

The state of advertising 2016, madames and *Madmen*

 By [Terry Levin](#)

20 Aug 2016

The Loeries Creative Week currently well underway in Durban, South Africa, is giving local and global industry opinion leaders the chance to network and share their views on best practice and the state of the industry.

If the Loeries DSTV Seminar of Creativity, which took place yesterday, is anything to go by, it seems that despite challenges, the greater communications ad industry machine is in a strong position.

Always the darling, ginger-bedreaded MC Tim Horwood – AKA the blackest white man in Africa – introduced speaker Susan Credle as being like the character Peggy Olson out of the retro TV series *Madmen*. The fictional copywriter Olson works her way up to a corporate position unheard of in the 1960s, but not exactly commonplace even 40 years on if the estimate of 3% of women in management positions worldwide is to be believed.



Credle in action at the seminar. © Photo by Alistair Ncoll/2016 Loerie Awards on Gallo Images.

As worldwide chief creative officer of FCB, Credle – having been honoured with among others accolades, Chicago Adwoman of the Year 2013 and *Advertising Age's* 100 Most Influential Women – is an important industry voice to whom we should be listening, regardless of gender.

“Who better than the ad industry to provide short-form content for current platforms?”

She surprised with her opening statements that she is tired of being part of conversations where the term advertising is “no longer allowed”. Citing examples of how Cannes Advertising Awards shifted its title to Cannes Festival of *Creativity*, how it is not fashionable to refer to ads anymore, but rather to use terms such as branded content. In this regard she questions sustainability, saying she believes there is just not enough time for every one of our brands to exist on long-form content platforms. Who better, she asks, than the ad industry, who have specialised in short-form (30- and 60-second, to be precise) branded communication for decades, to provide the engaging episodic content that current platforms and audiences now require?

“Nobody reads ads, people read what interests them and sometime they're ads”

The presentation is peppered with quotes from a real life ad practitioner from around the *Madmen* era of the 1950s, Howard Luck Gossage (1917-1968). The largely unheard-of Gossage, apparently known as the Socrates of San Francisco,

was prophetic in his statements. You can just hear him saying: “Nobody reads ads, people read what interests them and sometime they’re ads”.

“The captive audience”

Susan mentions the much-bemoaned demise of the captive TV audiences once enjoyed by advertisers, but counters that just because we no longer have captive audiences doesn’t mean our advertising shouldn’t be captivating and worthy of attention.

The highlight of the presentation shows 1970s classic TV advertising footage illustrating how the advertising images she had been exposed to in her youth had been life-changing, even going so far as to inspire a career in the industry.

“I wanted to share the Fantasy”

Serving up vintage gems from the heyday of TV advertising, such as Chanel No 5 Share the Fantasy, Susan shares with us that the images from the commercial – of bronzed models in a Hollywood-proportioned pool the likes of which could never have been imagined by an impressionable South Carolina teenager – have ensured she has remained loyal to the Chanel brand to this day.

It is these kinds of experiences that no data can anticipate or track, she says. Mass market ads by their nature are served to unspecific or even “wrong” target audiences or demographics, but cannot track their lasting emotional impact. Susan mentions she is surprised that one of the industries as yet undisrupted by social media is Testing. Social media can help the industry by allowing audiences to tell advertisers what we should put more money behind.

“Yes, I want to live in that world”

Psychedelic animation as practiced by futurists of 1960s illustration such as Peter Max took Levi’s advertising to new heights and for Susan and many like her, may have been the first exposure to the craft of animation, which would burgeon in years to come.

There are few who will not remember Coca Cola's iconic *"I'd like to like to teach the world to sing"* commercial, which at the time captivated the spirit of a new utopian altruism and diversity, which societies and suburbs segregated for centuries had never seen, unwittingly inspiring and predicting new hope and society.

"To be loved, the ad industry first has to love itself"

With all the ability of advertising as a powerful influencer, Credle makes a valid point that the worst thing the industry ever did was to brand themselves as an irritant, with the 'Skip this ad in 6 secs >>' wording.

The above broaches the topic of ad-blocking and the fact that perhaps it is not so much that people don't dislike advertising at all, but that they dislike the sheer bulk of too much and trash advertising.

Credle joined FCB Global in January because she loved the work being done there. Campaigns for client Nivea show how the best advertising simply nails human truths. The fact that mothers never relax on the beach because they are afraid of their kids wandering off is solved by a perforated smart tab in a magazine ad format, which can be applied as a wristband to a child and which is linked to a location-based app, ensuring they don't get lost!

The other truth, that children don't like putting on sunblock at all, is solved by dolls made of UV-sensitive material that turn red, and a brilliant local example shot on Camps Bay beach in Cape Town, which sees water-based sunblock sprayed out of a waterslide and in so doing succeeding in covering 100 kids every hour with sun protection.

"Don't look at the likes"

It is too easy these days, says Credle, to just be relying on Likes as indicators of the success of our communications. We should focus instead on what people are sharing, loving and are prepared to become advocates for, and in so doing investing in advertising of lasting worth.

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