

# fishing without a hook

By John L. Gann, Jr.

Communities need advertising that prompts involvement, that allows measurement of its results, and that is constantly tested and refined to make it ever more powerful. The task of making that happen falls mainly not upon ad agencies but upon local leadership.

"Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted," complained English industrialist Lord Leverhulme, "and the trouble is I don't know which half." Among communities that advertise for economic development, the percentage may well be higher. And some seem to feel it's more like both halves.

Conway Data, publisher of *Site Selection*, has tracked industrial development advertising and project announcements for over 30 years. Conway estimates that \$10 million is spent annually by communities on print advertising in national area development magazines. But in the last two years its figures show ad pages have declined 18 percent.

## INVESTMENT OR EXPENSE?

The decline began with the economic downturn six years ago, recalls Ronald J. Starner, director of publications at Conway. He estimates that economic development agencies now spend in real dollars just half of what they spent on marketing in 2000. So half of at least one form of community advertising may indeed now be gone. It is less clear that it is solely the "wasted" half that disappeared or that economic developers have been any better than old Lord L at telling which half was which. Cutting ad

budgets during slumps is also common in business. But some say that's when spending should be boosted to pump up sales and gain an edge on competitors who are hunkering down.

Which course prevails may depend on whether advertising is seen as an overhead expense or as an investment that generates revenues that support everything else a company or community does. Advertising has been called a "silent salesperson." And no sensible organization fires or demotes a salesperson who's bringing in business worth many times his or her pay.

## IS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVERTISING STRIKING OUT?

There does seem to be a question, however, as to whether the silent salesperson of advertising can deliver the goods in economic development. Most places wanting industry don't advertise at all. And of communities' tourism advertising, Rutgers professor Briavel Holcomb notes that there is "little published research on the efficacy of these promotional efforts, and indeed, the impact on actual travel behavior is difficult to measure."<sup>1</sup>

But perhaps most familiar to *Journal* readers are the surveys by Development Counselors International.<sup>2</sup> In 1996, 1999, and 2002 the New York public relations firm asked executives to identify "the three leading sources of information influencing your perception of an area's business climate." In no survey were print ads named by more than four percent of respondents. And no more than 21 percent ever gave high ratings to advertising of any kind as an effective marketing technique, the second-lowest percentage among eight techniques specified.

Of course, simply to influence perceptions of a business climate is not either the only or the most important reason that places run industrial development advertising. Since virtually every place boasts of a great business climate, such claims become rather meaningless. And rare is the executive who will admit that perceptions are influenced by ads he or she sees.

## MAKING COMMUNITY ADVERTISING WORK

While both communities and companies are questioning the effectiveness of advertising today, places seeking economic development face special difficulties. Adopting best practices to "hook" those who see ads can reduce waste. Five such measures supported by marketing experts run contrary, however, to common ad agency practice.

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The top-rated influences in the DCI surveys – press reports, industry scuttlebutt, business travel – are factors communities have little control over. A front page story in *The Wall Street Journal* is something even places that hire the priciest PR counsel almost never attain. Nor do DCI figures gauge effectiveness against cost or practicability. Highly-rated “planned visits to corporate executives” and “hosting special events” are desirable but time-consuming and expensive and reach fewer decision-makers than advertising.

The most reasonable inference from the DCI surveys might be that different techniques are suitable for different agencies and different stages of the marketing process. The mass marketing of advertis-

ing might be most advantageous at early stages, while one-on-one options might better serve fewer prospects later in the game. Such a conclusion would also pose no conflict with 30 years of findings by Conway Data. Its figures show that the states with agencies that buy the largest number of advertising pages in national corporate real estate periodicals tend also to account for the highest number of new or expanded corporate facilities valued at \$1 million or more. While emphasizing that this association does not prove causation, Starner notes that states that do the least advertising rank lowest in projects as well. But heavy advertising could simply be a sign of strong efforts in other areas of marketing that could be more responsible for success.

