

IT'S FUNNY YOU SHOULD ASK:
AN EXAMINATION OF PROFESSIONALS' PERCEPTIONS
OF THE USE OF HUMOR IN ADVERTISING

A Project presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts in Journalism

by

Jared Andrews

Jon Stemmle, Project chair

Mark Swanson

Michael Kearney

May 2019

Acknowledgements

I'd first like to thank my parents. They have always shown me support in my journey from undergraduate study through my time in grad school at Mizzou. Knowing that they have my back means the world to me. I also want to mention the support of my friends, especially Leah Maxey, who believed in me, gave advice and kept me sane in my times of greatest stress. I could not have done this without them

Of course, I must give thanks to my committee. Mike Kearney has helped shape this idea since my first semester in the fall of 2017. Mark Swanson gave invaluable insights about humor and advertising that could only come from someone with his level of experience and thoughtfulness. And I want to give a giant thank you to Jon Stemmler. He was always there to give a lightning quick email response, provide clarity when needed, and has offered advice that consistently made my work better.

The sources who graciously agreed to help me on this project also deserve recognition. Thank you, Drew Grier, Scott Shade, Miranda Cowan, Marissa Cuconato, Chase Koenekke, Craig Stewart, Lauren Hystead, and Tim Dyer for all your considerate thoughts and wisdom.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	ii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Literature Review	3
Chapter Three: Professional Analysis	20
Appendix	
A. Field Notes	36
B. Internship Work	59
C. Self-Evaluation	68
D. Project Proposal	73
E. Professional Analysis Source Overviews	99
F. Interview Transcripts	101
a. Drew Grier	101
b. Craig Stewart	109
c. Chase Koeneke	119
d. Lauren Hystead	133
e. Miranda Cowan	140
f. Tim Dyer	147
g. Scott Shade	153
h. Marissa Cuconato	159

Chapter One: Introduction

Lately, when meeting people, I have noticed a trend in their responses. They often say something along the lines of, “tell me your story.” I still think I’m a bit young to have a “story” at this point, but I still have to muster up an answer. When I mention that I earned my bachelor’s degree in psychology and am now studying strategic communication, people usually give me puzzled expressions. While these fields of study seem unrelated, I’ve always seen the connection between strategic communication and psychology—I’m interested in people. Further, I’m interested in what makes people tick, what motivates them, and what moves them.

One of the components of marketing and advertising that I have long found so intriguing is figuring out the audience. I want to know what they like and what will inspire them and move them to action. I have often found that people are moved by a compelling story, another component of marketing and advertising that I find interesting. Additionally, I want to tell stories. My interest in telling stories began well before my decision to come to the University of Missouri to study strategic communication in the renowned school of journalism. I have been writing stories for fun since middle school, and I have never stopped. I remember every teacher who ever told me that I was creative and encouraged me to keep writing. Every word of praise meant something to me. Every kind thought fueled my belief that I could make a living putting my ideas on paper.

When I finally took creative writing classes in high school and later at college, I became fixated on humor. I had known for years that I loved comedy in movies, television, standup, and the like, but I began to spend lots of time creating comedy of my own. The process of setting up a punchline, the various mechanisms of humor, the

pacing, the fragility of a joke—all these things fascinated me. It's a puzzle and not an easy one to solve. And solving it once does not necessarily mean that it will be easy to solve again.

I had seen many examples of well-executed humor – instances where the puzzle was solved. Of course, I had also seen examples of humor misfires. I observed this across many creative mediums, including advertising. Humor is such a tricky and risky strategy to use in advertising because a failure to execute precisely causes the entire ad to implode. Despite the risk, humor is one of the most common approaches used in advertising, as anyone who consumes ads will tell you.

I began to wonder how often humor works as a component of advertising. As I started to explore this further, I was fully aware of the irony in writing about something as artistic as humor in an academic paper. Some professionals believe it is too elusive to pin down any concrete formula. Nevertheless, I was curious to see how ad executives view humor's use as a calculated risk and if they believed there were any key elements to rely on (such as incongruity or the rule of three) to effectively elicit laughter. I also wondered if the types of humor and prevalence of it have evolved to adapt to the social media-centric, short attention span public that exists. This is what I want to explore in my study. How do professionals in the advertising world view humor as a strategy for advertising? And how do they view humor's viability as way to grab attention, embed memories, and create positive brand associations?

Chapter Two: Literature Review

More than a hundred theories exist to explain what moves people to laugh. Study of the concept of humor dates back to the earliest philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato. Among many others, writers such as George Eliot and Charles Baudelaire also proposed their own theories on humor (Ziv, 1988). Even today, with the massive compilation of humor theory that has accrued, researchers and professional practitioners still debate humor's mechanisms and its applications.

Marketers are especially consumed with humor and its usage in advertising. They seek a general golden rule of sorts or at least a clearer picture of the landscape of humor's selective effectiveness in various advertising contexts. Marketers' interest in humor in advertising is understandable, given the substantial amount of money dedicated each year to humorous ads. Approximately 30 percent of all ads ran in the United States feature humor. That figure has remained steady in recent years and is comparable in other countries (Chan, 2011).

Despite its prevalence in advertising, humor has its share of flaws, which makes it a constant subject of discussion. Those who criticize its usage state that humor often distracts from the brand message (van Kuilenburg, de Jong, & van Rompay, 2011). There are also concerns about offensive humor tactics, growing viewer irritation from repeated exposure to the ads, and failed attempts at humor (Eisend, 2009). Conversely, supporters of humor in advertising will point out that humor enhances attitudes toward the brand (van Kuilenburg, et al, 2011). A single funny and playful advertisement can shift a viewer's opinion of company to a more favorable position. Incorporating humor

in advertisements can also make them more enjoyable and effective in capturing the viewer's attention (Chan, 2011). Imagine a viewer who sees an advertisement, enjoys it, and remembers the brand. This viewer will recognize that the brand makes entertaining advertisements and will be more likely to pay close attention to future advertisements made by that brand. An especially humorous and compelling ad campaign, such as Apple's Get-a-Mac campaign from 2007, can shape the reputation of a brand in the minds of viewers and provide the brand a financial boost. Apple's advertising agency, TBWA\Chiat\Day, created the campaign that ran through 2009 and ultimately included 66 commercials, every one of which was directed by Phil Morrison of Epoch Films (Nudd, 2011). The ads starred Justin Long (playing the role of Mac) and John Hodgman (playing the role of PC). The actors take the human forms of the computers and, to an extent, the founders of companies that they represent, with Long resembling a relaxed, younger Steve Jobs and Hodgman looking like a doofus version of Bill Gates. In each ad, the two characters stand side-by-side against a plain white backdrop as they act out a short vignette. Each story depicts PC tangling with a new issue as Mac explains, in a friendly and supportive way, how his system encounters no such issue (Livingstone, 2011). In the year of the release of Get-a-Mac, a famous ad campaign comparing Apple to PC, Apple saw a 42 percent market share growth, record sales, and increased cultural influence (Business Wire, 2007).

Humorous Advertising

The topic of humor in advertising has been widely discussed and the subject of much academic review. In the study that follows, I will detail my exploration into

various humor styles and perceptions of humor in advertisements and their effects on the participants who view the ads. Specifically, I will discuss how the perception of humor impacts the attention paid to the ads, memory of the brand featured in the ads, and their likelihood of sharing the ad with someone that they know (via in-person mention or, more likely, via electronic means such as social media).

Mechanisms of Humor

The literature has a preponderance of data on how different methods of eliciting a humor response, such as surprise (Woltman Elpers, Mukherjee, & Hoyer, 2004), violence (Swani, Weinberger, & Gulas, 2013) and stereotyping (Beard, 2008), influenced the consumers' attitudes toward the ads. Perhaps not surprisingly, evidence suggests that the message involved in the advertisement impacts the effectiveness of the various humorous ads. A humorous advertisement featuring the solution to a dangerous condition, such as one for sunscreen to prevent sunburn, can be viewed either favorably or unfavorably, depending on the severity of consequence used in the ad. When participants in a study viewed a fake sunscreen brand's advertisements that presented the consequence merely as "a sunburn," the ads worked more effectively when absent of humor. The participants rated the non-humorous ads higher on a Likert scale for attitude towards the ad and attitude towards the brand. However, when the ads presented a more threatening consequence, in this case "sunburn leads to increased rates of skin cancer," the use of humor made the ads more effective, as the participants' posted higher scores in attitude towards brand and persuasiveness of the ad (Yoon & Tinkham, 2013).

Other research examined humor usage in advertisements via experiments. In one

such experiment done by Voss (2009), humorous advertisements were presented with negative consequences and had their effectiveness compared to advertisements that did not present the negative consequences. Participants were shown an ad and then gave written responses to display their understanding of the ad's message and their recognition of the ad's humor. When perceived, humor worked effectively in both ads that featured the negative consequences and the ads that did not display the negative consequences. The noteworthy difference is that negative consequence ads were viewed less favorably when absent of humor (Voss, 2009). This emphasizes a particularly valuable trait of humor's usage in advertising—when delivering unpleasant messages, humor can mitigate the sting that may have otherwise turned off viewers, causing them to dislike the ad and possibly disregard the message.

The use of violence as a mechanism for humor increased drastically during the early 2000s, especially in Super Bowl commercials. A content analysis of a longitudinal sample of Super Bowl commercials from 2005-2009 found that the rate of violence in Super Bowl advertisements rose by more than 135 percent in that timespan (Blackford, Gentry, Harrison, & Carlson, 2011). In Swani et al's (2013) experiment examining gender differences in perceptions of violent humor, it was found that while men tended to view violent humorous advertisements favorably across levels of intensity of the violence, women liked ads less as violence increased. Even though violence did not cause negative attitudes of men towards the ads, as it did with women, men found the humorous ads that did not contain violence to be just as enjoyable and effective (Swani et al, 2013). Given this finding, it stands to reason that violent humor in advertising should only be used when targeting a male audience, and even then, it may not be the best

approach.

