

Briefing to the Joint Committee on Public Accounts and Audit, Parliament House,
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Hearing: The role of the Auditor-General in scrutinising government advertising campaigns

In recent years, the term advertising has developed way beyond the conventional definition of an advertisement in a newspaper or a 30 second ad on television. It now loosely defines a range of marketing communications activities that can be anything from a clip on YouTube of a gorilla playing drums to Phil Collins 'In the Air Tonight' that implicitly promotes Cadbury chocolate, to a designer-painted bicycle ridden by Lance Armstrong in the Tour de France that promotes his cancer awareness foundation Livestrong, to the brand that is Apple and one that has become an iconic symbol of cool and individuality even though Apple products have mass appeal and sales.

While these are international examples of advertising communications, Australia has its own influence in the industry even though it is a small player. We certainly have the ability to punch above our weight.

Australia was recently ranked fourth in the world for its advertising creativity by The Cannes Report 2009ⁱ. We received this ranking for winning 45 Cannes Lions International Advertising awards, the industry's equivalent of the Oscars.

Earlier this year Australia stole the show at the 56th Cannes Lions International Advertising awards. The Tourism Queensland campaign, *The Best Job in the World* won three Grand Prix awards for direct campaign, PR and cyber (online) campaign, with an additional eight awards in the general Lions advertising categories. This campaign also won the prestigious American 'One Show' Ad of Year award. This international recognition came on top of the three Gold Effies awarded by the Advertising Federation of Australia.

It is interesting that this advertising campaign won Gold Effies in the categories of Government advertising and Most Original Thinking campaign.

The Best Job in the World campaign is a good case study to review how effective and creative Government Advertising can be and how Government processes can impact upon a successful and penetrating campaign.

I expect you would know this advertising campaign which was essentially a job advertisement for an island caretaker at the Great Barrier Reef offering a six month contract with a salary of \$150,000.

The campaign, managed by Brisbane-based creative agency, CumminsNitro (now known as SapientNitro Brisbane), was developed earlier this year with what would be considered by industry standards a small budget of \$1.5 million (in comparison to the current average Federal Government spend of around \$5 million). However, the goal of the campaign was big and that was to 'increase international awareness of Queensland's Islands of the Great Barrier Reef and transform a popular day-trip destination into an international tourist's dream holiday'.ⁱⁱ

The advertising campaign began with a simple job advertisement strategically placed in the recruitment pages of the leading daily newspapers in key Tourism Queensland markets. These included New Zealand, Germany, Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, England, Ireland, Nordic countries, and the United States.

The focus of these job ads was the call to action – directing people to the website www.islandreefjob.com that requested people to submit a one minute video of themselves explaining why they should be selected for 'The Best Job in the World'.

Queensland Tourism's target or its hope was for 14,000 video applications. It received 34,684 applications from 201 countries and more than 7.5 million web visits. The campaign became a leading news story and achieved global news coverage in all media formats including feature stories on CNN, BBC and in Time magazine.ⁱⁱⁱ

It is estimated that it achieved approximately \$150 million in free PR, however this is a conservative estimate as the campaign still has a strong profile on social media outlets, such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter (including many media organisations setting up their own 'Best Job in the World' Twitter sites).

The campaign was ranked eighth on the international list for the world's top 50 public relations stunts of all time by internationally renowned public relations company Taylor Herring.^{iv}

This campaign demonstrated what is now becoming an international industry standard in advertising – marketing communications. As Todd Sampson, CEO of Leo Burnett creative agency explained earlier this year on the ABCTV's The Gruen Transfer, before a creative campaign is even developed the creative agency should be able to explain to the client what the public relations and media outcomes will be.^v This further reinforces what I highlighted earlier that the traditional definition of advertising has broadened.

Recognition should be given to creative campaigns like Australia's own 'The Best Job in the World' for changing global industry approaches.

It may be of interest to the Committee that the industry in Australia has recognised the broad scope of advertising by announcing this week the establishment, in January 2010, of an industry peak body called The Communications Council that will feature the tagline: *Commercial creativity and connection*.^{vi} It is anticipated that The Communications Council will incorporate the merged industry groups of AWARD (the Australasian Writers and Art Directors Association) the AFA (Advertising Federation of Australia) and the APG (Account Planning Group).

