

The need for transparency in the advertising industry

Far from being a clever marketing gimmick, Joe Public's menu system is a genuine commitment to transparency in an industry shadowed by a bad reputation. Gareth Leck, executive maitre 'd, explains how this philosophy of truth has had proven results for both the agency and its clients.

In an international 2002 Gallup poll on the honesty and ethics of people in thirty-two different professions, advertising practitioners ranked near the bottom - right between insurance salesmen and car salesmen. Recent incidents of local and international agencies being caught out grossly over-billing clients haven't exactly helped the industry's tarnished image.

"Thank goodness for those car salesmen or we would've ended up with the reputation of being the least trustworthy in public perception," says Leck. "Still, being second last on the list of people to trust is not how any agency wishes to be viewed by key marketing decision makers. It's a problem that the worldwide industry has created for itself."

Demystify and simplify

"Given this general public opinion and the fact that ad agencies are supposed to be in the business of finding creative solutions to marketing and business problems, it seems ironic that in the last fifty years or so agencies have done little to come up with clearer, more creative and honest ways of operating."

"From the start we had a vision to demystify and simplify the business of advertising. We believe a successful shop needs to be built on trust - what you see is what you get, with no hidden agendas."

Joe Public's restaurant-model menu system offers clients a diverse through-the-line service. Take-Away constitutes roughly 20% of its clientele and creates project-based and below-the-line campaigns. The bulk of its business is tending to its Sit-Down or fee-based patrons. With this option, the agency has become brand custodians - and takes care of the ongoing needs - of patrons such as CTM, Clover, eBucks, and Tracker.

In fact, BetterBond was recently so impressed with the agency's Take-Away offering, the company has become a Sit-Down client.

"This system is upfront, honest and measured," Leck says. "It ensures our clients are charged fairly as it allows us to monitor time and production."

Continuously monitored

The process is continuously monitored. Every six months a full recon is done through independent assessment."

The performance criteria for this assessment is determined with each patron - it can be something tangible such as an increase in sales, an evaluation of liking scores or a general overview of the work by creative, media and strategic planning departments. "If we have met the pre-determined criteria, we earn a bonus percentage - if we don't, we basically break even in terms of resource and overhead investment on the account."

Leck is quick to point out that the trust has to start within the agency. Joe Public is driven by six core values - quality, integrity, transparency, partnership, positive mental attitude and courage. "We do our best to live these values everyday within the agency," he says. "It is a score card to keep us in check."

Not that there isn't the occasional hiccup in the system, he admits. "We believe in the vision and are committed to the philosophy of transparency, but that doesn't mean we've mastered it."

Intrigued

New clients, he explains, are intrigued with Joe Public's innovative, non-agency approach. The restaurant model played a vital part in getting eBucks as a client. "We were up against three or four reputable agencies. Our work ethic and novel approach definitely brought something into the mix and made us stand out."

More than a company ethos, transparency creates operational efficiency, he believes. The proof is in the results of the marketing system. Joe Public has increased its business by more than 50% in the last two years.

Leck believes that ad agencies can make a massive contribution in driving the national and global marketplace. "Great ads build great brands. Great brands build great companies. And great companies help create jobs and spin-off opportunities for many others."

"It's unfortunate that the industry has found itself with such a bad reputation," he concludes, "but at the same time marketing directors shouldn't tar every advertising agency with the same brush."

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