Although stereotypes are often viewed as negative and harmful outside of the context of advertising, when used in advertisements, stereotypes depicted in humorous ways have typically been viewed more favorably, or at least neutrally (Eisend, Plagemann, & Sollwedel, 2014). Humor execution becomes vital in these ads because viewers perceive the ads negatively when they do not detect humor. Nontraditional stereotypes (e.g. men in roles that would have been occupied by women decades ago) have a more significant positive effect on women, but both men and women view the humorous depictions of traditional stereotypes (e.g. women as housewives) favorably as well (Eisend, Plagemann, & Sollwedel, 2014). The consensus from consumers and researchers appears to be that stereotypes in humorous forms are harmless and easily recognized as silly mockeries, not accurate portrayals of modern men and women. However, this country has changed rapidly in the past couple years, increasing in sensitivity and focus on political correctness. It's possible that viewers' feelings about humorous stereotypes depictions have already changed, so I will seek updated data on stereotype humor's effectiveness when conducting the interviews for my study.

Two of the most popular and most effective mechanisms of humor are surprise and incongruity (Woltman Elpers, Mukherjee, & Hoyer, 2004). Alden, Mukherjee, & Hoyer (2000) found in their correlation study that incongruity yields greater viewer perception of humor compared to a non-humorous advertisement, and the addition of surprise increases humor perception. One of the keys to the usage of surprise in advertising is the element of playfulness. Without playfulness, surprise can register as fear in the viewers (Alden, Mukherjee, & Hoyer, 2000). Therefore, the playfulness puts

the viewers at ease, so they can clearly perceive the surprise as funny, rather than startling and discomforting.

Beliefs of Advertising Greats

This study would be incomplete without mention of the thinking of some of advertising's famous figures. This will help ground the subject matter into the industry. These industry professionals have varying views on humor's deployment in their field. Bill Bernbach rejected rules of humor and stated that "the memorable never emerged from a formula." He believed strongly that advertising is an art, not a science and that over analysis can "immobilize and sterilize an idea." Bernbach believed advertising was a lot like love, saying "the more you analyze it, the faster it disappears." (Oetting, 2016). His views contrast with David Ogilvy, who wanted his advertisements to adhere strictly to a formula that kept the copy brief and forbid the use of puns (Ogilvy, 1985). Hal Riney and Jeff Goodby believe in showing respect to the audience. They insist that the audience be treated as smart, so advertising and humor's use in it should be understated and play to the highest common denominator rather than the lowest common denominator, like they see in certain advertising (Nudd, 2015).

Attention

In the constant struggle to make consumers notice ads, advertisers often turn to humor to capture the attention of viewers. Humor consistently increases the level of attention that viewers give to advertisements. Yet, this does not consistently lead to increased message comprehension. In some cases, humor distracts the viewers, causing

them to misinterpret the message or fail to notice it entirely (Chan, 2011). Worth noting is the finding that low involvement viewers (those who are not giving their full attention to the ads) tend to view humorous ads as favorable and persuasive. Thus, even if humor does not fully capture the viewers' attention it will still increase the ad's likability and persuasiveness. In fact, some evidence suggests that humorous advertisements work most effectively when audience attention is low (Zhang & Zinkhan, 2006). An explanation for this may be that viewers paying attention most closely may tend to analyze the logic of the message more than other viewers. If this is the case, these logic-seeking viewers may find a humorous approach less effective than a simple logic-based approach.

Memory

Humor's impact on memory of brand messages is a complicated phenomenon. Merely placing humor in an advertisement does make the message or brand easier to recall or recognize. In fact, humor that does not relate to the brand can inhibit memory of the brand and message, and this impact is especially pronounced in viewers who have a low need for humor. Further, the expectancy of humor also inhibits recall of the message, especially when the humor is related to the message (Kellaris & Cline, 2007). However, Kellaris & Cline (2007) found that when humor is not expected, the application of humor that is related to the message will enhance memory. Recall is damaged when the humor is unrelated to brand message (van Kuilenburg, 2008). Brand-related humor improving recall makes sense, given that the humorous moment is likely what viewers remember best. However, the finding that humor expectancy inhibits message memory in brand-related humorous ads is more difficult to process. Kellaris and Cline (2007)

reasoned that the expectancy of humor might serve as a distraction to the rest of the ad's message. Therefore, humor that arrives unexpectedly and is related to the brand will most effectively enhance viewers' memory.

Of course, humor does not impact all viewer's memory the same way. Viewers with a high need for humor tend to recall brands and messages better than viewers with a lower need for humor. Relatedly, viewers with a high need for humor state that they are more likely to purchase the products that featured humor in their ads (Cline, Altsech, & Kellaris, 2003).

Some advertisers may point to broader research that suggests that across all consumers, humor bears no significant impact on brand and message recall, persuasiveness, and intention to purchase (Eisend, 2009). I contend that a broad view is the wrong way to view humor's deployment. Blanket statements about the usefulness of humor don't apply because humor is highly fragile and specialized. It differs in mechanism and intensity based on each situation. Similarly, pointing out its failure in one instance and generalizing that to a wide array of other scenarios displays a fundamental misunderstanding of how humor works. Humor can be and is effective when used with the proper mechanism, in the proper context, and in an ad targeting the proper audience. Humor's effectiveness in advertising likely cannot be broadly measured to conclude that it generally does or does not work. Its effectiveness depends on its timing, mechanism, audience, and the context in which it is delivered.

These findings lead to the research questions for this study:

RQ1: What are the crucial elements of making a humorous advertisement successful?

RQ2: Are certain mechanisms of humor more reliable than others despite differing

contexts?

Overview

Based on this review examining the mechanisms of humor to gain a clearer comprehension of what makes an advertisement funny it appears that, instinctively, we all have a certain sense of humor that allows us to identify when something is humorous and when it is not humorous. However, we all have individual tastes when it comes to perceiving humor, which means that there is no universally effective humor style. For instance, some enjoy the physical comedy stylings of Charlie Chaplin or Will Ferrell, whereas other do not find this sort of humor amusing. With that in mind, more rigor is needed to gain an understanding of humor in advertising. The research examined in this literature review provides a vivid picture of which humor styles work most effectively, and that knowledge can be used to shape some of the questions for the interviews with advertising professionals that will be conducted for this master's project. These interviews will include questions about how humor that relates to the brand message and uses a combination of incongruity and playful surprise approach that is devoid of violence, which does not enhance humor (Swani, 2013), and traditional stereotypes, which may displease a small portion of viewers (Eisend et al, 2014). Other questions will include asking about adding the humorous moment at the very end of the advertisement because this tactic yields the strongest humor responses (Woltman Elpers et al, 2004).

Humor's inclusion in advertising attracts much discussion. The strongest detractors of humor may argue that it is overused and overrated because it does not consistently increase purchase intention. These claims seem dubious, given that purchase

intention is one of the most difficult outcomes to influence with a single advertisement. Despite the perceived flaws of humor in advertising, the literature appears to show its value. In fact, most of the downsides of humor can be attributed to improper execution. The literature shows that humor consistently increases attention and attitudes towards the ads (Eisend, 2009), and it enhances recall when delivered in a way that relates to the brand and message (van Kuilenburg et al, 2011).

Looking toward the future of advertising, it can be surmised that humor's benefits toward attention and ad enjoyment becoming increasingly valuable as entertainment becomes progressively essential. Consumers have more control than ever over ad watching (or ad avoiding) with the use of DVR, adblocking software, clicking skip on a pre-roll ad, and multiple simultaneous screen viewing. Rather than forcing or tricking consumers into viewing ads, the viewers must choose to watch them. Based on this, it would appear that humor's ability to capture and hold a viewer's attention through entertainment, makes it as valuable as any element included in advertising. Evidence suggests that humorous advertising accompanying a program can increase program enjoyment and intention to watch the program again (Benson, 2006). The intention to watch again is key. Therefore, if humorous ads make viewers want to watch programs again, humorous ads will also make viewers want to watch future ads made by that advertisers. Theoretically, a string of humorous advertisements may establish the reputation of the advertiser as entertaining, causing viewers to watch future ad spots made by that advertiser, rather than ignore them as they would with many ads.

As consumers gain more control over the ads they watch, they are empowered enough to choose which ads they believe. Consumers can be clever about discrediting

ads that stand out as obvious attempts by the advertiser to sell. Instead, consumers favor ads shared with them by friends. A report from Forrester Research found that 70 percent of consumers trust brand recommendations from friends but only 10 percent trust advertising (Wasserman, 2013). With advances in technology, such as smartphones and social media ubiquity, sharing of ads is easier than ever. Given the ease of sharing and the massive participation in social media, it seemed logical to search for elements that increase the likelihood of sharing. Research suggests that the advertisements that move viewers emotionally (e.g. surprise, humor, or warmth) are shared most frequently (Dafonte-Gómez, 2014). This finding could have a significant impact on the landscape of advertising in future years, but this topic has thus far been lightly explored. To expand the literature, this study will, in part, gather insights from advertising professionals about humor's relevance in modern advertising and its place in fueling consumer-to-consumer recommendations.

Methodology

To collect primary data for my study, I conducted a series interviews with a mix of advertising professionals, including copywriters (who write the text for ads and do much of the “big idea” generation in the advertising process), art directors (who collaborate with the copywriters to create the best possible visuals for ads), creative directors (who oversee the entire creative process of copywriters and art directors and help them craft the vision for ads), and at least one account executive (who is responsible for the coordination of advertising campaigns and communicating the research-based

plan to all those involved). This eclectic mix of industry experts ensures that my sample has a balance of perspectives on humor's place in advertising in the United States (international advertising is not the focus). These interviews were semi-structured in nature, which means I came into each interview with a predetermined set of questions to ask each interviewee while also allowing leeway for the interview to pivot based on the various responses that are given. This open interview method of gathering data offers advantages over quantitative methods such as surveys because it is open to follow-up questions to provide clarity, and the interviews' relatively free-flowing nature allows unexpected beneficial feedback to be revealed.

