

ADVERTISING STAR



Roy Spence—The “S” in GSD&M

[By Robin Salisian]

President and chief salesperson of GSD&M, an advertising agency located in Austin, TX, Roy Spence learned, early on, to be open to all kinds of ideas. And one of the most important ideas he was open to was starting a business from the ground up without any clients or money.

Spence, who graduated in 1971 from the University of Texas at Austin with a degree in government, decided to ditch his degree, focus on his interest in film, and dive into the world of marketing and advertising after five of his friends agreed to start an advertising business together. Their two requirements were simple. Stay together and stay in Austin.

With no real experience in advertising, Spence relied on his business savvy to get GSD&M up and running.

“He decided to do things his own way, which included making new business calls sans appointments. He would show up at a CEO’s office and sell them on his own merit,” says an article on www.ciadvertising.org. “Fortunately, his lack of knowledge gave him the edge for which many clients were searching.”

One time, he “appeared wearing a shirt, tie, boots, and underwear in a lobby full of

Fortune 500 executives assembled for a Wal-Mart shareholders meeting. ‘Has anyone seen my pants?’ he asked. The desk clerk produced his sodden trousers. They had slipped off his hanger and been found rain-soaked in the parking lot. Spence borrowed a blow dryer and, right there in the lobby, dried his pants. He put them on and went on to a very successful meeting,” says an article on www.utexas.edu.

Spence and his colleagues also focused on figuring out what exactly the client wanted. Surprisingly, Spence discovered, it wasn’t advertising. “[Clients] wanted to increase their market share. They wanted to better their margins. They wanted market effectiveness, as measured by the attainment of specific, well-defined objectives,” continues the article on www.ciadvertising.org.

Soon, GSD&M went from six employees to 650 and from earning zero dollars to earning \$1.5 billion in revenue. Not bad for a company that started out with only two of its

six founders having advertising degrees.

Now the company works with a variety of well-known clients including Southwest Airlines, the PGA Tour, MasterCard, Lennox, AT&T, Krispy Kreme, and the AARP, plus many more. GSD&M has also earned top recognition including being named Advertising Agency of the Year in 1999 by *AdWeek*.

Sounds like Spence’s openness to all kinds of ideas paid off.

ON THE NET

GSD&M
www.gsd&m.com

University of Texas at Austin
www.utexas.edu

AdWeek
www.adweek.com

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