



the **advertising** handbook



sean brierley



The Advertising HANDBOOK

The *Advertising Handbook* is the ideal book for anyone interested in the *how* and *why* of advertising. Sean Brierley places the industry in its social, historical and political context. He explains the structure of the advertising industry and the role of those who work in it.

The Advertising Handbook examines why companies and organisations advertise; how they research their markets; where they advertise and in which media; the principles and techniques of persuasion and their effectiveness, and how companies measure their success.

The Advertising Handbook challenges conventional wisdoms about advertising's power and authority to offer a realistic assessment of its role in business and also looks at the industry's future considering, for example, the advent of the new "communications" agencies. Essential reading for anyone studying or teaching advertising or hoping to work in the industry.

Sean Brierley has taught and written about advertising and marketing for seven years as a journalist and as a lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University. He is currently Deputy Editor of *Marketing Week*.

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edited by James Curran, Goldsmiths' College, University of London

The *Media Practice* handbooks are comprehensive resource books for students of media and journalism, and for anyone planning a career as a media professional. Each handbook combines a clear introduction to understanding how the media work with practical information about the structure, processes and skills involved in working in today's media industries, providing not only a guide on "how to do it" but also a critical reflection on contemporary media practice.

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Sean Brierley



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In memory of my dad, Brian Brierley

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Introduction

Radios at the bedside; letters on the doormat; billboards at bus stops; magazines at the hairdresser's; newspapers on the train; faxes at work; videos in hospitals; stickers in newsagents' and TV in the living room: at every point of the day we are bombarded with commercial messages.

Researchers in the United States have estimated that by the age of 18 the average American will have seen around 350,000 commercials (Law 1994:28). Love them or hate them, you cannot avoid them.

Aside from advertisements being viewed, read and listened to, advertisers try to get us to practise advertising as well as consume it—and they often succeed. When I was a child my parents and neighbours were compelled to indulge in a commercially inspired ritual: when I burst through the door in a cowboy outfit brandishing a cap gun, they had to shout, "It's the Milky Bar Kid!" There is nothing new in this. In the late nineteenth century Victorians replied to "Good morning" with the advertising slogan, "Have you used your Pears Soap today?"

Though some may claim that this displays the power of advertising to influence our behaviour, there is little evidence that such acts resulted in increased sales of Milky Bars, or Pears Soap for that matter.

Though advertising practitioners encouraged the view that singlemessage advertising is powerful—Saatchi & Saatchi's 1979 general election poster campaign for the Conservative Party which used the slogan—"Labour Isn't Working" and a photograph of a dole queue is still perceived to have placed Margaret Thatcher in Number 10 this popular perception is flawed. Saatchi & Saatchi would be the first to admit that elections are not won on single posters or slogans. Advertisers hedge their bets. They usually use many media and in most cases several messages to appeal to consumers. This is almost always accompanied by a whole host of other commercial messages in the form of sponsorship, sales promotion, merchandising and public relations.

Advertising can be used for a number of reasons: to motivate consumers to buy goods, or certain consumers not to buy goods, to change attitudes or to encourage retailers to stock produce.

But the structure of the modern advertising industry has its roots in the Industrial Revolution. Technological progress improved production techniques, thus making possible mass production of goods and services. Producers had to

find new consumer markets and expand existing ones to maintain profits and keep control over prices. They branded goods and advertised the brands to consumers to appeal over the heads of retailers and wholesalers.

Manufacturers identified the mass media as a vehicle to stimulate demand. The promotional efforts of large firms focused almost exclusively on mass-media advertising, increasing promotional costs and pricing potential competitors out of more concentrated markets.

The term “advertising” came to be defined as paid-for mass-media communication, rather than all promotional activity. It became a means to the marketing ends of managing and controlling the consumer markets at the least cost. Up to the 1980s advertising agencies also focused almost exclusively on high-revenue mass-media advertising.

Though there are thousands of academic studies of advertising texts and their interaction with audiences, there are very few that examine the production of advertising from the advertiser’s perspective. Though it in no way attempts to provide a “missing link” in academic analysis, this book is intended as a contribution to a wider debate about the role of advertising in society, enhancing understanding and knowledge of a part of advertising practice that has, unlike journalistic practice, been generally ignored.