A grounded theory approach was used to analyze the data collected during the interviews. The grounded theory method is defined as a "qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This allowed me to develop codes after reviewing the initial data rather than creating codes that may not be ideal fits for the data that has yet to be collected. Within the context of these semi-structured interviews, grounded theory is most applicable because of the inductive nature of the research. This approach afforded the opportunity to develop a theory that explains the data.

In all, I expected to conduct between eight and 10 interviews given that past research has found that redundancies occur after the fourth interview (Taylor, Hoy, & Haley, 1996), so it is often unnecessary to spend time speaking with dozens of participants. For this study, I planned to interview as many advertising professionals as needed until redundancies began to appear.

Overview of Semi-Structured Interviews

As mentioned, the data was collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with professionals in advertising. Interviews were chosen as the means of data collection because of their inherent ability to gain insight into individual experiences and perspectives on the given issues (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews provide a consistent guide for the researcher to ensure that the crucial elements are covered, and they give the researcher a chance to explore new opportunities as they organically arise in a free-flowing discussion that largely resembles a conversation (Edwards and Holland, 2013). This provided a chance to dig deeper on certain topics about which an interviewee was particularly responsive. The freedom afforded to both me and the interviewees gave us a chance to delve into the unanticipated thoughts about humor and advertising when those discussions appeared to be headed in a fruitful direction. The key here was to not be restricted by a structured and completely determined set of questions that may limit the data that was collected. Conversations did not stick to a script, so some structure was needed to ensure that the key questions and asked and answered, but the door was wide open for additional avenues to be pursued as the conversation allowed. With this approach to the interviews, I was able to find “whys” and learn answers to questions that I did not think to ask. I expected this would likely mean that my early interviews would influence the questions that I asked in later interviews.

Recruiting Participants

When compiling the list of interviewees, I made sure to include an assortment of

professionals working within the advertising field. Candidates were chosen who worked in design, some with backgrounds in copywriting, and another who works as an account executive. I also included a mix of interviewee experience in the profession (some seasoned veterans and some fresher faces) and a mix of gender. This was done to gain the fullest perspective of a diverse array of professionals in advertising, rather than only the insight of one gender and age of copywriters, which could have provided an incomplete overview. I planned to recruit at least 13 interview candidates, but I understood that more may have needed to be recruited in case any participants were not willing to be interviewed for some reason.

In all, I planned to conduct between eight and 10 interviews and would not exceed that range. Past research has found that redundancies occur after the fourth interview (Taylor, Hoy, & Haley, 1996), so it is unnecessary to spend time speaking with dozens of advertising professionals for the sake of this research.

The initial contact with each candidate was made through email. Ideally, I thought I'd be able to reach each person directly, but I was ready to go through someone in human resources or administration first. The email explained why I was reaching out, including details on the length and content of the interview, how I would use the data I collected, and where the writeup may eventually be published. I requested an in-person interview for the candidates who were within reasonable driving distance and a video-chat interview for the more distant candidates. I sent these emails in a timely manner, so I could set a schedule and leave myself enough time to analyze the data.

Interviewing Process

To guide each interview and build some momentum in the right direction, I prepared a list of questions standard questions. These questions were meant to be broad. They began a line of questions or a subject to discuss until it resolved itself based on its own momentum. Ideally, each interview flowed smoothly and didn't resemble a dry and lifeless question and answer format. If a conversation began to flow too freely, I steered it back in the appropriate direction by asking another one of the pre-planned questions on my list. Each interview lasted between 30-60 minutes. A list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Although other questions would inevitably arise during the conversation, this initial list of questions provided a solid starting point. Also, as I mentioned before, early interviews revealed helpful questions that I was able to ask in subsequent interviews, so this list of pre-planned questions was able to be updated as needed.

Data Analysis

I took notes during each interview, but I focused primarily on listening and carrying on a conversation. Since breaks to take notes were expected to hinder any momentum of the conversation, I limited my note taking to the bare minimum and audio recorded each conversation to ensure that no data was lost. I took additional notes immediately after the interview to stay organized, and these audio recordings were transcribed and those transcriptions were de-identified.

As I cycled through the interviews, I developed codes based on themes that emerged within the data that I collected, which is a grounded theory approach. This made finding commonalities between the content of each interview easier to determine. I

continuously recoded the data based on new data from each subsequent interview. Broad categories emerged and became more refined and specific as more interviews were conducted. This gave me a clearer idea about how these professionals viewed humor as a strategy in advertising.

Discussion

Given humor's prevalence in the field of advertising, these findings, which are based on the insights of experienced advertising professionals, certainly have value. Though humor is widely used, it is not necessarily used with consistent success. With these findings serving as a guide, advertisers considering the use of humor can now better understand if humor is the correct fit for them. For the brands that ultimately decide to incorporate humor into an advertising campaign, they will have a reference for what types of humor have succeeded in the past, as well as a reference for what has failed, so they can avoid repeating past mistakes.

Notable examples of success using humor include Geico and Allstate, which both established themselves as humorous brands in an industry not known for using humor. For these brands, their effective execution of humor was enhanced by being different than their competitors because it helped them stand out. Similarly, Wendy's has thrived using humor because most other fast food brands aren't funny. Wendy's also succeeds using humor because it understands how to alter its content on various mediums, such as Twitter. Wendy's understands its audience, how to communicate on social media, and perhaps most critically, it commits to using humor. After years of establishing its humorous voice, it's not widely recognized and enjoyed as a funny brand.

Another upside of these findings is that they are current. Our culture changes quickly and so does its sense of humor, so having updated insights is crucial. This will help advertisers understand what might be problematic and avoid those areas. For instance, humor using stereotypes, a recently accepted practice, now appears to be completely off limits. Brands also need to be sensitive to the way various races are portrayed in advertisements, whether they are humorous or not. Problematic race portrayals, like a Dove ad from 2017 that featuring a black woman removing her shirt to reveal a white woman underneath. Dove apologized for missing the mark, but the damage could have been avoided completely had the brand been more sensitive and aware from the beginning.

Another key takeaway from these findings is how important it is for advertisers to understand the challenges. Humor is fragile. Talent both off camera and on need to write and deliver the lines to near perfection or the jokes will not land. Humor is something that brands must use carefully, or they are better off avoiding it entirely.

Chapter Three: Professional Analysis

HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY USE HUMOR IN ADVERTISING IN 2019

On a basic human level, humor is something that connects. Laughter is an essential part of maintaining a well-being as people. In some way or another, people all want to laugh, so it stands to reason that advertisements (which can be a source of annoyance in many instances) that make people laugh will be welcomed and enjoyed. Humorous ads that connect with viewers can lead to positive associations with the brand, increased attention paid to the advertisements, and can even improve recall of the brand and the message. All of these are desired outcomes for the brands.

That's not to say that humor will always be effective or that it is the only way to connect with an audience, but it is one of the most popular for a reason – it works when executed effectively. The proper execution, of course, is the key. As the remainder of the article will explain, humor is a tricky approach that comes with its share of risks and challenges. That said, it can also provide worthwhile rewards.

As explained in the Method section, interviews were conducted with eight advertising professionals who had varying experiences and roles in the creative field of marketing. Over the course of those interviews, they revealed insights that could fill a textbook (or several). To protect each of their identities (as they spoke candidly, which at times included thoughts about their clients and employers that could be deemed as unflattering) each of them will be referred to only by a number e.g., Advertiser #1.

Thanks to all their diverse and invaluable knowledge, these findings detail how to successfully use humor in advertising in 2019. It's far from exhaustive, and based on how quickly the current advertising world moves, some of it will likely need updating by the time anyone can finish reading it. Nevertheless, this will serve as a reference to anyone looking to incorporate humor in their advertising strategy.

UNDERSTAND BRAND & AUDIENCE

Regardless of the advertising approaches advertisers use, they must know the brand and the audience. Carefully crafted branding guides will establish a voice, personality, color choices, and so on. The first thing that needs to be done before attempting to make humor a part of one an ad is to determine if humor fits the brand. Humor is not completely off limits for any particular brand, as Advertiser #1 contends, "I don't think there are brands that should steer clear completely of humor, simply because I think that there's a way to approach nearly any subject in a way that's funny."

That said, not all brands need to use humor or should use humor. Some brands thrive without it. "Nike isn't usually funny, and they are arguably the most successful advertiser out there," said Advertiser #2. "So, humor isn't always the answer."

Once committing to using humor, it's vital to tap into what appeals to the brand's audience. As Advertiser #2 put it, "it so often depends on the brand and the brand's audience. So, it's not like there is a best type of humor. But there might be a best type of humor for your brand."

Brand awareness and audience awareness is essential because humor is so subjective. What one audience finds funny is not necessarily what a different audience will find funny. “That’s why it’s so important to talk to your client beforehand to get a really solid creative brief from them.” Adhering to the insights from creative brief, which is a document that provides details about a client to marketing professionals to guide their creative strategy when making various advertisements, is the key to crafting a message that is viewed as funny by a brand’s target of consumers.

KNOW WHEN TO USE HUMOR

The obvious answer to the question, “when should we use humor?” is, “when it suits your brand.” But there is more to it than that. Remember, advertising is a competitive field, so brands need to be mindful of the competition and their tactics as well as their own. Here are some of the instances when it might be beneficial for a brand to use humor.

When Challenging a More Prominent Brand

“Brands that do the most in terms of humor are the little guys trying to compete with the big dogs,” said Advertiser #3. “I think of something like a Wendy's that’s like, ‘we want to have fun because we have to beat a McDonald’s’ or something like that. ‘Nobody's going to pick us over McDonald’s unless we can do something to surprise and delight them.’”

