

AGENCY

Vol. 4, No. 2 ■ A Publication of the American Association of Advertising Agencies ■ Fall 1994

THE NEW LIGHT ON MEDIA

"The impact has been tremendous," says McCann's Lesser. "After 10 years of fighting for its place, it's evolved as a very good source for producing better advertising." She predicts that more of the big agencies will adopt account planning methods in the years to come.

"It seemed to me for a while that it was a small-agency phenomenon and was working well in the small shops where they need the efficiencies it can provide," Lesser says. "But in the last couple of years the bigger agencies, like McCann, Ogilvy and DMB&B are figuring out how to use it and appropriate it into their structures."

Arnie Freeman, a staff executive in the AAAA's management services division, who works with the account planning committee, says account planning has drawn a marked increase in interest from member shops.

"The number of calls I receive from member agencies inquiring about planning, about how to hire a planning director and how to structure a department has increased tremendously in the past few years," Freeman says. "I used to get only sporadic calls, and now a week doesn't go by without a call about it."

What's more, Freeman says the calls are coming from big and small agencies all over the country.

For her part, Newman recommends that account planning play a role in the future of all ad agencies, but she cautions that it must be done right. Simply jumping on a bandwagon is not enough because the discipline must be implemented properly in order to serve clients successfully.

"As account planning doubles in size every year, we have to make sure that the quality control is there," Newman says. "I think there's opportunity for planning to impact not just the advertising, but the total business solutions and problems that the client has. That's what we're trying to do here. We're trying to make planning part of the client-agency role at the top of the organization. We're developing proactive thinking and ideas that we take to our clients on everything from acquisitions to employee training. And it's working out really well." ■

A GROWING DISCIPLINE, BUT HARD TO PIN DOWN

Even account planners are sometimes hard-pressed to tell you exactly what they do. One reason may be that the agencies they work for don't mean the same thing when they say "account planning." Even so, they share some points of agreement.

The ultimate goal of account planning, its practitioners say, is to create better, more effective advertising. The planner's job is to understand how the consumer reacts to the advertising and help develop more effective communication.

A 1992 booklet, "What Every Account Executive Should Know About Account Planning," published by the American Association of Advertising Agencies, currently being updated and revised, provides a good definition of account planning: "A planner is essentially the account team's primary contact with the outside world; the person who, through personal background, knowledge of all pertinent information, and overall experience, is able to bring a strong consumer focus to all advertising decisions."

The part of the definition that distinguishes account planning from research is "bring a strong consumer focus to all advertising decisions."

Account planners use the traditional tools of research and are expected to be in the field on a regular basis, talking directly with the target audience. But unlike traditional staff researchers, who are principally charged with the compilation of data, account planners interpret what they learn.

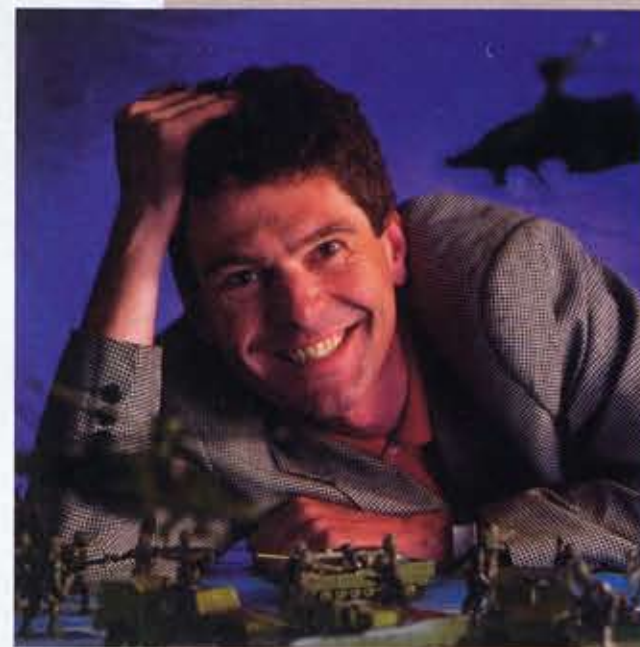
Planners are involved day-to-day with accounts and work in tandem with the creative and account management departments. The planning department is a line function, equal to the creative and account departments, with the same influence and decision-making power. It must have full access to the client in order to understand business objectives and participate in strategy sessions.

Matchmakers for the Brand

Planners use both quantitative and qualitative research to inform and assist the creative department in the execution of ideas. The hope is that planners will act as matchmakers between the brand and the consumer. Their responsibility is to help fulfill and successfully execute the creative strategy.

What makes a good planner? Chris Wauton of West Advertising in Tampa and Katrina McAuliffe of Goldberg Moser O'Neil in San Francisco have written in the AAAA's revised booklet, "A good planner must be attentive to detail without losing sight of the big picture." The writers maintain that "planners should be skilled at using marketing and research data and be able to translate research results into advertising action." They also say planners should have superior communication skills, a sensitivity to the creative process, and a "strategic and visionary mind to create openings."

Wauton and McAuliffe also write: "Account planning is not an end in itself. Outstanding ads were and are done without it. But with planning the chances of getting the advertising right the first time are increased."



WAUTON: Attention to detail, an eye on the big picture.

JERRY CAFF