ly, but both played off the Virgin cam-
paign’s theme, “Go Jet Set, Go!” There
was something that resembled an illus-
trated children’s book, though it actu-
ally contained bedtime stories for adults (“Night-night, CFO re-
cuing in 1A. Sleep well, knowing your decisions were admired
today”)—the idea being that flight attendants would leave the books on pillows in Virgin’s sleeping cabins. As speaking of those
flight attendants? CPB wouldn’t mind having a high-fashion des-
igner to grace up the uniforms. And how about staging “con-
cert flights”? And wouldn’t it be cool to hire celebrities to work
as “giant flight attendants”? And by the way, could the pilots fly at
a higher altitude so Virgin can claim it soars above the competition?
And then’s one more thing—well, no, actually there were 160
more, because that was how many far-fetched ideas CPB had come
up with since starting work on the campaign. “It can be a little
overwhelming,” acknowledged Virgin ad manager Ralph Bershof-
sky afterward. “It’ll be a lot of work for us to do some of these
things—but then again, we’d be idiots not to.”

Welcome to advertising as practiced by the agency of the mo-
ment. Crispin Porter & Bogusky is at hot as South Beach on a
Saturday night, having snapped up every top advertising cre-
ative award last year while being in prime accounts including
Mini cars, Rea furniture stores, Virgin Atlantic Airways, and
most recently Burger King—a $300 million-plus new-business
bombshell (that was quietly wrapped up the morning CPB
was pelting Virgin with ideas.

Hot agencies come and go, but this one beats the rest. Working
with modest ad budgets so far, CPB has riveted cus-
tomers’ attention with startling guerrilla tactics, unconvention-
al uses of media, and holistic marketing strategies that tie to-
gergether everything from product design to packaging to event
marketing to stuff that can’t even be
guessed at. “Anything and everything is on,” proclaims CPB’s 40-year-old
creative director, Alex Bogusky.

What the agency uses sparingly, how-
ever, is the traditional TV commercial.
This is damn close to being in a busi-
ness that gave fat on those million-
dollar 30-second spots. Madison Av-
eros agencies have been promising for
years to cut back on their TV habit and
provide solutions that address today’s
fragmented media landscape. But few
have delivered. Enter the little outfit
from Miami, which has rocked the in-
dustry simply by practicing what its
competition preaches.

There’s no good buzzword for what CPB does (the term “integ-
reted marketing” is meaningless by now), but here are some ap-
propriate adjectives: fresh, radical, hard-to-control, street-smart,
meteoric, all-over-the-lot, maybe-the-next-big-thing, possibly
 novità, perhaps-not-ready-for-prime-time. In other words, it’s extreme, dude.

Crispin Porter & Bogusky is not quite off
the map, but it’s pretty close to the edge. From the agency’s
Coconut Grove offices, you can get to the Atlantic Ocean in
minutes—if you’re cruising on a racing bike, the mode of trans-
portation for a number of CPB staffers. The location is important
for a couple of reasons. First, it enables the agency’s young ad cre-
sters to wind surf during their lunch hour (assuming they can dig out
from under the crushing workload). Also, being far removed from
big agencies and big media has allowed CPB to evolve as an inde-
pendent species. “They’re not breathing the same air as everybody
else in advertising," observes Brian Collins, executive creative di-
rector of Ogilvy & Mather in New York. "Instead of being sur-
rrounded by ad people, they’re surrounded by artists, music people,
and the whole Cuban/Latin/European/Beach Beach culture.”
Alex Bogusky is a homegrown product of that culture, and he
looks it. He wears loose polo shirts over athletic shoulders, with
long hair coming out from under a skullcap. He has an easy smile
(und like cheekbones; he’s “sweeet-worty,” reports Advertising
Age), calls people “bud,” and politely asks if you “need a pee-pee
break.” Bogusky is a one-time motocross racer who’s still a little
wild: On the way to a local restaurant, he warns that there may be
a problem getting in because he and some CPB sufferers got into a
food fight there.
Bogusky seems genuinely surprised that people as far away as
France (where CPB won top honors at last year’s International
Advertising Festival) are paying so much attention to his agency.
When the conversation turns to a couple of advertising’s most
revered creative stars, Dan Wieden of Wieden & Kennedy and Jeff
Goodby of Goodby Silverstein & Partners, Bogusky confides,
“You know, I’m not sure those guys even know who I am.” He
then tells a story about sitting down to lunch with the two men a
few years ago and feeling like the child at the table who is ignored
by the grown-ups.
Maybe these are the scars of a young ad junkie who labored in
obscurity for years in a marketing backwater. Until recently Mia-
mi was not on the advertising community’s radar. Bogusky’s part-
ner Chuck Porter, a native of Minneapolis, originally drifted down
there so he could windsurf every afternoon. To support himself,
Porter wrote freelance ad copy, “usually by the pool.” In 1988 he
was offered a spot as a creative director at quiet little Crispin Ad-
vertising. He cut back his pool time and got down to business.
The first thing he did was hire Bogusky, a 24-year-old art direc-
tor whose work on earlier freelance projects had impressed him.
The young motorbike racer and the middle-age windsurfer clicked.
Both are high-energy types, with loads of charisma and mischievous
senses of humor. But while Porter seems carefree to the core, be-
nath Bogusky’s sunny demeanor lies an ambitious, fiercely com-
petitive spirit. “Ade plays advertising like an extreme sport,” says
former agency creative director Sally Hoghead. “He is fearless.”
During the early 1990s, Porter and Bogusky’s agency (Crispin
cashed out) produced ads that swept local award shows—not that
the ad world cared what people thought in Miami. But locals still
admiringly recall a Sunglass Hut billboard featuring a gigantic
guitar pair of shades and the headline “What to Wear to a Nude Beach.”
To promote a local homeless shelter, CPB put ads in the dammed-
est places: on shopping carts, trash dumpsters, park benches. Clients
in Miami had small ad budgets, so “we found ways to cheat a lit-
tle and still get noticed,” Bogusky says.
Major ad clients remained oblivious, however, and by 1993,
Bogusky was growing frustrated. He and Porter began to butt heads, and eventually the senior partner decided to step back and let Bogusky run the creative department. Life promptly became much more intense at CPB, insiders say, with Bogusky knocking rigorous demands on its staff and rejecting (sometimes harshly, according to sources) ideas he thought weren't up to snuff. "I felt like I had to push people," Bogusky says. He and Porter agreed that the agency had to get hold of a brand that could draw national attention.