That's why smaller companies often turn to humor. Generally, the largest companies tend to be more conservative in their advertising, especially when they use humor. As Advertiser #4 explains, "I do think smaller companies, by nature, are more willing to take risks. You can get away with a lot when you're a smaller company, just because you have nothing to lose. And then you kind of can look at how there are certain companies that are just very traditional, the Fortune 500 type of companies that have been around for 150, 200 years. They use a very different type of funny. It's almost more a nod to the Dilbert cartoon, where it's funny to a business guy but very dry and understated."

When Your Competitors Aren't Using It

A key to advertising is communicating to consumers what makes this particular brand different from its competitors. Consumers need a reason to choose this brand over the other options. These reasons don't have to be complicated. Presenting a brand as something funny that people like can be enough to nudge consumers in the right direction, as long they have not already completely ruled out that brand. "I think humor can get somebody off the fence," said Advertiser #3, "but I don't know if it can completely change what somebody feels."

A brand positioning itself as humorous is most effective when its competitors all have similar personalities that are not funny. "Humor really does breakthrough, especially when you look at categories that don't use it much," said Advertiser #2. "For instance, we're working on Therma Care. The rest of the category of pain relievers, Advil

and Excedrin and Aleve, they all feel the same. They all try to make you feel like they're your mom and they can take care of you. So, if you want to break through in that category where everybody is acting the same, humor would be a great way to do that."

Know When Not to Use It

When the market is saturated with quality humor, trying to stand out as another funny brand is likely not the wisest move. Humor does not provide much of an advantage to a brand if all brands in its category are funny.

When talking about a certain successful ad campaign, Advertiser #5 mentioned, "It stood out because it was funny and memorable, but it also was different from what the competitors are doing. If everybody was doing humor and they were also doing humor, it wouldn't stand out as much."

KNOW WHERE TO USE HUMOR

Just as important as knowing when to use humor is knowing where to deploy it. Humor can be used on any medium, but some seem to be better bets than others.

Humor's Place on Social Media

Social media is a bottomless reservoir for humorous content (or attempts at humorous content, at least). That said, it's understandable why advertisers often turn to humor on

social media. “I feel on social media there's two ways to get attention - that's either be funny,” said Advertiser #4, “or take a stance on something that's going to either make people feel outraged or actually support a stand on something.” Since taking a stance on something that can outrage consumers has the potential for disastrous results, humor is the more prudent and more popular approach.

Social media has become accepted as a place where “you can try things that you wouldn't try on other mediums,” said Advertiser #6. “I think you get more latitude on social to play with humor, certainly more.”

Part of the reason for that latitude is that people choose what individuals and brands to follow on social media. “Twitter people are going to that brand's Twitter to see the content,” said Advertiser #4. “So, there is no worry that they're going to forget who the brand is.” This gives brands a bit more leeway to concentrate more on being funny without worrying about plugging the product or a benefit, so they have a greater opportunity to express their personality.

With such a grand opportunity, brands need to be careful not to waste the content they release on their social media channels. “I think that people who invest in [social media] are seeing benefits of it,” said Advertiser #4, “and the people who think they can just hire an intern or somebody to just run the social media accounts are the people who are finding themselves in trouble or not getting the reactions that they want.”

Similarly, when brands are making humorous content for social media, that content needs to be created specifically for the medium. “You can't just go out with your same exact message on social media and pretend that's going to be effective,” said Advertiser #2. “You have to cater it to that audience and tailor it to the platform.”

To accomplish this, brands need put control of their social media content in the hands of individuals who understand social media. “You need somebody who speaks the language of it,” said Advertiser #4. “You need someone who knows what makes people react and what makes people laugh on Twitter.”

Humor on TV

“Some brands have decided that TV they view as a place for an older audience,” said Advertiser #3. If that’s the case, then brands advertising on TV need to cater their message to fit the audience that will receive it, the same as they should on social media.

For those brands that try to reach their target via television, humor can be a valuable addition. “Well obviously, you know, video and TV humor is more effective because you get to see talent and actors and body language that's associated with that,” said Advertiser #7, “because a lot of the times delivering a humorous punch line or humorous line involves some sort of facial expression or body language.” With TV, you can also reduce the chances that your message will be misunderstood, since the body language and facial expressions are visible and the delivery’s tone is audible. This gives audiences a clearer indication that a joke is being made, which is something that certain consumers might have doubts about if the ad is in print.

Geography

Geography must be considered when creating humorous advertisements. This ties back to being mindful of a target audience. Not everyone has the same sense of humor, so a brand must be aware of what its consumers find funny. “There's definitely a disconnect with sense of humor in certain places,” said Advertiser #5. “I don't know how to describe it, but the Spanish sense of humor is very different from the American sense of humor.”

This research focused solely on advertising in the United States, and the advertising professionals interviewed for this article did not believe that humor varies a great deal across regions of the U.S. When asked if advertising team sessions or client meetings involve discussions about humor in different parts of the United States, Advertiser #8 replied, “No, I haven't had that come up. We talk about a lot of concerns with humor, but location is not really one of them.”

WAYS TO MAKE HUMOR EFFECTIVE

Determining that humor suits a brand and choosing where to place humorous ads is important, but they both become lost efforts if advertisers fail to properly execute the humor. The advertising professionals' insights highlighted a few ways to improve the chances that an ad's humor will work.

Link the Humor to Your Brand

“For humor to work well, it has to reflect your audience and it has to be on brand,” said Advertiser #5. “I think you can have a campaign that's really funny, but if it's not building a brand's personality or isn't something that they can own, then it's just funny for the sake of being funny and then it's not a brand that you're going to remember.”

One of the most common mistakes that advertisers make when using humor is failing to make their brand and message memorable. In those instances, consumers will laugh at the ad if its humor is done well, but they will have no recollection of what the ad was for. No advertiser wants that. To make the brand behind a funny ad memorable, “the brand needs to play a role more than just a logo slapped on the end,” said Advertiser #8.

Advertisers can increase the likelihood that their brand will be remembered if they feature the brand prominently throughout the ad. This extended exposure creates a greater chance for viewers to notice and absorb the brand's presence. Advertisers can also tie in the brand and one of its benefits to the story that's being told. If the brand is a key part of the story, the viewer will be more likely to remember it.

Use a Diverse Creative Team

Brands often run into problems when they are not hearing from an array of voices when creating their ads. It's essential to hire a team that has a mix of people of different races, genders, cultures, and ages. “A lot of times when something comes out and it doesn't get received very well, it's because it's a younger generation that's reacting negatively to the

message,” said Advertiser #4, “and maybe it’s older people that are putting it out that didn't understand why it was problematic.”

Adding diversity to an advertising team will not only expose the ad to a variety of people who can detect if it is likely to offend, but it will also expand the team’s creative range. This is crucial for advertisers that work with a variety of clients or clients who are trying to reach a wide audience.

Make a Joke

“I think it needs an actual joke in it,” said Advertiser #1, “or it needs to be interesting from a comedic perspective.” Actually making a joke sounds obvious, but some brands’ attempts at humor fail to do this. Perhaps in an effort to appeal to modern types of humor that are more awkward and obscure than the obvious methods of the past, the brands leave out the something that makes people laugh.

As far as joke construction goes, there are many tools to use, but the foundation is almost always built on incongruity. “I mean, humor has some pretty fundamental elements in all its forms. Whether it’s standup comedy or advertising, a joke usually has an element of surprise. A lot of it is doing something unexpected or taking someone's idea of what is expected and then turning it on its head. Wordplay is certainly something I like for making connections.”

In all forms of humor, timing plays a significant role. “I like to add buttons at the end,” said Advertiser #2. “I think that’s an important part of a good funny ad.” Further, the beginning of an ad is also significant. “I hear all the time from clients and Facebook

reps and stuff that if you don't hook people in the first two or three seconds, they're gone,” said Advertiser #8.

Hire the Right Talent

As mentioned in the section about humorous ads on TV, the talent (the performers) can dramatically impact an ad. Choosing a funny person who aligns with the brand will yield better results, while choosing the wrong person can lead to failure. “I think the talent is a big ingredient in [humor] because it comes so far,” said Advertiser #2. “If I'm someone writing the ad, I can write something that I think is funny, but then if you don't have the person that's prepared to deliver it the right way, then it won't land.”

Commit to Humor

After releasing a humorous campaign for your brand, stick with that tone and style. Constant shifts in tone will only confuse the audience and will reflect poorly on the brand. “Brands that are constantly trying to reinvent themselves don't really have a personality,” said Advertiser #2.

Humor works well as a tactic when brands devote themselves to it. “Three things make [humor] successful,” said Advertiser #7. “Time, frequency, and money.” The way to earn the best payoff from humor is to invest in it.

UNDERSTAND THE RISKS OF USING HUMOR

Although humor has a positive impact when done well, it has its downsides if not executed properly. When using humor in advertising, brands need to be aware of the risks involved, so they can be mindful about how to minimize them.

It Might Offend Someone

Offending a portion of a brand's audience is an inherent risk that comes with using humor because it almost always in some way involves poking fun at someone. Even if this is done indirectly or in a subtle fashion, there is still potential that certain viewers will look unfavorably on the brand for an ad that had no malice intended.

While any joke might offend some percentage of viewers, certain types of humor and certain subjects are more likely to do so and, therefore, should be avoided. "Leaning heavily into stereotypes is not a great territory to go to right now because a lot of brands are being called out," said Advertiser #5. "I think anything really political too could also do that because you're going to automatically divide your audience."

The Humor can Interfere with the Message

When a consumer remembers that an ad was funny but is unable to recall the brand, then the humor has harmed the ad, rather than benefitted it. "You've got to make sure the funny doesn't overpower the ad," said Advertiser #5.