The most important limitation of both the DCI and Conway findings, however, may be that they do not tell the whole story of community advertising today, since economic development is now much more than the traditional “smokestack chasing.” The disseminating power of advertising can also be attractive to communities seeking retail development, tourism, conventions, retirees, or other economic benefits (see box). “The biggest marketing problem downtowns have,” confirms David M. Feehan, president of the International Downtown Association, “is how to deliver their message to target audiences.”

## A SUSPECTED UNDERACHIEVER IN BUSINESS TOO

Supporting the DCI findings nonetheless is the fact that even corporations are doing soul-searching about the payoff from advertising these days. Kevin J. Clancey and Robert S. Shulman note that companies have been diverting resources into promotions “because most advertising has been unable to demonstrate a convincing connection between advertising and sales results.”<sup>3</sup> Al Ries, co-developer of the marketing concept of positioning, and his daughter/partner Laura memorably characterize this kind of advertising as “fishing without a hook.”<sup>4</sup> “Prospects pick up the bait” the ads present, they explain, “but never get hooked on the brand.”

John Philip Jones of Syracuse University agrees that ads commonly fall short. He faults not any inherent limitations of advertising but its creators.<sup>5</sup> Print doesn’t get much attention from ad agencies, Jones explains, since bigger commissions lie in television. And agency people resist measuring response.

## DIFFICULTIES IN MAKING COMMUNITY ADVERTISING WORK

But if even companies are having trouble making advertising work today, there are special problems with advertising communities. Six are especially notable.

## SCOPE OF COMMUNITY ADVERTISING

### Community to Business Advertising

#### **1. Industry**

Cities, regions, states, and nations advertise themselves as manufacturing, distribution, high tech, or corporate office sites.

#### **2. Retail**

Cities like Long Beach and Riverside, California, and their downtowns are advertised as store locations to chain retailers in trade journals

#### **3. Meetings**

Cities like Houston and resort areas are advertised as meeting sites to convention planners.

### Community to Consumer Advertising

#### **1. Tourism**

Nations, states, regions, cities, historic districts, even highway corridors like U.S. 6 in Pennsylvania advertise to tourists.

#### **2. Shopping**

Downtown areas such as in Ithaca, New York, have advertised themselves as shopping venues.

#### **3. Entertainment**

Downtowns or other business districts are advertised as dining or entertainment hubs.

#### **4. Residence**

Urban neighborhoods are occasionally advertised as residential locations to area home buyers.

#### **5. Specialized Labor Force**

Cities are even sometimes advertised as employment locations to locally scarce labor force. Phoenix has advertised its moderate housing prices in California to recruit police officers.

#### **6. Retirement**

States and towns like Tupelo, Mississippi, advertise themselves as retirement havens in seniors’ publications.

#### **7. Economically Valuable Populations**

Cities are sometimes advertised to young people, graduating students, or the “Creative Class.” Pennsylvania has promoted its virtues with a tongue-in-cheek ad headlined “Top Ten Reasons to Stay in Pennsylvania After You Graduate.”

## 1. Equating Advertising With Media Buys

In some communities, advertising may be seen simplistically as little more than spending on media. The focus is on simply getting the community's name in front of a large enough number of the right kind of people. Less care may be taken in formulating what to say and how best to say it.

Advertising agencies – which began historically as commissioned sales reps for the media rather than marketing pros serving advertisers and are still anachronistically paid a percentage of clients' buys by the media – may encourage this perception. This can lead to underinvestment in developing an effective campaign strategy and compelling message. That can make advertising ineffective no matter how heavily media are used. “Selling media is how the agency makes money,” says Barry Feig, “selling products doesn’t generate any income.”<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Small Media Budgets

That said, media purchases do in most cases have to be made. But most communities' media budgets are limited. That can mean too little exposure for good results. "One of the big mistakes communities make," suggests Ron Starner, "is campaigns that are too short. Three years should be a minimum to see results." Small budgets also mean communities' accounts are of less interest to ad agencies and their best talent except perhaps as a "community service" activity to burnish an agency image.