'The Best Job in the World' advertising communications campaign successfully demonstrated what can be achieved on a small budget and within a short time frame through an integrated marketing communications approach. It also demonstrated the imperative of identifying and understanding the target audience, strategically reaching them and engaging them so they believe what CumminsNitro, the creative agency, set out for them to believe. That is: "You don't truly experience something unless you immerse yourself in it."

It is very easy for us to say "wow what an amazing campaign" and "how fantastic; it was a brilliant idea", but that is with the safe knowledge of knowing that it had cut through with its target audience, it increased visitation to the Great Barrier Reef (and the expectation is that this will increase further^{vii}), and it is internationally recognised through all the awards it has won. It also provided human interest, humour and a distraction from a depressed social environment.

And as we would all know, getting this campaign approved would not have been simple as it would have needed to go through a range of Queensland Government hoops, including endorsement from the Minister for Tourism.

It is important to consider that 'The Best Job in the World' campaign was established in a confronting climate that included the Global Financial Crisis, at a time when there was a reduction in consumer spending and rising unemployment, and prior to the Queensland State election.

As Queensland Tourism is an agency of the Queensland Government it could be perceived that this campaign was established to assist in promoting brand Queensland and the incumbent Queensland Government just prior to the election.

The decision to back this campaign was bold, yet it certainly paid off.

I have focussed on this campaign as I believe it highlights a range of challenges when developing government communications activities. Some of these challenges I will speak to later.

During the 2007 Federal Election campaign, the Australian Labor Party made a commitment to reduce Government advertising if elected. The Rudd Government has maintained this promise by reducing Federal Government media spend by 28 per cent (with a spend of approximately \$130 million per annum) during the past financial year (July 2008 to June 2009).^{viii}

Since this Government was elected in November 2007, the Federal Government has dropped from being number one media buyer (or advertiser) in Australia to number four.^{ix}

This decrease in Government advertising activities and reduction in media spend has had an impact on the industry with many creative agencies rationalising and downsizing. Job vacancies have been in limited supply. The industry has faced more than 50 per cent staff reduction in the Advertising – Media industry from July 2008 to June 2009^x which is a result of a range of factors, including the downturn in the economy and, what industry describes as the Rudd Factor, a reduction in Federal Government advertising.

This is not meant to be a criticism; this is just an explanation of the impact on the industry when Governments reduce their advertising. I also know that some in the industry are using this cut back in spending as an opportunity to demonstrate creative skills on limited budgets. 'The Best Job in the World' showed that this is possible...but, would the current Federal Government advertising processes support this innovative campaign? Something that I believe needs to be considered is: do the current accountability processes allow for bold, pioneering decisions in Government advertising?

Anyone that has worked in Government advertising could provide colourful details of the pros and cons (especially the frustrations) of the approval processes managed through the Hawke / Keating Governments with aNiMLS (the National Media Liaison Service) or with the Howard Government's MCGC (Ministerial Committee on Government Communications).

These committees usually boasted members who were highly experienced campaigners. Therefore, they expected exacting standards of the Government agencies coordinating the communications campaigns, and demanded a real understanding of the target audience and how to reach this audience with creative impact.

While it was timely for the Rudd Government to review the Government Advertising and Communications guidelines so as to introduce more transparency and accountability, I can not help but wonder if these changes have aided in a risk averse approach, where public servants are afraid to be bold and innovative in their choice of creative campaigns due to the range of auditing and approval processes that are now in place.

We are all aware of the public criticism of Government advertising and at times this can be valid. There is a perception that Government advertising has the sole purpose of only promoting the incumbent Government. This debate, regardless of its legitimacy, has the potential to limit discussion and analysis of the broader public benefit of Government advertising no matter when it occurs.

From an industry view and from my own practitioner's experience, the debate about politicisation of Government communications can reduce the public focus of the benefits of any Governments work that needs to be promoted so as to encourage social behavioural change. Advertising has its place and can make a positive impact. In other words, advertising does matter.

I doubt that a Grim Reaper television advertisement, a strategic shock campaign developed in 1987 that assisted Australia reducing AIDs in the general community, would receive approval through the current processes. This award winning campaign is still recognised as being innovative and a leader in social change marketing.

I also doubt that the feel good campaign of 'The Best Job in the World' recognised internationally for its innovation and creativity would receive approval through the current Federal Government processes.