It can be tempting for advertisers to make an ad as funny as possible, but they must keep their primary goal in mind. The ad is about communicating a message about the brand – it’s not a comedy bit. That’s why many brands opt to make ads that use “not laugh-out-loud funny, but get a chuckle kind of humor,” said Advertiser #1.

THE CHALLENGES OF USING HUMOR

Not everyone can be a standup comedian. The best humorous ads require a tremendous amount of consideration and time. Just as with the risks, advertisers must be aware of the challenges, so they can be prepared to face them when they arise.

It’s Difficult

Being funny is hard. Being funny while effectively representing a brand is even harder. That’s why advertising agencies need to assemble a talented and diverse creative team. They will give a brand the best chance of making a successful ad that makes people laugh and makes them remember the message. However, this will not always come easily. In fact, usually it will not.

Despite all the research and analysis of humor, there is no confirmed scientific method for creating it. Humor is an art. It remains elusive in many instances. Advertisers need to be aware of this and manage their frustrations as they complete their creative journey.

Clients Might Change Your Ideas Too Much

Clients (brands) have the most at stake when releasing an ad campaign, so they will almost always give their creative input. Unfortunately, at times, they provide too much input and damage the agency's original concept. "If a client doesn't trust their ad agency, then that's when things get watered down," said Advertiser #4, "or things get more complicated and they add layers on top of stuff and it's something that might've been funny at one point, but it is now annoying or not funny at all."

Establishing a mutually respectful working relationship between agency and client will increase trust. Then the client will be more willing to give the advertising team creative freedom. Of course, the client will almost always have final say on the ad. So, all the advertising team can do is respectfully explain its position and hope the client is willing to bend.

REMEMBER THE BENEFITS OF USING HUMOR

After covering the risks and challenges that come with using humor, it's a good time to insert a reminder of the benefits that humor brings to the table. If the brand can survive the process of creating the humorous ad and ultimately make something that works, the effort is worthwhile.

Humor Can Make the Brand More Likable

People like to laugh. It's positive emotion. When brands create successful humor ads and make audiences laugh, they can be viewed more favorably by consumers. "I think anything that invokes emotion or connects with people on a human level is going to do better than rational ads," said Advertiser #5, "because at the end of the day, most of our purchases are emotionally driven."

It Catches the Attention of Viewers

In a world of limitless entertainment options and sources vying for people's time, attention spans are short. They quickly bounce from one fun source to another. Since people enjoy humor, they are more likely to pause temporarily for something funny. "As somebody who spends a lot of my scrolling through memes that are fun," said Advertiser #2. "I personally think that humor is a way to get people to stop."

Humor Can Aid Memory

Along with humor's tendency to enhance brand likability and increase attention, it can also lead to improved memory of the brand, which is clearly desirable. "I think humor is a way to be memorable, especially in TV," said Advertiser #4. "And being memorable is kind of the best thing that you can ask for."

Humor is one of the most frequently used tactics across the advertising landscape. Despite its prevalence, humor is likely as challenging to execute effectively today as it has ever been in the past. Advertisers must be careful to minimize the offense that a joke might cause, while also saying something fresh and interesting. It's a difficult balancing act to pull off, but it can be done. To create successful humor campaigns, advertisers should consider their brand and audience, when and where to use humor, ways to execute humor well, and humor's risks and challenges. After doing all that, advertisers maximize their chances of making an effective humor ad and reaping its benefits.

Appendix A: Field Notes

Week 1: Jan. 22-25

Tuesday - Orientation – I met with my supervisor, who began with a quick tour of the office and gave introductions to the employees present that day. We then moved on to a rundown of all the tools that I will use during my time with Caledon Virtual. She helped me set up my accounts on HeyOrca, Basecamp, and the company Slack among several others. Much of this was new to me, so she gave a brief tutorial. After covering the technology information, I filled out all the necessary new employee paperwork. This entire introduction process lasted about two hours, which wasn't quite enough time to make me feel well-acquainted with the procedures of the place. It felt a little rushed. Then I generated ideas for Facebook posts for Wier and Bein and Caledon Virtual for February. I wouldn't have minded a bit more guidance for my first assignment or two, but they willingly answered questions, so it worked out.

Wednesday – This day continued much of the same work from Tuesday with more time spent generating content for Facebook posts. I finally had a chance to shift gears when a co-worker asked me to help with a video for Choose Life Marketing. It was a 30-second post for Instagram about what love means. My co-worker and I wrote the script and recorded others in the office reading the lines, which essentially consisted of each person saying “love means ____.” The video turned out fine and, in this case, I was pleased that they allowed me to handle the editing on my own because that's something I felt comfortable completing. I later made a Facebook post for a Caledon Virtual client employee celebrating a 52-year work anniversary. To close the day, Culligan (a new

client) came in and gave a water comparison demonstration. We recorded some video for later use on social media.

Thursday – I met with someone and discussed upcoming videos that included drone footage and estimated times to complete them. It's going to take multiple days of editing once the videos have been shot. Later I used Promo for the first time to create a video for a construction company's social page and used Canva to create graphics that'll be used on social media pages. This was a big learning day since I had never used Canva or Promo. Both proved to be fairly intuitive and will certainly be essential as I continue creating social media content.

Friday – This was a hectic day—one co-worker's car caught fire, so a few others had to scramble and help her. A lunch meeting and afternoon meeting were both cancelled, so we had to adjust our plans for the day's second half. I spent most of my day brainstorming video ideas for social media, tweaking and punching up planned Facebook posts, and creating a few graphics. It was my most relaxed day of the week and the first time I wasn't pushing to finish multiple tasks by the end of the day. Fortunately, this gave me time to help a co-worker with some of her work creating graphics on Canva.

Analysis – I spent a lot of time trying to learn the voice of these various brands as I created Facebook content. They're all different, so it's taking a while to learn them all, but the practice is helping. As I continue to create more social media content, I think that'll become clearer. I expect the same will be true as I make more videos. At this point, I'm not sure if Caledon Virtual is looking for footage that I record around the office and use that to generate content, or if they'd rather that I use stock footage for quick and easy usage. I'll make a mix of both and see which plays better.

I'm still feeling out what they're looking for on certain tasks. Directions are sometimes vague, so I make best guesses and ask questions. Thus far, the feedback I've received on tasks I've finished has been largely approving, so I think I'm on the right track. Overall, it's a positive work environment with helpful people. I'm happy about the first week.

Week 2: Jan. 28-Feb. 1

Monday – I spent the morning working on a Valentine's Day-themed video for a client. As is often the case, my supervisor instructed me to use Promo. It's a great site and it an exceptional video creation tool, but it has its limitations. For instance, only five clips can be combined in each video, and only one song can be used. These restrictions made making the video that I envisioned difficult. I had to pivot on a couple ideas, but ultimately my supervisor liked the video. I spent a few hours unsure about what to do with my time since I did not have any tasks assigned to me, so I researched pregnancy help centers and brainstormed ideas for future Choose Life Marketing videos. Then I was assigned multiple tasks an hour before I had to leave for the day. That's often the way of work here. It comes in bursts.

Tuesday – Today I wrote an SEO guide for Wier and Bein. It went exceptionally well because I was given clear direction and an example of something similar that was done in the past. I also made another video using Promo, a resource that I'm becoming increasingly comfortable using, which is a nice feeling. I enjoy the opportunity to work on various types of projects (longer and shorter writing posts and video content). A key lesson of today: I have to ask for more tasks if I want them. My supervisor has plenty to

do besides remember to assign me work, so I've learned to ask others if I can help them out. There's always someone happy to pass me a task.

Wednesday – Subzero temperatures kept most people out of the office today. They worked from home, so not too much changed other than the crushing loneliness (kidding!) I worked on a couple blog posts for different brands. My supervisor has been great about letting me tip my toe in many different projects. I've always enjoyed long-form writing, so I find blog posts a treat to write. They're also a nice way to help me learn more about the brands and the industry because the posts require research.

Thursday – I spent most of the day reading through webpages and writing their meta descriptions. It's a task that grows tedious quickly. After finishing a long list of those, I worked on a piece for Choose Life Marketing that will be sent out in an e-blast next month. I like writing but writing nearly nonstop for six and a half hours is rough. It'd be nice to break up the day with some video or graphic work.

In office news, one guy brought in his dog (dogs are welcome in our office), and the dog promptly devoured some chocolate and had to be taken to the vet.

Friday – Friday was a fun day. I spent the morning browsing the webpages of different sites and running them through a plagiarism scanning tool. We've recently discovered that some content from another site that we run was copied verbatim by other sites, so we're checking our other sites to see if this is widespread issue. Turns out, it is. We're not through searching yet, but I already helped uncover several other sites that had blatantly stolen content from us. I had to pause from this investigation after lunch to work on a few more videos using Promo. The site is getting easier to use, but it can still be frustrating because of its limitations.

Dog update: the chocolate eater is back home today. He's doing just fine.

Week 3: Feb. 4-Feb. 8

Monday – Since Monday was one of the less exciting days thus far, I thought I would use it to provide you all with a description of Caledon Virtual. The office space has a comfortable open-floor plan with several desks and a few offices with large glass windows, so everyone feels accessible. In total, we have 16 people in the office and a half dozen others who work remotely and communicate regularly via Slack. The employees are mostly young (late 20s to early 30s) and new (I'm one of five people to begin work here within the past year). From what I've heard, they're looking to continue expanding.

CV has a stellar reputation and has been honored as one of the top three ad agencies in Columbia in recent years, once winning top overall. It's comprised of three different branches—Wier & Bein (which works with the alcohol industry), Choose Life Marketing (which works with pregnancy help centers), and Caledon Virtual (which works primarily with local businesses). Everyone does work for each branch; the branches just take on different voices with their content and cater to their market.

