

ADVERTISING STAR



McKee Wallwork Cleveland's Art Director: John Reams

[By Robin Salisian]

Art director John Reams “sort of flipped a coin” when a professor broached the career question, “graphic design or advertising?” in a college class. The “coin” landed advertising-side-up. “Next thing I knew I was in Dallas at TracyLocke as a production artist.”

“That’s where I heard my calling to be in advertising,” continues Reams. “The thrill of working on big brands in the fast pace was enough to hook me.”

A graduate from Oklahoma State University, Reams received his associate’s degree in graphic design and began working at Dallas-based ad agency TracyLocke. The brainchild of Shelly Tracy and Raymond Locke, TracyLocke was founded in 1913. And “innovative thinking combined with old-school determination launch[ed] the agency into history books with a strong of milestone achievements,” says its website.

“[The agency] put Dr. Pepper on the map with the ‘10-2-4’ slogan and helped create the name 7-Eleven,” the site continues. “They invented an entire category of clothing with the term ‘slacks’ for Hagar, and helped create Elsie the Cow for Borden — named by Advertising Age as one of the top ten icons of the century. TracyLocke knew early on how to activate a brand.”

Today, Reams works as the art director for ad agency McKee Wallwork Cleveland.

“We could have easily set up shop on the 74th floor of some glass building, but we didn’t,” says McKee’s website. “In doing so, we broke the rules of where an ad agency can

be, and it’s this rule-breaking mentality we bring to the work we do. We’ll try anything to help your brand, and sometimes that means doing something that’s never been done before.”

McKee’s rule-breaking mentality has worked, landing them jobs with clients such

as Heritage Hotels, Mr. Rooter, and Blake’s Lotaburger, “a 78-unit hamburger chain in the mold of In-n-Out Burger and White Castle.”

One of Reams’ clients includes Albuquerque Convention and Visitors Bureau (ACVB). “We created a campaign with rich textural frames that showcased the genuine qualities that are a part of Albuquerque: one was a tin piece, another was leather, and another, pottery. Each was created by a local artisan,” says Reams.

However, when asked about his favorite ad, Reams describes the teen anti-smoking campaign, “Thank You for Not Sucking.”

“Anywhere you use the word smoking (in warning signs and other public-style signage) you would see ‘sucking’— it takes this turn of phrase and lets teens, who already have a high ‘whatever’ factor, to use that phrase as ammo to make smokers feel like losers. The campaign is most succinctly expressed in the t-shirts and stickers we produced, which teens greedily gobbled up.”

But Reams can appreciate other ad tactics outside of McKee, including McDonald’s campaigns.

“I still recall the several-year-old

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. The most fun I have is with my two boys, four and three years old. They are an endless source of entertainment. I also like scotch.

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

A. *The Autumn Project*. But I’ve been playing my iTunes on ‘random’ for months now.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *Details*. But it wasn’t really mine. I was stealing a subscription from a writer buddy. Alex, you should be getting this issue soon. Hang in there.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *The Simpsons*. By far.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. Brett Favre. Humility, grace, and a hard-working attitude are evident in his actions.

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McDonald's stuff, where they parked a snowplow in July with the messaging: shakes are here. Or the billboard with the upside-down shake, and the pole has been turned into a straw."

At McKee, an agency that has worked on some of the nation's biggest brands, employees "[learn] what [works] and [pay] attention to what [doesn't]. In other words, they "do their homework." And because of this, workers are asked to share their opinions with prestigious publications such as *BusinessWeek Online* and *Advertising Age*.

McKee's own president, Steve McKee, has written commentary for *BusinessWeek* since 2004, while Bart Cleveland, McKee's creative director, has offered his opinions to *Advertising Age* since 2005.

And Reams' opinions on the advent of TiVo are clear:

"I have a feeling what we call 'TV' will simply morph into all those mediums that utilize video," he says. "The internet is already offering video that is higher resolution than SD. And with inventions like Slingbox and Apple TV, the mediums are being blurred to the point that the end user doesn't distinguish a major difference. Just the size of the screen. A perfect example is the AMC series 'Mad Men.' I watch it on any number of screens in my house, including the laptop."

"DVR is a new way of life," continues Reams. "I don't know what I did before the 'skip back' button. (I tend to watch the ads, whereas I'm sure most people use the 'skip forward' button.) I would imagine that advertisers will be doing a lot more of what is already happening on TV: co-oping with shows and creating their own content. But that's just the beginning — the consumer will inform us of what's next."

If "flipping a coin" helped determine this successful art director's destiny, then eager advertisers everywhere should regard his advice:

"You have to really want it. This stuff does not get handed to you. Study people — you'll rely on your gut about how people decide things on almost a daily basis. Use your ego to push yourself and your humility to keep it in check."

ON THE NET

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www.mckeewallworkcleveland.com

Oklahoma State University
www.osu.okstate.edu

Advertising Age
www.adage.com/index.php

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