

The real 'Mad' geniuses: New York's real-life advertising superstars

Today's Don Drapers Twitter while they work — and skip the martinis

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Say the words “consumer insight” and you might conjure Don Draper by naming his superpower. The philandering advertising genius of AMC’s “Mad Men” returns tonight to strut the halls of the Sterling Cooper Agency in vintage Madison Avenue splendor.

But the ad world has come a long way since Draper’s many-martini lunches. Five contemporary ad creators prove that to survive in today’s market, Draper would have to get on Twitter, address increasingly specific minority and youth audiences, throw even sexier parties and — here’s the rub — try not to drink so much at work.



HOWARD BUFORD

AGE: 50

YEARS IN ADVERTISING: 28

COMPANY: Prime Access, Inc.

SAMPLE CLIENT: Partnership for a Drug-Free America

As president and CEO of Prime Access, Inc., Howard Buford specializes in tailoring marketing to African-American, Hispanic and gay consumers. On *Black Enterprise*'s 2009 list of the nation's largest black-owned advertising agencies, Prime Access ranked among the top 10.

Prime Access produced public service TV spots in the “Above the Influence” anti-drug campaign. What was your challenge in gearing them toward young black and Latino audiences? The challenge

with reaching a youth audience is creating advertising that they find authentic and compelling ... In one of our spots, a young Latina high school student learns a hard lesson about the consequences of marijuana use when an alarming photo of her is sent to classmates via their cell phones.

What differentiates these ads from the hokey “This is your brain on drugs” ads of yesteryear? They allow the viewer to come to their own conclusion. That’s the big difference, and the big point of effectiveness.

Corporations come to multiculturally oriented agencies like yours to reach new subsets of consumers. Is it hard to make your ads fit in with the original campaign? Volvo saw that they had a strong base among gay and lesbian consumers and so they asked us to create advertising that specifically spoke to that audience. Volvo is best known for what they call they’re “legendary safety engineering” — a message that’s most compelling to families, people who have kids.

In speaking to a gay and lesbian audience, the headline was “Whether you’re starting a family, or creating

one as you go. Volvo for life.” We used the same theme line, the same brand essence, but the portrayal is different. It shows male couples and female couples and couples with adopted children and couples with one of the parents’ natural children — the idea of family in the eyes of the gay and lesbian community.

One of your early jobs was working with Bill Cosby on the Jell-O campaign for Kraft. What was that like? It was quite an introduction to have such a high-profile celebrity campaign. There was a lot of spontaneous things between Cosby and all the kids we had on set. We worked with a lot of kids — and interesting mothers.

How would you fit in on “Mad Men?” Advertising was the investment banking of the ‘50s and ‘60s: high prestige, high salary and really an exclusive country club. “Mad Men” does a great job of portraying that. As an African-American, I’m not sure there would have been a significant role for me in the industry, even with my MBA from Harvard ... It’s still extremely hard to find multicultural people [in the industry].