CV is a full-service agency, so it handles just about everything, including video marketing, design, SEO, paid search, and strategy. I've mostly spent time working on video and social media content, but I've also dipped my toes into a variety of other writing tasks.

Tuesday – I spent most of the day writing meta descriptions for various client webpages. There was time to take two quick breaks: one to carry in boxes of supplies and one to complete the office puzzle (this office loves dogs and puzzles). Outside of work, I

arranged my first couple interviews with advertising professionals—one for Thursday and one for next week.

Wednesday – This was a writing-heavy day. Between a couple longer-form tasks and many shorter ones, I’m sure I tallied several thousand words of content. I’m happy with this sort of day on occasion, but I would rather not spend every one this way. I much prefer days that bring a variety of tasks including video and idea generation.

Thursday – I had my first taste of Google My Business today. After learning what it does and how we publish for it, I spent time researching and creating new posts for a few different clients. One of the part-time employees at the agency announced that he is leaving soon, so it seems like I’m going to take over a lot of his Google My Business work.

Shifting gears to the individual research portion of my semester – I conducted my first interview tonight. I video-chatted with Drew Grier (nice guy with a lot of insightful takes on humor in advertising). Drew clearly is the type of person who thinks about his work and the industry and doesn’t simply go through the motions. I’ll be thrilled if everyone I speak to has as much to offer as he did.

For the video chat, we used Zoom, which worked... okay. I’m not ready to blame Zoom yet because I don’t think the internet connection was stable enough. If I run into issues next time, I’ll know the issue is with Zoom itself and will adjust. In any case, I was still able to get what I needed from the interview.

Friday – Busy day. I had a ton of tasks in my court to finish and only a few hours until I had to shoot a video for our new client, Culligan. Fortunately, my co-workers were helpful (they always are), so I finished on time, which was fortunate because the Culligan

shoot took about two hours longer than expected. My supervisor grew increasingly ambitious as the shoot went on, leading to us continuously adding angles and re-shooting certain clips. I haven't worked with him in this way before, so I cannot say for sure if that's just his process. Maybe it is. Edits will come next week, so we'll see how it all turns out.

Week 4: Feb. 11-Feb. 15

Monday – Jon mentioned that it would be helpful if I explain some of the software that I work with at CV, so I'll begin that today and continue it going forward. Google My Business, which I've recently started using, is a free tool that helps businesses manage their presence across Google. It hosts business info like addresses, links, history and user reviews (it's comparable to Yelp). Businesses can use GMB to make a post that will promote a page from their site and drive traffic to it, similar to the way they might on social media. Most of what we do for clients is plot those posts several months in advance and respond to user reviews.

A new employee started late last week, and another started today. That makes four new employees added to the team since I've arrived. We're running out of desks.

Tuesday – Culligan content is launching this week, so that's been the primary focus around an office that's brimming with anxious energy. We have a couple people here who stress bake, which means we are constantly inundated with plates full of sweets each morning – it's a double-edged sword.

I've spent much of my time writing GMB posts for a bevy of clients, most of them pro-life pregnancy help centers. I don't mind this type of work because it combines

reading, writing, and visual content. That way I don't feel bogged down by the monotony of one repeated behavior.

Wednesday – I had an interview with Craig Stewart last night. Two interviews in and both have been exceptionally engaging and eager to give anything they could to help me and my research.

It was a busy day in terms of responding to emails, messaging on Slack (a team collaboration tool that makes instant communication easy, especially for an organization with remote employees), and brainstorming with people around the office. I spent my available time doing research for a webinar that a couple co-workers are giving next week. The webinar will cover PPC and SEO information for our clients. PPC (pay per click) is an advertising model that involves an advertiser paying a publisher each time the ad is clicked – it's typically associated with search engines like Google. SEO (search engine optimization) is the process of impacting a website or webpage's online visibility – again, that visibility often refers to how high it places on the list of Google search results.

Thursday – Today's highlight was the culture lunch, a monthly event (with lunch provided to us) during which we spend about an hour discussing something that will boost office morale and improve interpersonal relationships. Not sure if that sounds cheesy, but it was actually enlightening. We talked about our DISC assessments, which is a sort of personality measure that sheds light on the way that people may alter behavior in the workplace versus in their natural states. Building a strong culture that emphasizes understanding is clearly a focus of the team's leadership, and as far as I can tell, it's paying off.

Friday – Slow day. I worked on GMB posts and did research for upcoming blog content, so I had things to do, but there wasn't the urgent "finish by EOD" tasks that usually pop up. A co-worker introduced me to Google AdWords and the Yoast plugin on WordPress, which are SEO tools that I don't totally understand yet. I'll dive into them more next week after I finish the written content – that's when they'll be needed.

Week 5: Feb. 18-Feb. 22

Monday – I attended my first Monday morning meeting. They call it the weekly MOJO (that's a familiar name). Though it was one of the longer meetings I've been a part of, lasting nearly three hours, it was time well spent. I learned valuable information about the agency and its divisions' voices. Choose Life Marketing (works with pregnancy help centers) has a softer voice with a woman's touch, according to them. They described it as informational, inspirational, educational, conversational, and after that they ran out of words ending in -ational. The Wier & Bein (works with the alcohol industry) voice has a dry, subtle sarcasm to it. The sarcasm is sometimes so subtle that's not clear if it's joking, which I find amusing. It also strives to be sophisticated, never advocating binge drinking or any irresponsible drinking behavior. Caledon Virtual (works with many fields, but mostly focuses on local businesses) has a voice much like W&B, but it isn't quite as sophisticated and it doesn't look to include phrases like "full-bodied" and "artfully crafted" since it isn't speaking to or about breweries, wineries, distilleries. CV still has the dry humor, but it's definitely looser and more colloquial with its language.

Tuesday & Wednesday – I spent most of these two days researching Inter-State Studio, which is a yearbook publishing company. I visited every page of its website and read

articles related to my topics, “How to make a yearbook” and “How to sign yearbooks.” After poring over all the needed information, I wrote the two posts and optimized them for SEO (search engine optimization). For the purposes of this task, that included adding links to the article that connect to other pages within the client’s website and making sure that the keyword phrase “how to make a yearbook” appeared frequently enough in the text.

Thursday – I’ve had some difficulties video chatting with interviewees lately. The reasons they have for re-scheduling our appointments are all understandable – these are busy people who often work long hours. I have a few lined up for the next week, so I’m hoping those work out.

I spent most of the work day creating social media content. It’s nearly the end of the month, so this is the time when we plan posts for the upcoming months and run them by clients for approval. I don’t mind creating social media, but I wonder if we’re always going about it the right way. I see a lot of posts about silly holidays like “national eat chocolate donuts day.” Not all the posts are of that ilk, but there are plenty that are clearly in place just for the sake of posting *something*. On the other hand, posting consistently has proven to be effective, so we just have to accept that not all posts will be gems.

Friday – I waded back into the waters of social media content creation today. I’ve decided to embrace the challenge of trying to make mundane content as clever and engaging as possible. The rest of day consisted of making GMB posts and writing meta descriptions for webpages.

Week 6: Feb. 25-Mar. 1

Monday – Quick follow up on my social media content thoughts last week: I find that some content becomes monotonous and repetitive (especially when I’m planning posts for the month for several clients and all of them are using some of the same holidays). To make these posts more engaging, I look for ways to work in clever wordplay that suits the client. Not all of them are great. I know this. Some involve simple puns like “*wood* you be my Valentine?” when posting for a lumber company. Others are more elaborate, like saying that while other companies may have an eye for design, we have three designers, so that’s six eyes for design. Our creative director loved the weirdness of that one, which was nice but admittedly a little bit surprising. I’m still working on improving my sense of what will hit and what will miss.

Tuesday – I’ve noticed a trend from people in the office that I want to praise. They consistently give credit to others rather than being concerned about receiving it for themselves. For example, when a couple employees praised one content writer for a recent blog post, she immediately mentioned how much someone else helped her write it. She was happy to recognize a team member’s efforts when it would have been easy to not say anything. This practice gives the office atmosphere a warmth, and it reassures everyone that their good work will not go unnoticed. I don’t remember hearing anyone ask for credit or praise for doing something well. Part of the reason for that is the people here modest and humble. The other part is I think everyone knows that their shout out is coming.

Wednesday & Thursday – I spent most of these two days writing blog content for Wier & Bein and writing new page content for Steve’s Pest Control. Long-form writing and

video content creation are my favorite tasks to work on. I like projects that take a bit more time and effort to complete. It requires idea generation, planning, creating and editing – I like that it contains layers. Making social posts, GMB posts or writing meta descriptions are all fine, too, but I definitely prefer them less.

Friday – New task today. I researched Midwest bloggers and magazine writers who write about dining, shopping, and outdoor recreation. We're putting together a list of individuals who might be interested in attending an event this spring and writing about it on their respective platforms. This process was harder than you'd think, or at least, it was harder than I thought. Finding candidates was easy, just time consuming. However, finding contact info took a lot of effort. I'm amazed by how many sites I found that post content but don't have a way to directly contact anyone. They often have a way to sign up for a newsletter, but there isn't always a general email address or any contact info for individual writers.

Quick interview update: I have chatted with five people so far, all copywriters. I'm close to arranging times with an art director and someone on the account side, but it's not done yet. I received contact info for these individuals from my other interviewees (they've all been incredibly gracious and helpful).

Week 7: Mar. 4 - Mar. 8

Monday – We learned this morning that our executive team decided to create a new niche that works with cbd (Cannabidiol) companies. One employee thought it seemed like a curious choice for an agency that also works with dozens of pregnancy help centers

that are mainly run by conservative, older women. They think there's at least a chance that those pregnancy help centers would not understand the difference between cbd store products (which do not contain THC) and marijuana. The people running those agencies might drop our agency without seeking to understand the difference. They might just think, "weed = bad" and move on. I figured that agencies often work with various companies that have differing values, but I know I'm new to this world.

