

ADVERTISING SALES: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

This issue of Ads & Ideas is dedicated entirely to the topic of salespeople—those who sell advertising and those who manage the sales process. What skills and experiences will they need to succeed in the decade ahead compared to 20 years ago?

To address this topic, we sat down with Jim Elliott, founder and CEO of the James G. Elliott Company and Dana Borowka, CEO and co-founder of Lighthouse Consulting Services (LCS), a firm that specializes in personality assessments, interpersonal coaching and conflict management. Through comprehensive personality studies, LCS helps companies hire the right people.

The Big Picture

Q. Before we get into the future, let's talk about the past and present. What's the big picture in publishing today, particularly in the area of advertising sales?

J.E. The James G. Elliott Company is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. Twenty years ago, the media world was much more stable. This is an unsettled time for media. Networks are on the decline. Newspapers are in a state of flux brought on by the Internet and its influence on the way people access breaking news. The Internet itself is still unclear. Magazines are holding their own. And certain types of magazines such as custom publishing and association titles are gaining strength. It's all shaking out.

D.B. Looking at the big picture from a recruitment standpoint, companies, particularly large organizations, need to recognize the role reputation plays in recruitment itself. It's just as important to seed information into the market and use PR in hiring people as it is in marketing products. You can give yourself a great advantage in recruiting the best and the brightest, the most intelligent candidates, if they have a positive preconceived impression of your company coming in.

J.E. And intelligence really is more essential

than ever among salespeople. The industry is moving from relationship-driven sales to idea-driven sales. The very meaning of the word relationship is changing. It's becoming more about bringing real ideas into the mix.

Relationships Built on Ideas

Q. So what will the Advertising Director and salesperson of the future look like? What skills will they need?

J.E. Sales will always be about relationships in some form. But as I was just saying, today's relationships—and tomorrow's especially—are inverting the old relationship model. It used to be: First we're going to be friends, and then we'll see about the business. Now, most agency people won't go to lunch. So you need to come at it from a different angle. You have to go into the relationship at the same knowledge level as the other party—to know their specific needs and come in with solutions. You need to focus on the business interests first and then the friendship.

Q. This newsletter is called **Ads & Ideas**, and it sounds like that's exactly what we're talking about here—bringing new ideas to the process of selling advertisements.

J.E. Very much so. You can't just show up and throw some numbers up on a screen without demonstrating a specific understanding of what the other party's needs are. Today, sales truly demands strategic thinking. You must establish a common basis for discussion and then get into someone's head that way.

D.B. You now look for creativity right up front—rigidity is not good. Many candidates with apparently good people and presentation skills end up testing better as a teacher. You need to be careful of those candidates. You want someone who's smart and good with people—but dynamic, not didactic. And resilience is an important quality. Salespeople have to be able to deal with rejection.

J.E. Agencies expect the publications to do more of the heavy lifting, and the onus is on the publications to produce ideas to get heard. When I worked in the agency world, I had 15 people on a piece of business that now has 2 or 3. With fewer people to handle the work on the agency side, publications need to come in with their own promotional ideas and be able to put it

all together, to leverage the power of the publication's community.

Community is King

Q. Is a publication's community more important today than it was in the past?

J.E. Community is everything. If you're placing your ad in publications that don't have community, then you're not selling anything. Clients are going to get fed up with the lack of moving the needle in sales and they're going to get more involved. In a recent MMR study, *Forbes* magazine was #82 on the list of the most-read magazines, and *American Bar Association Journal* was #2. The broad-brush segment of magazines is eroding. People have a limited amount of time. They go to the sources that they know will deliver the information that is truly targeted to them.

So community is not just the catchphrase of the day—you need real communication with the audience. We deliver this with our association publications. Even a title such as *Yoga Journal*, which is not an association publication, does connect directly with a well-defined community. It's hard today for the large, mass-reach magazines to show true community. They have no real bond with the reader and no true synergies to offer advertisers. On the other hand there is NFIB that I personally spend \$300 a year to belong to. There's a real community there. And NFIB's *MyBusiness* publication (600,000 circulation) is the perfect place for advertisers to connect with small-business owners.

On Intermedia

Q. You mentioned synergies for advertisers, can you expand on that?

J.E. Media properties have been trying to do integrated deals for a long time and have been terribly unsuccessful. There is a lingo and an understanding of other media that you're expected by the agencies to have to be an effective salesperson.

Sellers must understand intermedia combinations and put packages into the equation. And if the mission is to sell intermedia packages, then the salespeople must truly

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understand the other media. Where's the program to train print people in the ways of the broadcast world? Print and broadcast are two very different animals that speak two very different languages. These integrated solutions are complex packages, complex deals, which demand a great deal of originality.