The purpose of this book is to examine the organisational structures and professional practices governing the production of advertising. There are four broad areas covered. Firstly, the advertisers: who advertises? Why do they advertise? What do they advertise? Secondly, the economic and social relations between the producers of advertising practices; companies, agencies, media owners and government. Thirdly, the theoretical approaches and professional discourses governing research, production, media planning and buying: how is advertising put together? Where and when does advertising appear, and why? Fourthly, the book examines the historical changes to the advertising industry from its formative years to the period of rapid change in the 1990s.

Universities and colleges generally teach advertising practice from two perspectives; for those on business courses wishing to go into advertising and marketing, and for those on arts and humanities courses who seek to examine advertising in its widest cultural context. Ironically, many of the students on arts and humanities courses also end up in the advertising industry and find that much of the social or semiotic analysis they performed at college bears little relation to everyday practice. It is tempting to suggest that the very real uses of social and semiotic analyses are often rejected or misappropriated by those in the industry. This is not an attempt to make advertising “more approachable” to students and academics: as will be revealed in following chapters, advertisers are extremely adept at arguing their own case. Though this book does not seek to right the wrongs of the industry, there is an underlying wrong that this book does seek to address: the ghettoisation of academic life from real-life practices. Students are aware that when they leave college or university they will enter an unfamiliar world which bears little relation to what they have been taught in class or read in

books. This book aims to examine industry practices critically, offering people within the industry a fresh, unhostile insight into how they work, dealing with moral and ethical issues as well as the inevitable social and political questions that always arise. It aims to bridge the gap between practice and theory. It offers a theoretical understanding of the industry from a historical, cultural and economic perspective to those who are involved in the industry, practitioners and students of advertising and it offers an understanding of industry practices and discourses to students of mass communications and cultural studies.

It is not a guide to best practice. The aim of this book is to produce not better advertising but better understanding of advertising. It examines what advertisers themselves regard as “best practice” and why, and the repercussions of this for society. Unlike most books for practitioners, it is not a “how-to” guide. It has a linear structure, beginning with the economic context of advertising: the economic rationale for advertising within companies, examining the relationships between manufacturers, retailers and companies and the imperative to control prices and stimulate demand (chapters 1–4). The book shifts in chapters 5, 6 and 7 to an examination of the formal organisation of the advertising industry: how agencies came to dominate advertising, and how advertising came to dominate the mass media. Chapters 8 to 12 examine the mechanics of the advertising process: the buying and selling of advertising and the creative process. They contain treatments of the guidelines and theories that practitioners follow when planning and buying media and when creating advertisements.

Chapters 13 and 14 examine not only the relationships between advertising and consumers from the perspectives of practitioners and regulators but also theories of advertising effectiveness, consumer behaviour and the regulations governing the industry.

The advertising industry is undergoing radical change and restructuring. In recent years, a crisis has emerged. The hegemony of the advertising agency has been shattered and new forms of paid-for communication have emerged to challenge old practices. The very definition of advertising has changed from the traditional “use of media to inform consumers about something and/or to persuade them to do something” (Economist Books 1993:25) to a much wider definition which includes all paid-for publicity. The Postscript at the end of the book indicates the features of the crisis, and some of the new changes that advertisers and their agencies have made in response.

Because of the dual focus of this book, “workshop exercise” suggestions are provided for each chapter, and a glossary of terms is located at the back for lecturers and students. As advertising industry commentator Adam Lury pointed out, “There is no formal industry-wide training scheme and very little knowledge is formalised. The most powerful influences are myth and oral history. Any study of advertising...needs to take this ‘invisible history’ into account” (Lury 1994). In practice, advertising people bring their own experiences and histories to their work. They act on a mishmash of industry folklore, past research findings,

intuition and the need to meet tight deadlines. They also work in a hierarchical environment, competing with others for status and money, which can inform practices. Around these practices are all kinds of competitive discourses mediated by award systems, the trade press, conferences and exhibitions, and books and manuals with which they negotiate. This book is an examination of those discursive debates and practices. It critically examines the practices and perspectives of people working in the industry—in businesses, agencies, consultancies and media owners—analyses key themes and debates and examines the wider societal context.

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