### 3. Less Visible Benefits

When companies advertise, the financial benefits come to the organization that pays the bill. Benefits of community advertising, however, accrue more broadly and less conspicuously to multiple businesses, property owners, taxing bodies, workers, real estate agents, and others. In addition, effective community advertising today often leads prospects to visit a Web site rather than to call or write, making respondents invisible. This is especially the case in industrial development, given the anonymity desired by site-seeking corporations. Dispersed benefits and untracked responses can make investment in advertising difficult to justify or to apportion fairly among prospective beneficiaries.

#### 4. Unfamiliarity and Inexperience

Much community advertising is done by government. While advertising has always been part of business, it has had little place in public administration. Cities and states don't have marketing commissions or advertising boards. And while companies that don't compete well can go under, even the least economically successful localities continue to exist. Businesses go out of cities, but cities don't go out of business.

That means governments have had less advertising experience and less incentive to do it well. Without advertising staffs, they have less ability to do advertising in house or to astutely buy and evaluate services from others. "Economic developers need advertising and marketing knowledge, not just selling skills," says Ted Coene, publisher of *Business Facilities*. And government, being government, hiring an ad agency or PR firm based more on politics than professionalism is not unknown.

Nor are the agencies always much better off than their clients. "Most advertising agencies have limited experience in dealing with economic development advertising," concluded Richard L. Eggers and Robert G.

Treat of Illinois Power Company. "Traditional consumer advertising placement formulas and measures normally employed by advertising agencies have marginal success in economic development situations."<sup>77</sup>

## 5. The Data Game

Another barrier to effective use of advertising is the perception that data is controlling in community marketing. Places sometimes assume they need do nothing more than get their numbers out on their Web sites or through state economic development agencies and wait for the phone to ring. Some places have indeed been surprised to find themselves on a company's short list as a result of quiet Web-based research. In this context, of course, advertising naturally seems superfluous.

But while the data strategy has some validity in industrial development, it is inapplicable in other forms of community marketing. Even the best numbers, moreover, don't count for much if they're never found. Places still need advertising, says Bill King, editor of *Expansion Management*, if only to direct executives to their Web sites. And data and advertising are hardly mutually exclusive. Selective data can be advertised to good effect (FIGURE 1).

**Figure 1**  
 Communities advertise for retail development too. Lima, Ohio, eschews the “creative” approach in favor of data, rankings, and trade area delineations suggesting sales potential. (Reproduced with permission of Allen Economic Development Group.)

## 6. Promotions Rule

But the primary reason why advertising has not achieved its full potential in economic development may be the heavy reliance on promotions. This has also been the trend in consumer marketing by business, with increased emphasis on sampling, cents-off coupons, and temporary price cuts to stimulate sales rather than on conveying full-price value by means of advertising messages.

Even CVBs now compete on price as a result of the large number of convention centers. But with the possible exception of auto makers, perhaps no marketers rely more on price concessions than industry-focused economic developers. Like GM and Ford with their perennial rebates and financing deals, communities seeking industry have trained companies to expect generous financial

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incentives. Reliance on incentives is understandable given intense competition and widely varying prices for labor, real estate, and utilities that are out of communities’ control. But competing on price obviously departs from the idea of advertising to create perceived value that merits a higher price.

### ADVERTISING SMARTER

For the problems these difficulties create, neither the DCI nor the Conway surveys may offer the best solution. That’s because the DCI conclusion (spend on high-cost personal touch contacts rather than mass media) and the implications of the Conway data (be among the biggest spenders on print advertising) may be equally out of reach for most communities with limited budgets.

The remedy in such cases, say marketing experts, is neither downplaying advertising nor advertising harder. It’s advertising smarter. The biggest problem with that may be that expert advice is not



Figure 2.

*In a departure from typical full-page ads, the communities of Brazoria County, Texas, pass on ornamental graphics and designer white space in favor of conveying information of interest to the industrial site selector. The only large graphic is appropriately a schematic map laden with still more information. (Reproduced with permission of The Economic Development Alliance of Brazoria County.)*

always put to use. Don E. Schultz of Northwestern University complains about “the disparity between what is *known* and how marketing and communications are *practiced*.<sup>8</sup> David Ogilvy lamented that “advertising agencies waste their clients’ money repeating the same mistakes.”<sup>9</sup> There are, however, five rarely utilized “hooks” that some places have put into their advertising that both communities that advertise and those that have written advertising off might well consider.

