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Advertising Lessons from Mad Men

“Change is neither good or bad, it simply is.” – Don Draper

By: Jennifer Marsnik

This month marks the end of AMC’s iconic period drama, *Mad Men*. In its seven seasons, the award-winning series offered an examination of 1960s American culture through its representation of the “golden age” of advertising. Much has changed on Madison Avenue and in boardrooms throughout the country since that time, and not just because so few of us partake in daytime office-drinking with our colleagues today. But in some ways, *Mad Men* offers thoughtful insights for modern advertising.

The world was changing in the 1960s, in ways few could have imagined in decades prior. Television became more prevalent and replaced radio and print as the primary medium to reach consumers. Society was also becoming more mobile – though not in the way we think of “mobile” today, always within arm’s reach of a device. With advancements in both automobile and air travel, people began traveling more frequently – locally, regionally, nationally and beyond. These changes affected how consumers saw the world and how they saw themselves, requiring advertisers to change their approach to reaching audiences, both in terms of the medium and the message.

Don Draper and his team at Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce on *Mad Men* prioritized the understanding of clients’ target audiences and the market opportunities at that time. As a result, they developed ad campaigns that played to the market’s emotions and promoted brand connections that ultimately create loyalty.

Advertisers today are also faced with constant change in how they reach their audiences. How people see themselves, how they relate to others and how they judge the value of things are constantly evolving. Because of the Internet and those ever-present mobile devices with all their clever apps, the world is smaller, and consumers are inundated with messages. Building a strong connection between your brand and your target market is now more challenging, but more important than ever before.

Strong brands create value because many clients are willing to pay a premium for a brand they trust, believing it reduces risk. In addition to generating higher operating profits, a strong brand builds client loyalty which can further promote stability and growth.

Many companies selling to professional services firms – legal, accounting, finance, etc. – emphasize the importance of personal relationships in the success of their business. Certainly this is a critical aspect of generating revenue. But studies have shown that in B2B, sales efforts impact about 17 percent of buying decisions, while brands have about 18 percent share in purchasing decisions. This means companies that prioritize investment in their sales organizations *at the expense of* investment in marketing or public relations activities – efforts that serve to strengthen the company’s brand – may be doing so at their peril. Finding the right balance is your key to success.

Marketing channels and strategies may change over time, but some core philosophies of advertising’s “golden age” have remained: know your audience; develop long-lasting relationships; be creative, bold and unafraid to take risks; and continually re-evaluate your success and how you measure it. While *Mad Men* might have been a period piece, these are a few lessons we can take from Don, Roger, Peggy and the rest. But most of us should think twice before lighting up a smoke or pouring a drink at the office.

About the author

Jennifer Marsnik is a senior account manager with Edge Legal Marketing. She specializes in helping clients develop and implement strategic PR and marketing plans that support their overall business goals. Jennifer is a life-long Minnesotan who tolerates the long, brutal winters only so that she can readily feed her obsession with Minnesota Twins baseball.



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