In 1997 such an account finally came to CPB, although it wasn't a national brand. In fact, it wasn't a brand at all, until CPB turned it into one.

The Florida Teen Antismoking Campaign

"Truth" became a prototype for the strategy CPB would later apply to consumer brands like Mini and Illix. It all started with street-level research; Agency staffers went out at night with videocameras and talked to local teenagers. CPB learned that conventional antismoking appeals—"This will kill you"—made rebellious kids want to smoke even more. Cigarettes tapped into teens' desires to establish identities, be associated with brands, and take risks. For the antismoking campaign to work, CPB had to push these same buttons harder and turn teenage angst against the tobacco industry. To do so, however, Bogusky couldn't use conventional marketing such as slick 'TV commercials. Only guerrilla-ambush tactics could promote an "anti-brand" that kids could latch on to. Bogusky named the brand "Truth" and even created a corporate logo for it.

CPB scattered the "Truth" logo across Florida on posters, billboards, T-shirts, stickers, and other gear. The firm rented tracks and trains to traverse the state, staging impromptu live events and parties where "Truth" was disrobed. The agency also organized various stunts that bordered on harassment—teen activists plied crank phone calls to tobacco marketing executives and showed up unannounced in tobacco company lobbies, with some of these stunts videotaped and used as gritty, low-budget TV commercials. The "Truth" website served as information central for the whole campaign. And it worked. Between 1998 and 2002, smoking among middle and high school students in Florida declined an average of 38 percent. Eventually the infectious campaign

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**Bogusky's Rules for Breaking All the Rules**

1. Zero in on the product. While many advertisers focus on the consumer, CPB's Alex Bogusky believes it's all about the product. Get close to it; find out every good thing about it; even try to improve it. CPB offers ideas to clients on ways to spice up the product through packaging, display, added features, little giveaways, etc.

2. Kick the commercial habit (or at least cut back). The TV commercial is more than 50 years old, and it shows. Bogusky says there's still an important role for TV ads, but as part of a larger, diversified mix of marketing. Before his creative staff is even allowed to think about TV, they have to brainstorm other ways to reach people.

3. Use loads of design. CPB likes to hire people with design backgrounds. Their skills come into play when creating billboards, posters, gear, and packaging. Designers know how to do more than just ads.

4. Find the sweet spot. Bogusky likes to draw a chart with two circles: One contains all the characteristics of a given product, the other lists the needs and aspirations of the targeted consumer. The overlap is where you'll find the best ideas for an ad campaign.

5. Surprise your audience. That's the part CPB likes to do best. It started with ads and quickly moved on to all sorts of guerilla marketing—showing up unannounced at comic conventions, spreading fake corporate logos across Florida, erecting huge inflatable people, and staging impromptu live events and parties where "Truth" was disrobed. The agency also organized various stunts that bordered on harassment—teen activists plied crank phone calls to tobacco marketing executives and showed up unannounced in tobacco company lobbies, with some of these stunts videotaped and used as gritty, low-budget TV commercials. The "Truth" website served as information central for the whole campaign. And it worked. Between 1998 and 2002, smoking among middle and high school students in Florida declined an average of 38 percent. Eventually the infectious campaign

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moved beyond Florida when the American Legacy Foundation opted to use "Truth" as the basis of a national campaign, partnering CPB with Boston agency Arnold Worldwide. That led to big-budget Super Bowl commercials, though the beauty of "Truth" was its grassroots origin—which showed that CPB could build a popular movement around an unknown brand, using any and all available means.