### HOOK 1: LOSE THE AD LOOK

The first hook must get the prospect’s attention. And you can’t hook someone on something he or she doesn’t even want to look at.

Typical ad agency work makes a community’s message look *like* advertising. The problem with that is a simple one. Most people don’t like

advertising. DCI survey respondents give it low marks. Yet PR – the other way to get a message out through the media that DCI respondents rated higher – has its own limitations. Unpaid advertising in the form of editorial coverage is hard to get. States, big cities, and famous tourist meccas can claim a significance that merits high-profile exposure. Smaller places can find the task much more difficult.

Editorial matter is, moreover, controlled by journalists who don’t know economic development, are trained to be skeptical, and are obligated to present the downside as well as the upside. And most media are already swamped with press releases and would much rather sell ad space to someone with a promotional story to tell. Editor Bill King estimates that only one to two percent of print articles published result from pitches by PR firms.

### Hybrid Messages

The solution to the advertising-vs.-PR conundrum may therefore be a paradox: advertising that doesn’t look like advertising. The solution, in other words, is a hybrid of the two. “You know you’ve written a good ad,” says ad man Roy Williams, “when it doesn’t sound like an ad.”<sup>10</sup> “An ad,” agrees copywriter Luke Sullivan, “says, ‘Turn the page.’”<sup>11</sup> David Ogilvy observed that ads that look like editorial pages rather than advertising draw 50 percent more readers.<sup>12</sup>

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#### **Ways to Lose the Look**

Four measures are suggested for communities to take to avoid a look that can stand in the way of getting their message taken seriously.

##### **\* White Out the White Space**

Although aesthetes love it, marketer Ray Jutkins reminds us that in an ad “nobody reads the white space.”<sup>13</sup> “We have practically nothing to put in this space to say to you, but, hey, why don’t you look into our community anyway?” represents a less than compelling appeal.

##### **\* Hide the Hype**

Part of the “advertising look” is the unabashed boasting in copy that has given advertising little credibility. The alternative is to make the ad as factual and credible as a well-written article.

##### **\* Credit the Copy**

“The more you tell, the more you sell” seems especially apropos for communities. The choice of a community as a business, residential, convention, or vacation location is a complex, big-ticket, and often long-term decision requiring lots of information.

But many agency people claim people won’t read long copy in ads, even though they will read it in articles. The solution: make ad copy worth reading. “It’s not long copy that people don’t read, it’s dull copy,” insists Robert Pritikin. “A man interested in purchasing a recreational vehicle will read a 30-page booklet on RVs.”<sup>14</sup> According to Ogilvy, the very appearance of long copy is a plus because “advertisements with long copy convey the impression that you have something important to say....”<sup>15</sup>

#### **\* Fix the Photos**

Tourism and industrial ads especially tend to display photographs of the community. Full-page ads can include a bewildering number of tiny scenes. But these images often add little pertinent information. What a community looks like can best be conveyed on a Web site full of images or in a video or site visit. And majestic mountains, dreamy waterfront sunsets, and other cliched scenes can be found in many places. In high-priced ad space, photos might better be used selectively to convey something distinctive.

### **HOOK 2: JUST TALK PERSON-TO-PERSON**

Once you have the prospect’s attention, you have to keep it by communicating something of interest. Person-to-person talk is a good hook to accomplish this.

In lieu of the advertising look, communities might emulate the format so effectively used by the sales representative. Talk. Given a half-hour of time with a site selection, convention, or retail executive, few communities would use it to display pretty pictures, call attention to their flashy apparel, or show off their verbal cleverness or sophisticated taste. And it would be suicidal to say virtually nothing at all. Yet when given a few seconds of that executive’s time as he or she glances at an ad, that’s what many choose to do.

