

ADVERTISING STAR



## Kathy Sharpe: CEO of Sharpe Partners, a Dynamic Online Advertising Agency

[By Robin Salisian]

CEO of Sharpe Partners, an advertising agency that began as a consultancy, Kathy Sharpe got hooked on “real world” advertising—“things you saw every day in magazines, on TV, in newspapers”—and never looked back.

“I was temping at different agencies in New York City before I started teaching [during] the fall semester at New York University, where I was a Ph.D. candidate. It was a course on American film in the ‘60s.” However, advertising beguiled her away from academics and lead her towards a secretarial job at Bozell & Jacobs, an advertising and public relations agency headquartered in Omaha, NE.

“It was a great place to start a career,” said Sharpe.

And start her career it did. Since then, Sharpe has held various advertising positions, including being an account director at Ogilvy & Mather Interactive and the director of interactive marketing at DDB Needham, where she managed accounts such as IBM, American Express, Michelin Tires, Amtrak, and Mobil.

Finally, according to her website, Sharpe, “armed with a B.A. [in English] from Franklin & Marshall College, a M.A. [in Cinema Studies] from NYU, 14 years [of] marketing experience, and a dedication to developing digital marketing solutions,” founded Sharpe Partners in 1999.

Sharpe’s main objective? “To sell products. PERIOD. It is not to be cool, have fun, or make the cover of a magazine.”

The online ad agency is dedicated to providing clients with “the unique interactive marketing needed to build a strong online brand presence...[including] strategic media

planning, creative advertising, fun and informative wireless content, and, of course, innovative, visitor-focused website design,” says the site.

### **Q. What do you do for fun?**

**A.** My husband and I enjoy being New Yorkers: the movies, galleries, plays, jazz, and ballet. We are big readers, and I’m geekie about needlework. We have two Whippets in an apartment, so they need their daily exercise. Then, there is a world outside of NYC, not to mention a full season of NFL and friends to keep up with. I’m basically never bored.

### **Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?**

**A.** The new Prince CD.

### **Q. What is the last magazine you read?**

**A.** This week’s *New York Magazine*.

### **Q. What is your favorite TV show?**

**A.** Does the NFL count? Then *Deadwood*.

### **Q. Who is your role model?**

**A.** My dad. He had the courage to be honest about his biggest mistakes. So, I can try not to make them. He also taught me that saying, “I’m sorry” is not a sign of weakness. That said, you definitely want him on your side no matter the game; you wouldn’t want to play against him.

And as Sharpe Partners creates dynamic online advertising, the ad company makes sure not to compete with offline advertising, instead striving to complement it with Sharpe Partners’ online creations.

Currently, Sharpe works with clients such as Fujifilm and Circuit City, while past clients have included Simply Orange Juice, Matrix Direct, and Aramark.

“Our campaigns are focused on getting results for the brand, and, ideally, that means sales,” said Sharpe.

“In 2007, the most effective advertising is not contained within the format of a 30-[second] TV spot, nor is it limited to the next rip off of ‘Subservient Chicken,’” Sharpe continued. “It is grown out of an integrated plan well thought out across media campaigns—people live offline and spend a whole lot of time online.”

One example that Sharpe described is Sharpe Partners’ current “OffZHook” campaign for Fujifilm that targets Generation Y with a website ([www.offzhook.com](http://www.offzhook.com)), online

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ads, email, [et cetera]. “It looks like nothing out there, and it incorporates video contests and a branded tool that brings the Fujifilm brand to the desktop.”

Sharpe can also appreciate other agencies’ good technique when she sees it, particularly Dove’s “Campaign for Real Beauty.”

“It took courage to break away from everything advertising said women were,” said Sharpe. “But the prize (which they won) not only made an ‘old’ brand relevant but gave them a brilliant platform for new product introductions for years to come. And it looked like nothing else out there.”

Accolades for good ad tactics go to Sharpe Partners as well. In 2006, the company won a Davey Award, WebAward, and Internet Advertising Competition Award. Clearly, Sharpe Partners’ technique is working.

The company, with its fresh perspective and unique approach to advertising, also

understands where the future of advertising is headed: “Wherever consumers go.”

“If they want content on their desktops via widgets and downloadables, advertising will follow. If they move from must-see TV to download-on-demand, ads will be there. It has always been about the consumer. That will never change,” continued Sharpe.

What, then, can an undergrad seeking a profession in this highly energetic and dynamic field do to keep up, learn, and grow? Intern.

“Intern at different agencies and marketing departments—large, small, with different specialties—and see what you like. We always have interns, and we bring them into everything. In that situation, have an open mind and join the team. That attitude feeds on itself and gets the intern involved in more meetings [and] engaged with more projects...”

And for those desiring career changes, Sharpe offers this advice: Network.

“The ad business is embarrassingly self-obsessed, so there are plenty of blogs and sites to find people—and though we all sound pretty obnoxious, most of us will help out to the best of our ability with advice and time. Experience is a big factor in this industry, so you may need to rethink your salary, but as there are talent gaps in media, project management, and account management, people who are smart will see their salaries rise pretty fast.”

### ON THE NET:

Sharpe Partners  
[www.sharpe-partners.com](http://www.sharpe-partners.com)

Bozell & Jacobs  
[www.bozell.com/internet/home/default.asp?sect=7](http://www.bozell.com/internet/home/default.asp?sect=7)

OffZHook  
[www.offzhook.com](http://www.offzhook.com)

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