

The creative community has been excitedly packing their sun tan oil and micro-thongs for weeks now. Yes, it's that time of year again; the Cannes Advertising Festival will soon be upon us.

I suppose as a voice from the client-side, I should be beside myself, full of righteous indignation, that the self-absorbed, back-slapping representatives of the creative community will be living it up, while the market shares they are supposed to be driving up languish in the doldrums. But try as I might, I can't work myself into a mouth-frothing paroxysm on the subject, mainly because I think it is actually quite a good thing.

Good advertising is so rare these days that it is useful for everyone to be reminded of what good advertising actually looks like. My old agency, Leo Burnett, used to arrange a lunch'n'learn for me and my department after the event, using a tape of all the winning ads, with a few of the creatives orchestrating a discussion on what was good and why about various ads. I found this an enormously useful exercise as, to get to see the good stuff in an informed environment, without having to sit through endless crappy ads by watching TV at home, seemed an efficient way to hone our knowledge. So I can only support the process which resulted in that reel.

Also on the plus side, I do have some sympathy with the notion that advertising is an art-form and should be celebrated as such. How can I say any different when on my office wall behind the very screen I am typing this on, I have three framed travel ad posters from the 1950's? Now whether or not any ads produced today will be adorning the walls of some future columnist's office is a debatable point, but I see no reason why advertising cannot have artistic merit and still be effective. So if Cannes helps achieve that, then it gets my vote.

One myth I would like to expose about Cannes though, relates to a study I saw recently which demonstrated that the average Cannes-winning ad drove an extra 20% increase in sales when compared to the average non-Cannes-winning ad. This was then taken to support a claim that, since "creative" work was therefore more successful, then all clients should suspend their better judgment and go with their agency's more creative recommendations.

I'm afraid I don't buy this logic. What I think what this study proved was that, contrary to popular belief, ad award committees - especially at the Cannes level - are actually quite good at spotting and giving awards to the minority of "creative" ads which were good enough to drive up sales.

I expect there will be a healthy Canadian contingent making the trip over, and if it's not too late, I have a special request for while you are there guys - though it is something of a stretch goal. I would really like someone to be singing the praises of the advertising behind two of our most successful indigenous brands: Canadian Tire and Tim Horton's.

I know the creative community hates their stuff, but I love them both. I do not aspire to be like the bearded, smug git, but I do appreciate him explaining to me how everything works on their latest, available only at Canadian Tire, gizmos. Not creative in the usual sense of the word, but I think it takes some talent to explain five functions of a machine to a dullard like me in a blended infomercial / continuing story 30 second spot.

I am already on record as a committed Tim Horton's brand admirer, and this also extends to their advertising. To me, the whole Tim's experience is epitomized by the smiling, 30-something server turning to camera holding a tray of freshly baked delights: casting, lighting, direction are just perfect. Plus I do like the humour in some of their stuff, together with the emotion in their "True Stories" ads (more of those please.)

I just think that advertising which has helped to build and nurture such enduring consumer warmth, and also driven business success, should be awarded something.