“Advertising,” said John E. Kennedy, “is salesmanship in print.” In our own time Sergio Zyman argues that advertisers need to remember that the reason to run advertising is to “sell stuff.”

One reason advertising ranks low in DCI surveys as a source of business climate information may be very simple: most ads don’t offer it. The amount of space devoted to such information in even full-page ads is often overwhelmed by the space taken up by the advertising look. Given fleeting seconds of attention, many ads try to dazzle with design rather than intrigue with information.

### **Is Glitz-Free Tourist Advertising an Oxymoron?**

How to avoid the advertising look was never better illustrated than by advertising legend David Ogilvy. In the 1950s, he did a full-page ad selling England as a low-cost tourist destination. It looked like an article, not an ad. A third of the page was a single photograph, and the rest was 400 words of small-type copy. The headline was set in plain-looking type. There was no logo, no artsy treatments, no amusing Limey phrases in the copy, no cliched London Bridge or Big Ben graphics, no cartoon beefeater. And no color.

A dozen detailed figures demonstrated the low prices tourists could enjoy. The schedule of prices also served to draw attention to wonderful things to do. In lieu of overgeneralized puffery, the ad provided concrete information that sold.

Most tourists are less concerned with saving money and factual specifics than other groups. So Ogilvy’s formula might be even more effectively used to sell to industry, retailers, meeting planners, retirees, or home buyers.



the product. Summarizes Ted Coene, "Content is king." Superficial and cliched information may mean the ad agency hasn't done enough digging to find the best things to talk about. "Vague claims about an area's quality of life are deadly," adds Ron Starner. "Businesses want specific bottom-line information." "Downtowns have to sell the experience of the place" to distinguish themselves from the malls, maintains David Feehan. "But only about five percent of downtown organizations do this."

That makes Job One in community advertising an intensive probing study of the community that floods the advertising message-maker with information. Luke Sullivan quotes advertising legend Bill Bernbach: "The magic is in the product....You've got to live with your product. You've got to get steeped in it. You've got to get saturated with it."<sup>22</sup> That can especially pay off when the product has more to offer than it appears. Stories of crime and racial incidents made perceptions of a client of ours unfavorable. Yet our research uncovered multiple distinctions that could identify the community instead with a tradition of being "first." An ad we prepared (FIGURE 5) showed that little-known side of the town.

#### HOOK 4: GET INVOLVEMENT

You can't really hook someone until you get him or her to become involved with you by taking a small initial action. The ad must motivate that action.

The only advertising that ultimately counts is the kind that produces a sale. Car dealers know that unless the buyer takes action to visit the dealership and try out the car on the road, there will be no sale. Community advertising is also likely to be more effective if, in the words of marketing consultant Ian Moore, it "sells the test drive." In Seth Godin's *Permission Marketing*, an ad sells the reader on giving an initial permission – say, to send a brochure or video. That then leads to other things. But if the permission doesn't happen, Godin warns, effective marketing won't either. Advertisers must actively go after involvement. "Too much economic development activity is *ad hoc* responses," warns Ted Coene. "Communities should be more proactive, less reactive."

"You can't sell a community with advertising alone," advises William L. Shanklin of the University of Akron. Few buy a corporate facility location, vacation destination, meeting site, or place to live solely as a result of an ad. The most an ad can do is to get a select number of readers to take the next step toward a sale. But to achieve marketing with a hook, that's also the *least* it should do.

That "test drive" step can take various forms. It might be to explore a Web site, order a brochure, visit a real estate office, redeem a coupon downtown, make a phone call, view a tour on a DVD or on the Web, request a visit from a representative, or order or download a research report. Not surprisingly, the options rated highest in the DCI surveys tend to be

high-involvement marketing like visits to executives and special events.

#### Love Without Marriage

Advertising people often argue, however, that it is enough to create "awareness," "likability," or a brand identity. It is asking too much, they say, to try to involve the reader or move him or her to action. But it's not an either/or choice: ads can do both.

