The New York Times https://www.nytimes.com/1989/03/20/business/the-media-business-advertising-light-touch-for-channel-on-business.html

THE MEDIA BUSINESS: ADVERTISING

THE MEDIA BUSINESS: ADVERTISING; Light Touch For Channel On Business

By Randall Rothenberg

March 20, 1989


THE MEDIA BUSINESS

Advertising Randall Rothenberg

Light Touch For Channel On Business

Public Affairs At Edelman

Newsweek How Safe Is Your Food? DANGER

TIME Is Anything Safe

This week in TIME

COVER STORY: Contaminated water, tainted food— Is the growing paranoia justified?

BUSINESS: Little town blues— Can rural America survive the exodus to the cities?

TIME Think about it.

Big Begins Campaign For New Perfume Line

Lois/GGK Is the Name

Ogilvy Quits 2 Jobs Of Brown & Williamson

Grace & Rothschild

New Warwick Official

People

ESSEX HOUSE

Address for Success

ESSEX HOUSE

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

THE PORT AUTHORITY

IMPORT ADMINISTRATOR

½ SALE! FAX Copier

See the article in its original context from March 20, 1989, Section D, Page 9 Buy Reprints

VIEW ON TIMESMACHINE

TimesMachine is an exclusive benefit for home delivery and digital subscribers.

About the Archive

This is a digitized version of an article from The Times's print archive, before the start of online publication in 1996. To preserve these articles as they originally appeared, The Times does not alter, edit or update them.

Occasionally the digitization process introduces transcription errors or other problems; we are continuing to work to improve these archived versions.

WHEN the National Broadcasting Company decided to create the Consumer News and Business Channel, its cable-television news service that will begin next month, it faced a problem familiar to package-goods manufacturers: differentiating the product from its competitors in the category.

But where one might expect a rival to the Financial News Network and the Cable News Network to traffic in sober, serious advertising, CNBC's television commercials, which begin today, reveal that the company favors what its ad agency calls ''outrageousness.''

Two of the five 30-second commercials, which will run only on cable television, stretch the limits of advertising acceptability with their lighthearted depictions of an executive washroom and a man's fear of impotence. With their exaggerated view of how people can often be led astray, the ads are intended to establish CNBC as a place of reason in a hysterical world.

''There was a need for advertising that would show CNBC not to be another droll, boring business channel,'' said Arthur Selkowitz, the president of Penchina, Selkowitz, the agency behind the campaign and a newly acquired, independent unit of D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles.

The decision to use humor was based on instinct rather than research, said Steven M. Penchina, the agency's chairman and the author of the ads. But it struck the network executives and the agency people as a perfect vehicle to attract the different audiences they needed to reach -men, the traditional viewers of business news; women, who are thought to be attracted by consumer, health and medical information, and the cable operators, who need to be reassured that their decision to carry CNBC was a wise one.

In the spot titled ''Trust Me,'' a pudgy, balding stockbroker tells a gullible, fresh-faced fellow: ''Trust me. This stock's gonna be the biggest thing since polyester.''

''So we're talking big?'' his client asks.

The sound of a crowd can be heard outside the office. ''They're lining up 10 deep out there.''

Cut to the shareholder's meeting, in a vast auditorium with only one elderly woman in the audience. A tiny figure - the company's president -bangs his gavel and shouts into the near-empty space, ''Can we have some decorum, please?''

Although only a handful of viewers would know it, that last voice belongs to Mr. Penchina, added in the studio during final mixing. Like Alfred Hitchcock, he tries to inject himself into his own works. But he also said that in this spot he wanted a tone he could not find elsewhere.

That attention to detail, in fact, distinguishes every aspect of these spots, enhancing the humor in barely perceptible but significant ways. In ''Executives,'' for example, a tall and self-assured man tells his short, nervous female colleague that there is no reason to fear the boss. ''Relax, kid,'' he tells her. ''I've been through meetings like this a thousand times.''

As the conversation ensues (and ends with the confident man's fainting from fear just as his compatriot is about to step inside), the fat employer's ominous shadow crisscrosses his office's milky glass door. That touch, called ''stylized'' by Mr. Penchina, was added by the director, Chris Nolan of Film Realite in Los Angeles. It heightens the ludicrousness of the situation.

The music departs from convention by eschewing the use of what advertising creatives call a ''rug,'' a complete musical theme that supports a spot from beginning to end. Penchina, Selkowitz hired a pair of former MTV contract composers, Tom Hajdu and Andrew Milburn, who work together under the name Pow Inc., and they substituted subtle musical effects for melody.

When the stockbroker in ''Trust Me'' tells his client that the deal he's promoting is ''bigger than the universe,'' a choir can barely be heard underneath the din outside his door.

And in ''Health Front,'' a frazzled man stands in his kitchen while his radio blares, ''Rare minerals in milk can cause uncontrollable shaking.''

The glass of milk in the man's hand shakes violently. Listen carefully, for audible just beneath the clattering is the electronically created sound of mooing cows.

A version of this article appears in print on , Section D, Page 9 of the National edition with the headline: THE MEDIA BUSINESS: ADVERTISING; Light Touch For Channel On Business