



During a nearly 20-year career as Senior Vice President/Group Creative Director at Young & Rubicam New York, Jim Hayman built an exceptional record of success both as an award winning copywriter, strategist and creative leader. He wrote TV advertising for US Army, US Postal Service, Advil & Mercury Automobiles, with one of his ‘strap lines’ even crossing over into the 2001 Hollywood blockbuster ‘Black Hawk Down’, winning numerous major awards along the way including an ANDY, CLIO, New York Art Directors Club and 2 Effies.

Since founding the Hayman Communication Group (HCG) he has diversified into many different areas of business writing for a roster of clients that includes McGraw Hill, T. Rowe Price, Delaware Investments, Banknorth Group. Lucent Technologies, Pitney Bowes, Lipper Analytics, and AXA Financial Advisors.

He now specialises in print advertising, direct mail marketing, corporate literature and media services to business. Jim has also written non-fiction books and is now starting his first novel. He talked to Bloc’s Tim Brewster about the life of a business writer.

- *Can you summarize you’re early ambitions and how they evolved into writing?*

“All though college writing was one of the careers I was considering carefully. I felt I was good at it seemed interesting to me. When I was looking for jobs after college interviewed with Time Magazine and United Press, then one of the major (news) wire services”

- ***You started work as an account manager for Ad agency how did you progress onto creative work?***

“My entry into copywriting was very unusual. Few if any writers follow the track I did and I think today it would probably be impossible. What happened was that I took a job as an account management trainee for a big ad agency. The training was six months. During those six months I was rotated into each of the agency’s major departments. At the end of six months I was supposed to move into either media buying or market research for a year or two prior to becoming a junior account manager. I hadn’t enjoyed either and asked if the Copywriting was possible since that seemed like something I’d enjoy more. They sent me up to see a Creative Director who gave me a ‘test assignment’. More out of luck than anything else I came up with the TV spot that answered his needs.”

- ***What are the working relationships between copywriter, artistic director and account manager like?***

“Copywriters generally work as part of a two person ‘creative team’ with the art director. Together they explore ideas that are on strategy and answer the client’s needs in hopefully a new ore unexpected way. The account manager’s role in the creative process is to make sure the creative team understands the strategy before they begin work and to help them sell an idea to the client after they’ve come up with what seems a compelling approach.”

- ***What makes copywriting for TV adverts unique?***

“You can be creative. Some days you sit around all day laughing yourself sick at how brilliant and amusing you and your art director are and how incredibly clever your joint solutions to the creative problem are. You can have fun. Make pretty good money. Move movie stars (occasionally). Go on shoots, which is fun. Stay in fancy hotels and eat good meals and have the company pay for both!”

- ***Is the ability to sell your work more important than your ideas themselves?***

“No. The ideas are the most important thing you do. Selling a bad idea to a client only gives you a bad portfolio and a reputation for second rate work.”

- ***How has the internet affected advertising?***

“Hugely - The internet is quickly becoming the most important medium for advertising. This wasn't the case in my day, but today the internet is changing the way companies advertise and the way Copywriters work. Since I've done very few online ads I can't be much help here”

- ***What is your proudest moment in the business?***

“Winning the US Army Recruitment Account. It was the biggest and most intensely watched new business shoot out of that year. Six of the top agencies in the business were competing for it BBDO, Ogilvy, DDB, Y&R of course, Thompson and others. I was creative director in a small agency team that worked 12 – 14 hours a day. Seven days a week for seven months. The agency spent over two million dollars on the effort. Then after the presentations we had to wait nearly three months for the Army to make up their minds. When we were announced as the winners it was like winning the Super Bowl of advertising.

- ***Can British writers work in the US advertising industry?***

“Yes. Brits with good portfolios are common over here. Probably best to get your initial experience in London if working here is a goal. Since virtually every agency is now part of a global conglomerate, once you've established yourself in London you can ask your company if you can move to their offices in the US.”

- ***What kind of shape is the Advertising business in now?***

“It’s a little chaotic. The internet is huge. TV has lost much of its effectiveness because the audience is so split up among the hundreds of cable channels and use of TiVo (TV time shifting / capture) and equivalent recording devices to screen out commercials is rightly making clients wonder who, if anyone, is watching”

- ***Given that some illustrious people, such as Salman Rushdie, have pursued successful writing careers after beginning work in the advertising business is it a valid route for aspiring writers of all genres?***

“I don’t know. Being a good advertising writer doesn’t mean you will be good at other genres or vice versa. The skill sets are different. However it’s certainly not uncommon for successful ad writers to end up as screenwriters. I would say that if you know where your skills lay then head in that direction, although the need to make a living is certainly a valid consideration.”

- ***How would you respond to those who claim that writing for advertising is a ‘sell out’?***

“Copywriters who consider themselves ‘artists’ are fooling themselves. While what they do may require many of the same skills as writing novels or poetry, they shouldn’t lose sight of the fact that they are business people, earning a good living in a legitimate business that provides a useful service to their clients and occasionally even to society. They are selling out no more or less than any other person who takes a job in a legitimate business.

At the same time, I think that many novelists who write ‘genre’ fiction i.e. mysteries, romance, thrillers and the like are also business people writing to sell books, not to create great art. Even Michelangelo, whose goal I believe was to create great art, painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel as a business assignment from the Vatican. Would he have done it if the Pope hadn’t been willing to pay him a fair amount of money? Beats me! I guess the whole issue of ‘selling out’ is a phoney one.”

- *Finally, what are your 'top hints' for those seeking a career in the industry?*

If you want to be a Copywriter you need a portfolio of advertising created with an art director. Probably the simplest way for you to build one is to get any job in an agency that you can, meet a young art director willing to work with you and beg creative directors to let you take a crack at real assignments. Some will tell you to get lost. Others will be more helpful. You and your art director can create ads on 'spec' to help build a portfolio. As a reference point you should buy some of the annual books that show that's won the top awards. In the USA that's two shows the Clios and the ANDY's. I'm unsure which the UK equivalents are but anyone who works in an agency there can tell you. The books are generally available through Amazon and in larger bookstores in the graphic design section.

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