Tuesday – Based on conversations that I had with co-workers at Lazertag, others had the same concern about the new cbd niche. By the way, a few people from our team played Lazertag after work Monday night. It's further evidence that our office is close and has a noticeably friendly culture. Additionally, we have an office happy hour tonight at Truman's – it's a big week for after work fun. Also worth mentioning: I learned my supervisor is interested in keeping me on after the internship ends. I haven't talked to her about it directly yet, but that was the word relayed to me from others. So, that's exciting.

Wednesday – While out at our team's happy hour, I talked to my supervisor today about the possibility of staying on full time after the internship ends. She was delighted that I said something and told me that she would bring it up in the upcoming executive meeting. I get the sense that they were thinking about adding another full-time employee regardless, so having someone who they already know and have already worked with is helpful.

Workwise, my tasks have been mostly typical. I wrote a few blog posts and many meta descriptions. One new task I completed was to assign to-dos for all the reporting tasks for this February. As far as I can tell, reporting basically involves a recap of how SEO and PPC performed for the clients each month, but that's not what I did. I ran down

a spreadsheet of our clients and created to-dos for each of them and assigned them to different employees in Basecamp, which is our task management program.

Thursday – I can feel that the people are starting to give me more responsibility and more work. There used to be days when I wouldn't have anything due that day (only tasks due in a week or so), but now I am constantly asked to help with time-sensitive assignments and a greater number of assignments each day.

Friday – I've created a lot of writing content this week. It's been a mix of blog posts, GMB posts, and meta descriptions. I like the mix. I'm figuring out that I prefer to spend most of a day writing, as long as it's broken up with other activities, especially video content creation.

No interviews this week, but I'm hoping to finish three more in the next week or two, which will give me all the data I need. Then I can move on to analysis and writing the article.

Week 8: Mar. 11 - Mar. 15

Monday – It turns out that the employees who mentioned their concern about taking on clients who work with cbd have put in their two weeks. It's too bad because they're both terrific co-workers and one in particular provides a consistently calming influence in the office anytime stress levels rise. This continues the trend of regular turnover at Caledon Virtual. I haven't spent much time working at a marketing agency, so I don't know if this level of personal change is common, especially at one of this size (around 20 people). Maybe one of you can speak to that.

Tuesday – Today was our monthly culture lunch. We did a Mexican food potluck, which

was spectacular. These are talented people so it's no surprise that many of them are also skilled cooks. For the activity, we broke into teams and were tasked with solving a scenario using assigned objects ranging from a box fan to a rope to a margarita glass. Scenario examples included, "you're stranded on a desert island. Return to civilization," and "Godzilla is terrorizing your city. Defeat him." My team won by explaining how we would use our *paperweight*, *lint roller*, and *People Magazine* to retrieve our keys from our locked car – we would smash the window with the paperweight, clean the glass with the lint roller, then cover the open window with the magazine pages and lint roller sheets.

Wednesday – I've had an unfathomably difficult time getting these last couple candidates to show up to our scheduled video chats. One candidate has agreed then later cancelled six times (sometimes the cancelling occurs an hour after the interview was scheduled). I understand that these people are busy. I'm just frustrated that I've dumped so much time into texting, emailing, scheduling meetings, adjusting my schedule, and waiting for the interviews to begin, and I still have nothing to show for it (for a couple candidates, that is). At some point I might have to accept it as a sunk cost. To prepare for this, I've been in contact with other candidates, so I have a backup plan.

Thursday & Friday – It's been all hands on deck this week at the office. Tasks have been flying in, leaving us scrambling to keep up. Most people around the office bury their stress and go forth without a change in outward appearance. Others wear their stress like a Lady Gaga dress. Fortunately, the environment is consistently supportive and tight, so we recognize when another needs help. That's one of the things that I like about working here – people go out of their way to help when a team member needs support. We all know what it's like to feel overwhelmed with time-sensitive tasks, which is why

everyone is willing to step in and provide help when necessary.

Week 9: Mar. 18 - Mar. 22

Monday & Tuesday – I worked on some of this, a little of that, and a lot of everything else. I've spent time on Google My Business posts and profile optimization, which essentially includes updating links, photos, phone numbers, hours, services, and a description of the organization. All this information needs to match what is found on the website exactly or it causes problems in search engines and makes the webpages appear lower in the list of search results (it's more complicated than that, but that's my level of understanding at this point). I've also made videos of the new Culligan dispenser that they installed in our office. Other than that, there's the usual workload of blog and webpage content in addition to mapping out posts for clients on social media for April.

Wednesday – Brutally busy week. I've been working extra hours every day to try and keep up with everything. We're ironing out the details for how delegation of responsibilities will change after one of our content specialists leaves. My supervisor asked me to work more hours, which I'm a bit iffy on since I have so much left to do on my project. I agreed to pick up an extra few hours each week, so we'll see how that goes. I'm still waiting to find out about a full-time position here when the internship ends.

On the plus side, I'm finally finished with all my interviews and am working transcribing them and writing the article for my project.

Thursday – NCAA tournament games began today and the office was abuzz. We didn't watch any games, but people shouted out score updates regularly through the afternoon. And, of course, we have an office pool going (braggin' rights only) that includes almost

everyone, including those who don't follow college basketball. Despite the excitement, we still managed to get some work done. We had a meeting about who will handle the recurring writing tasks that our departing content specialist will leave behind. The plan is to hire two new content specialists to replace her, which says a lot about how much work she produced.

Friday – Finally things slowed down slightly to end the week. I spent most of the day working on a PowerPoint presentation about how to maintain brand consistency and why it's important. I'm not actually giving the presentation and the person who will give it is off today, so I had to do my best to add the content I think she'll want. After I finished the presentation, I created a few more videos for pregnancy center clients and proofed a few social media plans for next month.

Week 10: Mar. 25 - Mar. 26

Monday – The project is starting to come together. I have compiled nearly all the necessary materials into a single document except for a couple transcriptions and the trade publication article. I did not realize how humongous this was going to be. It looks like it'll end up being well over 100 pages – probably somewhere close to 150, which I'm not sure how to feel about.

Work at Caledon Virtual has been about the same as it has been recently, which is to stay that it's been busy. It's near the end of the month, so we're finishing SAPs for social media clients, and we're adding content pages for new pregnancy help center clients who are expanding their websites. I'm learning that it's tough to write different content for an ultrasound information page for 10 different clients without ending up with

too much overlap.

Tuesday – Not much more to say about this week. I finished all the work I needed to complete before I left, which is a relief. Sadly, I'll miss a team outing Friday afternoon at the movies. And I'll miss a goodbye party for one of our team members who is moving to St. Louis. She's staying with the agency as a remote employee, so it's not a final goodbye.

Week 11: Apr. 1 - Apr. 5

Monday – Lots of writing today. Lots and lots of writing. I start work each morning a little bit later than the others in the office (since I'm not full time), so they often urgently give me a task as soon as I walk in the door, especially on Monday mornings. I spent most of my day writing email content for Choose Life Marketing and page content for a couple clients. This week's email content covered rebranding. So, I researched and explained the elements of a rebrand, including renaming, logo design, typography, website design, color choices, etc.

I'm finishing up with the transcribing on my project, so of course I now have to transcribe text at work. Amazing. Luckily, the transcriptions at work are not nearly as lengthy, so it didn't take me very long.

We also did some desk shuffling. Several employees moved to different desks in the office after our lead digital strategist moved to St. Louis, which opened up a prime desk location. That was the first domino to fall. After someone claimed her spot, a few others also wanted to upgrade. By the time it was all finished, half of our office was at least partly reconfigured (I'd say for the better). I didn't move desks, but I did snag a

better chair, which I'm happy about.

Tuesday – Today was all about making edits to written content and creating videos. The edits come from clients and other content creators in our agency. Sometimes the clients give a lot of feedback, but other than a couple persnickety ones, they usually trust our judgement. The videos I'm making have been ongoing for quite a while. I have to make 40 videos that we will sell to clients to use on their sites. So far, I've made about half. It's not a top priority timewise, so I just make a few each week.

Wednesday & Thursday – Our agency's president's grandmother passed away earlier this week, so she and her husband (our creative director) have been gone for a couple days. From what I understand, her grandmother basically raised her, so it was like losing a parent. Everyone in the office has been great about showing support. I've said this before – this office has a strong culture. It's obvious that we care about each other.

Workwise, I made a video for a pregnancy help center that will be used in movie theaters near the agency, which is pretty cool. Other than that, I've mostly been writing meta descriptions and more email content.

Friday – Project update: I will have the first draft finished Saturday. Then I'll just have to make all the edits that Jon has for me and then I'll share it with the entire committee. The finish line is coming up.

Week 12: Apr. 8 – Apr. 12

Monday & Tuesday – Monday, our creative director discovered yacht rock. He found it when browsing for a new Spotify playlist for us to listen to in the office. He then proceeded to find new yacht rock playlists every day this week. He didn't know what

yacht rock was at first, I still don't really understand what yacht rock is, and I'm not sure anyone else in the office does either. Supposedly, it's a mix of relaxing rock music that can include jazz and has a coastal sound. Anyway, it's good music and was a major talking point of the office for the week. At last count, our creative director said yacht rock 16 times.

Work continues to be busy. We're still in the process of hiring replacements, and we're adding new clients, so the workload is as heavy as ever. I've spent a lot of time writing blogs and pdf content for weekly emails, some of which is more fun than others. The content for pregnancy resource centers tends to be pretty dry, so I don't find it as much fun to write. Other clients allow more freedom and a more expressive voice – that's what I enjoy.

Wednesday & Thursday – I had an interview with Caledon Virtual for a full-time position. It went well or at least I'm assuming it did because they scheduled a team interview for me next week to see if I get the job. I just have to prepare a 10-minute presentation and then answer some questions about myself. I saw another employee go through it a few weeks ago and got the impression that it's meant to be laid back.