The 2009 winner of the Advertising Federation of Australia's Grand Effie was the 'Pinkie' campaign created by Clemenger BBDO for the NSW Government's Roads and Traffic Authority. This 'Speeding – No one thinks big of you' campaign has been highly successful, not just because of the number of awards it has won, but because it has penetrated into the minds and souls of the target audience – Aussie blokes aged around 17-25 who love to drive and speed.

Within a few months of this campaign launching in 2007, awareness with the target audience reached 97 per cent and 95 per cent among the general public. The campaign had an enormous impact with road deaths in the target age group dropping by half in its first year of the campaign's circulation. Due to these powerful results, the campaign has continued and with each subsequent year road deaths in the target age group have continued to drop dramatically.^{xi}

This 'Pinkie' campaign has worked because it hit young male drivers where it hurt most. As Clemenger BBDO has explained, "the old cliché rang true: these guys were thinking with their penises. Driving was an opportunity to be the 'Big Man' and let all their mates know about it."^{xii}

However, this social marketing campaign nearly did not happen. Initially, it was rejected through the (state) Government processes and it was due to the belief and determination of Clemenger's creative staff who orchestrated a chance meeting with the then Minister for Roads (Eric Roozendaal), so they could pitch their creative concept directly to him. As history shows, the Minister bought the concept.^{xiii}

Clemenger's now assert that the Pinkie campaign has saved at least 56 young lives in the past two years^{xiv} and saved \$264 million in accident related hospital costs.^{xv} Imagine these results if the campaign was developed when first pitched to the RTA in 2004.

I have deliberately focussed on State Government advertising communications campaigns to illustrate my points as I did not want to single out any Federal Government campaign for criticism for these purposes. However, the list provided to this Committee from the Department of Finance on 1 June provides some worthwhile examples for future discussion among the Committee.

The current guidelines produced by the Department of Finance^{xvi} stress the need for research, clear campaign objectives, understanding and reach of target audience, campaign approach, and evaluation. As I explain to students in the Advertising-Marketing Communications program at University of Canberra these are all crucial components of a successful campaign. However, I also add that without a bold approach to innovation and creativity in communication campaigns and the ability to take a risk with the creative concepts so it talks to the target audience, there is little point in producing the campaign as it will no doubt have limited recall, which generally means that there will be no impact on knowledge and attitude, and as such will unlikely deliver the objectives and achieve behavioural change.

Accountability and transparency is crucial in Government advertising, but these should not be the only aspects that are taken into consideration. Government advertising is not just about procedures and keeping the number of Government campaigns to a minimum. Any communications campaign, and especially Government communications because it is funded through public monies, must also incorporate true evaluation measures and have creative cut through with the target audience. In other words, the advertising focus should not be just about the spend; it must reach the target audience in a creative way that informs and persuades. This would then be real value for money.

ⁱ Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival. The Cannes Report 2009. France.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.canneslions.com/>

ⁱⁱⁱ source: 'Tourism Queensland – The Best Job in the World' case study, www.afa.org.au 2009.

^{iv} *ibid*

^v Chilcott, Tanya. 'Tourism Queensland's Best Job in the World makes list of top 50 public relations stunts'. The Courier-Mail, 17 April 2009. And

<http://www.taylorherring.com/blog/index.php/2009/01/50-top-publicity-stunts/>

^{vi} source: Todd Sampson, CEO Leo Burnett. *The Gruen Transfer*, ABC1, Wednesday 13 May 2009.

^{vii} source: Mumbrella, 'Ad industry uber body set to be called The Communications Council'.

www.mumbrella.com.au 19 October 2009.

^{viii} www.afa.org.au Tourism Queensland. loc cit.

^{ix} source: Nielsen / Adnews September 2009.

^x source: *ibid*, and 'An Educational Guideline on the Advertising Media Industry'. Media Federation of Australia, 2009.

^{xi} source: Olivier Job Index http://www.olivier.com.au/files/oji/2009/august_09/amr_august_2009.pdf

^{xii} source: NSW Roads and Traffic Authority: 'Speeding. No one thinks big of you' case study, www.afa.org.au 2009.

^{xiii} *ibid*.

^{xiv} Lee, Julian. 'RTA gave finger to pinkie ad'. 31 August 2009.

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/rta-gave-finger-to-pinkie-ad-20090831-f48z.html>

^{xv} www.afa.org.au NSW RTA. loc cit.

^{xvi} Julian. loc cit.

^{xvii} Department of Finance and Deregulation. 'Guidelines on Campaign Advertising by Australian Government Departments and Agencies. June 2008.