"Truth" begat the Mini campaign, one of the most celebrated marketing efforts in recent years. The story has been widely told (see "Most Innovative Campaign" in "The Business 2.0 Sweet Spot Awards," May 2002): Tiny British car is introduced in the United States with equally small ad budget. Decision is made to launch the Mini with little TV—a first in modern-day car marketing. CPB generates buzz by putting Minis in all kinds of weird places: inside sports stadiums as seats, on top of SUVs, as centerfolds in Playboy. Street props are created, including a coin-operated children's ride in the shape of a Mini. There are Mini games, Mini booklets, Mini suitcases, Mini placement in movies—and last and perhaps least, a few Mini commercials that almost never air. By the time the car is introduced in spring 2002, the buyer waiting list is six months long.

Suddenly everyone wanted a piece of CPB. The agency turned down buyout offers from the Madison Avenue holding companies that control most of the advertising business, but it did sell a 49 percent stake to a Canadian company, MDC Partners. Meanwhile, Ikea, Molson beer, and Virgin Atlantic all came south looking for some Mini magic. And soon, big old Burger King followed.

How does CPB do it? There are no hard and fast rules, but there are some soft and loose ones (see below). For starters, the agency

7 Conspire with consumers. At convince people you're on their side. CPB abetted teens in a rebellion against Big Tobacco, promoted an "SUV backlash" on behalf of Mini, and helped Molson drinkers chat up girls by printing pickup lines on the labels of beer bottles.

8 Make yourself useful. No one needs ads, but you can always use sway. CPB makes lots of giveaway gear for clients and designs ads that can be reused. A recent Ikea poster ad doubled as holiday wrapping paper.

9 Think of advertising as a product, not a service. Agencies have long played up service (i.e., taking the client to lunch, or saying "yes" all the time) as a way to cover for a weak product. Instead of being the client's paid pal, the agency should be a factory focused on making the best ad possible. One point to keep in mind, Bogusky says: "Advertising is not an assembly-line product. It's a custom-made one."

10 A good idea can come from anyone, anywhere. While it's normal to assign just a couple of partners to a campaign, Bogusky may throw 10 "creative" people at a problem and let them fight it out. Business-side employees are also invited to weigh in. Sometimes even the client (gasp) has a notion worth listening to.

11 Rules are lame (except these). Bogusky says every product category has ad rules that make no sense. Example: Automotive ads always show silver cars. Bogusky goes out of his way to break those rules. "You'll rarely see silver Minis in our ads," he promises.

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COURSE, IF YOU PLAN YOUR WAY INTO THE kitchen, you'll better be able to stand the heat, and CPB is about to feel what it's like when you cozy up to a flame-broiler. The Burger King account is unlike any the agency has dealt with: bigger, more bureaucratic, and downright sensitive. Burger King has fired five agencies in the past four years, turning a reputation as a client that won't let its ad partners produce good work and then blames them for the results. "When I hired about CPB winning the Burger King account," one Madison Avenue executive says, "I felt a little sad for them."

Burger King, which has been losing market share, is looking to CPB to find "a holistic way to connect with our core consumers to build a strong, consistent brand message," says chief executive Bradley Blum. CPB's Hicks says, "They've come to us for help with everything, not just commercials. We're now re-designing anything we can get hands on." That includes signage (CPB plans to post a customer "Bill of Rights"), drive-through signs, employee uniforms, even ketchup packets. CPB has brought back the company's 1970s theme "Have It Your Way," and its first TV campaign hits that unique brand attribute hard. In the ads—done in the deadpan style of the hit (and hire) British comedy The Office—workers compete to order the coolest customized hamburgers.

The partnership is off to a fast start, but whether it will last is uncertain, given Burger King's track record. "The question is, how much of an appetite for risk does Burger King have?" asks I. Walter Thropson's Ryan. Cahaly's Collins thinks the appetite may be large enough. "Burger King knows that if they don't do something great with Bogusky, they will embarrass themselves," he says. "So I think there is some hope there." Meanwhile, the sheer size of the account may alter CPB. The agency had been producing about $250 million of advertising annually; Burger King will double that. The staff of 170 will have to expand quickly, and it seems unlikely that Bogusky can continue to approve every ad, although he insists that nothing will change.

The industry's titans are watching closely and, yes, they now know exactly who Alex Bogusky is. "I think it will be a good thing for everyone if CPB does well," says Jeff Goodby. Dan Wieden takes a similarly sporting attitude toward the agency: "We're not his former junior lunch partner; "They've turned guerrilla into an art form, and it's working," he adds. "Did I mention I hate them?"

Worren Berger writes frequently about advertising and marketing for Business 2.0.