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The nuts and bolts of creative advertising  
**Two recent books look at the creative aspects of advertising and how to engage customers.**

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There are those who say that advertising doesn't work, and to some extent they are correct. The power of what author Seth Godin calls the "television industrial complex" -- whereby companies saturate the airwaves with ads and then lay out an enormous amount of goods in retail outlets all over the country -- is diminished, if not dead. The mass audience is dispersed; the market is fragmented.

Yet advertising prevails. Since there is no single way to reach potential customers, creativity and versatility are more important than ever.

Advertising can be done artfully and creative excellence should always be a goal, but the means is never the end. If the work is evocative, audacious and inspired, yet fails to achieve its ultimate goal of selling stuff, it's worthless. While gaining accolades and "buzz" is nice, few clients would be satisfied with winning awards and spurring watercooler talk, but not gaining sales.

Here are two recent books that deal with the challenges of advertising.

*10 Ways to Screw Up an Ad Campaign and How to Create Ones That Work.* Barry H. Cohen. Adams Media. 262 pages. \$12.95.

This book was originally self-published in 2001. Now revised and expanded under the imprint of a "real" publisher, Barry Cohen's book is a good real-world look at the nuts and bolts of advertising for businesses of all types and sizes.

His focus is more positive and proactive than its title would indicate. In fact, instead of merely making fun of ad campaigns gone wrong, Cohen takes a holistic approach to business and the difficulties they face in promotion and marketing.

The material is well organized and presented with humor and intelligence. Cohen, a veteran ad executive, has been down in the trenches with corporate accounts as well as

mom-and-pop operations. As you might expect, he includes lots of anecdotes and quotes to back up his lessons. Not limiting himself to traditional advertising, he also discusses guerrilla marketing and other under-the-radar methods that are requisite elements of modern business promotion.

Enterprises of all sizes, and advertising and marketing professionals who want to work with them, will benefit from Cohen's sagacity and savvy.

*Street-Smart Advertising: How to Win the Battle of the Buzz. Margo Berman. Rowman & Littlefield. 235 pages. \$26.95.*

The author, Margo Berman, an associate professor at Florida International University, presents an overview of the key aspects of advertising: concept, copy, design, media and other elements, with an array of examples and citations.

Early in the book, Berman cites Burger King's "subservient chicken" website as an example of "breakthrough thinking," calling it "a tremendously successful interactive campaign."

How so?

A site featuring a fat kid dancing in his bedroom with a Star Wars light saber may also get millions of hits, but did BK's dude in the chicken suit result in increased sales or just buzz? Nothing wrong with the latter, especially given the chain's ongoing effort to rebrand itself as edgy and hip, but Berman offers no metrics other than page-views to measure the "tremendous success" with nothing on sales growth, loss or plateau.

There are errors as well. Infinity Broadcasting and Clear Channel Communications, for example, are not "two radio stations." They are broadcast groups composed of many radio stations and other media outlets. The text is also a bit wordy and would have benefited enormously from a tight rewrite.

Overall, Berman provides an adequate survey of the elements of advertising creativity, and her book might serve as an introductory text for neophytes and students considering careers in the profession.

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