D.B. Again, this comes back to what kind of thought-processes do you employ and what kind of entrepreneurial skills do you have?

You can tell up front if people have the entrepreneurial skills. You're looking for people who like to make things happen, who have energy, who demonstrate involvement.

J.E. Getting back to your question about the Ad Director of the future. Ad Directors of the future will have both marketing and sales skills—they'll need the ability to create these programs and packages that add real value. Intellectually, they'll have to have the appropriate bandwidth for large deals, based on sound broad-based knowledge. They may come more and more from agencies, where they're exposed to the wide range of media.

D.B. This raises another interesting issue with regard to hiring. If you want to hire people who will stay with you in this changing environment and even work their way up, you may need more of a hybrid person. An individual may have an aptitude for traditional selling but not for marketing, and as marketing becomes more important an organization can end up handicapping itself if it hasn't hired people with that aptitude to begin with.

Training and Mentoring

Q. You mentioned training before—training print people to understand broadcast, etc. Will this sort of training become more important as time goes on?

J.E. Yes. Ad directors need to do more than just training. They need mentoring skills to make sure that they are developing their people. You can't just unleash a pack of super salespeople who only understand consumer magazine selling on the market, because this is now very complex selling we're talking about. There are trade shows, magazine schedules, affinity relationships, pass-throughs at the association level. Most salespeople are social optimists, so you need managers who are pragmatic pessimists, who'll say when something is impossible.

D.B. The topic of training and mentoring raises another perspective on hiring as well. Money is important, and it needs to be at a decent level, but people also want, and need, to feel they are contributing. People are feeling

stuck. They're not being heard. The structure gets to them, so they're going to smaller organizations for the same pay.

J.E. You just can't put people at a desk and say "have at it." People need to be thoughtfully assigned to specific accounts; there's a strategic alignment to a sales organization. Selling to service advertisers is different than selling to manufacturing. Sales directors have to know their audiences.

You need to create a sales process, but the process is not the purpose. To use a metaphor, the software is not the end result in itself. It's what you do with the software that matters.

This interview was conducted by Celia Currin and Stephen Strager of BenchStrength Marketing.

ELLIOTT COMPANY NEWSWIRE

The Detroit office of the Elliott Company has moved to larger offices at 16267 W. 14 Mile Rd., Suite 202, Beverly Hills, MI 48025. The new phone number is 248-530-0300.

ACCOUNTS

The American Legion, publisher of the 2,560,000 circulation *American Legion* magazine, has hired the Elliott Company to represent it for all display and classified advertising sales. The magazine, first published in 1919, is the best read magazine of the more than 200 publications measured by Mediamark Research, Inc.

The Los Angeles Times has retained the Elliott Company for advertising sales representation on the East coast for its *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine*. This award winning weekly publication now has a circulation of over 1.2 million.

Yoga Journal magazine has hired the Elliott Company to handle all of their endemic advertising and classified ad sales throughout U.S.

American Scientist magazine, the publication of Sigma Xi, the Scientific Research Society, has hired the Elliott Company for national advertising sales representation.

PEOPLE

Diane Sacken has joined the sales staff of the New York office of the Elliott Company as the Eastern Account Manager for *Realtor*[®] magazine. Previously Diane held sales positions at Meredith Corp. and Gruner & Jahr.

Ilyssa Somer, formerly of *U.S. News & World Report*, has joined the sales staff of the Elliott Company as Account Manager for the *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine*.

Gerald Massa has joined the sales staff of the Elliott Company's New York office as an Account Manager on *American Legion* magazine. He formerly was in advertising sales for Hachette Filipacchi. **Mike Semple** has also joined the company's New York staff in the same position. Mike came to the Elliott Company from the Hearst Corp.

John Thornburgh joined the staff of the Detroit office as an Account Manager on *American Legion*. Previously, John was on the sales staff at Meredith Corp.

Heidi DiFazio has joined the staff of the Elliott Company's Chicago office as an Account Manager on *American Legion* and *Yoga Journal* magazines. Heidi was formerly with Warden, Kelley, Allen & Opfer, a Chicago-based sales company.

Gloria Biscardi has re-joined the Los Angeles sales staff of the Elliott Company as an Account Manager for *Yoga Journal* magazine.

Kyona Levine has joined the sales staff in the Los Angeles office as an Account Manager on *American Legion* magazine.

Gabriela Duenas has joined the sales group in the Classified Department at the Elliott Company in Los Angeles.

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