And awareness without action may be likened to a salesperson giving a presentation and then committing the cardinal sin: failing to ask for the order or at least the next step toward the order. Sergio Zyman colorfully dismisses ads that aim for "likability" as creating "people who think they are in love with you, but have no plans to marry you."<sup>23</sup> American Telecast founder Steven K. Scott argues that agencies talk up "awareness" and "recall" to disown responsibility for influencing sales and substitute a low-ball way to claim success. "Even a child can be a successful high-jumper," he notes sardonically, "when the bar is only six inches off the ground."<sup>24</sup>

Syracuse University's Jones agrees. He cites "a tendency for agencies to respond defensively about building images, changing consumer perceptions, and generating long-term sales. My own experience has taught me that without a short-term effect, advertising will never have a long-term effect."<sup>25</sup>

But "selling the test drive" is more than just listing a phone number and address or urging a Web site visit. "The ad must give a reason," says Shanklin, "to take that first step." And on a Web site, says Zyman, "traffic is good, but it doesn't guarantee commerce any more than driving past a McDonald's guarantees buying a Big Mac."<sup>26</sup>

#### HOOK 5: BETTER HOOK NEXT TIME

Expert fishing ultimately requires knowing how well a hook worked and using a better one when you next put a line in the water.

"The most important word in the vocabulary of advertising," concluded David Ogilvy, "is TEST."<sup>27</sup> The only way to know which hook will work best is to test against others. And the only way to know whether any hook is working is to measure results.

**There's just one word for a place like Belleville...**

*David O'Farrell, will (426-3921), A.B. Jones, M.A. (426-3922), and Jim Gobin (426-3923) are members of the City of Belleville's tourism committee. They are part of the City's tourism committee, which is working to improve the town's image. The committee is composed of a variety of business and community leaders, including business, professional, and*

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*If you like great local products, visit the biggest store in the country's northeast. And great regional cuisine can be found at restaurants in the area.*

*Now do something else. Visit the area's natural parks and recreation areas. And don't forget the area's biggest attraction: Chicago's 11th largest city is Belleville.*

*And while you're here, have a blues dinner, visit the world's largest*

*Top-Tier Schools*

*Education and culture: many things. We have the area's best pre-kindergarten, elementary and secondary school facilities in Belleville. Our students are the top not to mention for our education programs.*

*And the largest community of performing arts in the area. Visit the area's best performing arts facilities, such as the Belleville Performing Arts Center, located in the heart of downtown Belleville, on W. Lincoln St. 610-395-3300.*

*Business? We'll treat you right.*

*Whether you're looking for a place to do business or a place to live, Belleville's business climate is second to none. We have a great business climate, and we're here to help you succeed.*

*Other communities have adopted City programs, like walk-permitting, business improvement districts. But we don't believe in that. We believe in what we do best: we're a community, and we're here to help you succeed.*

*Our Surprising Record*

*You won't see all these great things in a brochure. You won't see all these great things in a newspaper. But let's be fair: we're one of the most business communities in the state. Believe it or not, we're here to help you succeed.*

*And like everywhere else, we're not a*

*little bit of everything.*

*So come to the area's best city. And if you need a place to live, we can help you succeed. It's Belleville, we're good*

**A Place to be Proud of**

*Now, you might not have known all this before, unless we told you. And if you're not from here, you might not even know what you're talking about.*

*Now do something else. Visit the area's natural parks and recreation areas. And don't forget the area's biggest attraction: Chicago's 11th largest city is Belleville.*

*And because we still need to be the area's first place to look for local products or fresh meat, vegetables. But if you're not from here, you might not even know what the heck the place where it comes from.*

*So just wait for the next*

*Yes, Belleville:*

*you know*

*How to be First.*

*The Belleville Area Development Corporation is the area's economic development organization. For more information, call 610-395-3300.*

*Or visit our website at [www.belleville.org](http://www.belleville.org).*

*Or just wait for the next*

Figure 5. Some older cities that have suffered from bad press and a tarnished reputation actually have a lot going for them. But it can take a long-copy ad like this one to make that widely known. (Ad copyright Gann Associates.)

## Here's Looking at You

**Talk is the most personal form of communication and the most effective.** We respond better to communications from people than to messages from faceless organizations. That can provide a clue to one of the most effective graphic elements in any ad: a photograph of a person looking directly at you, the reader. Probably nothing is more arresting as you page through a magazine. We are conditioned to notice and respond to this kind of stimulus.

A few places have effectively used images of a company CEO, mayor, or governor to personalize their messages. But less prominent faces can work too, as demonstrated by the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce (FIGURE 6).



**Figure 6.**  
The Charlotte, North Carolina, Chamber of Commerce is also at least 13 percent smarter when it comes to stopping the busy business reader with an image of a person looking right at him or her. For companies seeking an educated work force, Charlotte's ad also offers a few reasons to check the town out. (Reproduced with permission of Charlotte Chamber of Commerce.)

Advertisers' coupons, mailing addresses and phone numbers, and Web sites in print ads can be keyed so as to trace inquiries to a particular ad and measure effectiveness.

Ads that work well based on measured response should be repeated until response falls off or until testing produces a better ad that "beats the control." A successful small-scale test can be expanded into a bigger investment. Ads that can't meet the test of measured response should be replaced. "You have to try different things," says Bill King of *Expansion Management*. "Different things work at different times, and nothing works forever."

## MORE MUSCULAR ADVERTISING FOR COMMUNITIES

Economic development in the 21st century has evolved beyond the "smokestack chasing" industrial recruitment model. Communities now seek a variety of investments that can create jobs, enhance incomes, and generate tax revenues. Use of media

to get marketing messages out is similarly evolving in business. More companies are finding that traditional "fishing without a hook" advertising isn't producing results. And they also recognize that PR is inadequate to tell their story. Both evolutions suggest that past conclusions about the role and nature of advertising in economic development are due for reappraisal.

For all its shortfalls, advertising still represents a cost-effective way to reach large numbers of all kinds of prospects. It offers a message that comes to them rather than one they have to somehow locate in the thicket of today's Internet. It's a proactive medium that seeks out the people the advertiser decides should hear his message. Unlike PR, it allows an advertiser to tell his story in exactly his way. At the same time, traditional advertising that "fishes without a hook" can be enormously wasteful.

Marketing authorities suggest, however, that this waste can be greatly reduced with better advertising practices. Most fish will always elude even the most effective hook. But the prospective catch from a line bearing nothing more than attractive bait hardly justifies even dropping it into the water.

And it is nowhere more important to apply best practices than in advertising communities. It is hard to think of a higher-value product or one with greater economic significance. Successful community advertising can mean more jobs and tax revenues, higher incomes, lower taxes, and enhanced property values. If advertising a community is a much tougher job than advertising a product, the value of the payoff is also commensurately greater. Yet to bring these larger results about, communities can spend only a fraction of the funds on media that product marketers do. Since that's not likely to change, what this paradox calls for is a leaner, more muscular kind of advertising for communities.

Whether advertising to business or consumers, communities now need advertising that is less glitz and more purposeful; less fluffy and more information-packed; and less Madison Avenue fantastic and more Main Street credible. That means less show and more person-to-person talk. It also means ads that are less about the stylishness of the ad world and more about the benefits of the product. Communities need advertising that prompts involvement, that allows measurement of its results, and that is constantly tested and refined to make it ever more powerful. The task of making that happen falls mainly not upon ad agencies but upon local leadership. While the ad agency's job is simply selling advertising, the job of selling a place for economic development will always belong to the community.

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 Briavel Holcomb, "Marketing Cities for Tourism," in Dennis R. Judd and Susan S. Fainstein, *The Tourist City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 61.
- 2 The most recent report published was Andrew T. Levine, "A View from Corporate America," *Economic Development Journal*, Summer, 2003, p. 8.
- 3 Kevin J. Clancey and Robert S. Shulman, *The Marketing Revolution: A Radical Manifesto for Dominating the Marketplace* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1991), p. 167.
- 4 Al Ries and Laura Ries, *The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR*. (New York: HarperBusiness, 2002), p. 50.
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