Friday – It can be frustrating to write this much content because I have to continuously put words on the page quickly. I don't think rushing through writing tasks to this extent is a great way to produce quality work. I don't like seeing our work suffer because we're taking on too much, and I know that is happening on certain tasks. Sometimes even an extra hour would be a big help, but we are not always granted that luxury. On the busiest days, my time consists of researching then writing a blog, researching then writing another blog, researching then writing another blog, and so on until it's time to leave. It's

forced me to become more efficient, which I know is valuable, but I think sometimes we're stretched a bit too thin in terms of time to complete tasks. I expect things will improve when we add another writer.

Week 13: Apr. 15 - Apr. 19

Monday & Tuesday – Monday was a typical work day. I wrote blog and client page content – nothing out of the ordinary. Tuesday was much different. About 10 minutes after I arrived, our agency's president received a call that her mother had just died. Her grandmother died recently, so this is obviously been a difficult time for her. Her husband is our creative director, so neither of them were around the office much this week.

In better news, I had my team interview Tuesday. I gave the presentation on myself since I don't get a chance to talk to everyone in the office that often, and I hardly ever interact with most of the remote employees. The presentation was a breeze. Everyone was supportive and laughed along with all my silly jokes that I mostly put in for my own amusement. They also had to vote on their approval of me, which is pretty funny because they have been asking me to stay full time for weeks. Now I just have to wait on an official job offer.

Wednesday & Thursday – Wednesday and Thursday were fun days because I had a chance to work on a brand messaging guide for our new niche called The Good Seed. In the messaging guide, I wrote various lengths of boilerplate about the agency, created lists of adjectives to describe the verbal and visual styles, wrote a mission statement, a brand promise, a vision statement, unique selling proposition, and tagline options. What I created was just a rough draft, but I thought it was cool that I was given the opportunity

to take the lead on this project.

The brand voice and design are still very much in progress. Now that I have personally contributed to the branding, I'm even more excited to see how it all turns out.

Friday – I spent the morning writing a script for a woman who is going to share her story with other women who have had abortions. It's only supposed to be three minutes long, which was brutally difficult because when she told her story over the phone, it lasted about 15 minutes. I had to trim quite a bit, but I think it turned out well. Another writer looked over my draft, and we sent it to the woman for final approval.

Week 14: Apr. 22 - Apr. 26

Monday & Tuesday – Monday began as one of the most relaxing days I've had at work in weeks. I still had plenty to do, but I didn't feel a pressure to move rapidly through my tasks the way that I normally do. I worked on a blog post, completed a set of GMB posts and did a bit of quality assurance work on WordPress site instructions. Of course, just as I was about to finish everything on time for the day, I was given another task that needed to be done by the end of the day and I was set to leave in 20 minutes. I had to abandon my present in favor of this new assignment. I finished that quickly and bolted out the door to meet with my committee for the project defense.

The defense went well. My committee has great people on it who really care about helping me and have constantly gone above and beyond to assist me in any way possible. They said kind words about my work and offered their final comments on how to improve it. Then we said our goodbyes and left. It was certainly a relief to be finished with the project, but I will miss working with those guys.

Wednesday & Thursday – Back to the grind. The rest of the week made up for the early lull, as I have been bombarded with loads of tasks. I have had to sharpen my focus and work as efficiently as ever to complete everything on time. I'm getting better at meeting deadlines, but I'm also getting better at understanding what the real deadline is.

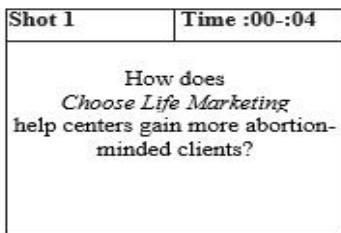
Friday – The final week. It's been fun and it's been tough. Ultimately, I'm glad it's over, despite how much I've learned and enjoyed my time. There's always a new challenge, and I'm ready what is to come. They've hinted strongly at a full-time job, so I'm expecting that offer to arrive any day now.

Appendix B: Internship Work

- Blogs

- [How to Market Alcohol to Millennials: A Guide for the Alcohol Industry](#)
- [Best Outdoor Drinking Spots Near Columbia, MO](#)
- [6 Free and Cheap Apps for Creating Videos](#)
- [Does Medicaid cover abortion costs?](#)

- Storyboard



VIDEO: Open with question (use logo of CLM to replace its text).
SFX: Music playing throughout video might be nice as long as it doesn't distract from the narration.



VIDEO: Clock ticking.
SFX: Clock ticking & narration - *Your website is the cornerstone for effectively reaching more abortion-minded clients.*



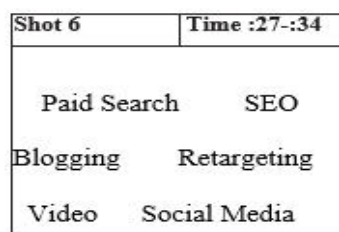
VIDEO: Over shoulder shot of woman looking at screen (screen shows CLM site).
SFX: Clock ticks then alarm sounds & narration - *Within 5 seconds, women on your site make a judgment call about your center.*



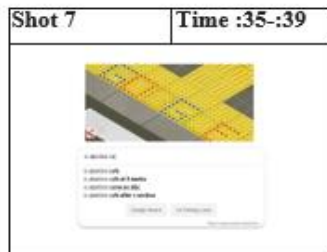
VIDEO: Zoom to computer screen. Mouse hovers over each drop-down menu at top of screen.
SFX: Narration- *We make those seconds count with... and abortion-minded clients.*



VIDEO: Woman scrolling through site on her phone.
SFX: Narration- *With digital marketing services, we can reach abortion-minded women as they're scrolling on their smartphones.*



VIDEO: Each phrase appears on screen as it is read.
SFX: Narration- *Tactics like Paid Search, SEO... allow us*



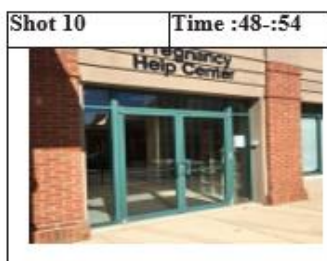
VIDEO: Shot of key phrase being typed into Google.
SFX: Narration- *to target your ideal demographic... already searching for.*



VIDEO: Shot of mouse moving toward "website" on GMB listing.
SFX: Narration- *Each of these tactics points them in the direction of your website or a highly-targeted landing page*



VIDEO: Scroll through "contact us" page.
SFX: Narration- *where they can learn more and schedule an appointment when they're ready.*



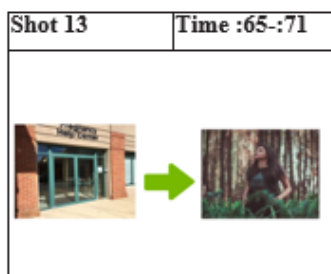
VIDEO: Wide shot center then words like "calm," "comfortable," and "safe" appear on screen.
SFX: Narration- *Our branding services develop... for the first time.*



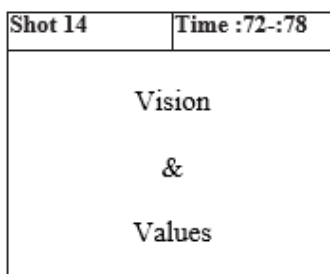
VIDEO: Cut to screen shots of Facebook, GMB, website.
SFX: Narration- *Your branding is used across all platforms, and that consistency*



VIDEO: Two women smiling, nodding.
SFX: Narration- *helps build recognition and trust between your center and the women you want to reach*



VIDEO: Photo of center appears, then an arrow pointing right, then image of concerned-looking women.
SFX: Narration- *An effective marketing strategy is a connecting piece between your center and the abortion-minded clients who need you.*



VIDEO: Each word appears on screen.
SFX: Narration- *When you work with Choose Life Marketing, you partner with an agency that shares your vision and your values*




VIDEO: Woman looking down at phone. Cut to her looking up at center then walking in.
SFX: Narration- *all while helping you gain more abortion-minded clients.*

- Presentation

How to have Consistent Branding

Presented by Caledon Virtual



1

How Important is Consistent Branding?

- Very.
- It's very important, even for small businesses
- It's marketing on a Higher Level
 - Making your brand synonymous with product experience automatically leads consumers to think about making their next purchase



2



How Important is Consistent Branding?

- Consistency Makes Your Brand Feel More Dependable
 - Being consistent across social media, packaging, your website, and everywhere else will make consumers feel comfortable with you because they know what to expect
- Consumers Trust Brands They Recognize
 - People often purchase based on emotion rather than logic
 - Familiarity helps create recurring consumers



3

So, how do we make this happen?



4

It Starts from Within

- With a few forward-thinking documents, you, your employees and any person who works on your marketing will be on the same page
- Even if you think you don't have the time, give it a try. It'll be worth your effort



5

Analyze

- Your audience
- Your competitors
- Buyer persona



6

Customers

- Who are your current customers?
- What are their demographics?
- Where do they make purchases?

ORLEDOONVIRTU.L

7

Competitors

- Create a list of competitors and profiles for each of them
- Why do their customers choose them over you?
 - Why do your customers choose you?

ORLEDOONVIRTU.L

8

Create a Buyer Persona

- Profile the specific person who embodies your ideal customer
- Use this to map out this person's likes, dislikes, motivations, goals, and challenges
- This profile will help you better understand your customers and will inform the way you brand yourself to appeal to them

ORLEDOONVIRTU.L

9

Sample Buyer Persona: Working Mom Tammy

- Role – healthcare decision maker
- Age – 44
- Salary – 75K
- Family – Children – Rachel, 18, & Charlie, 15
- Location - Maryland



ORLEDOONVIRTU.L

10

Sample Buyer Persona: Working Mom Tammy

- Key Identifiers
 - Full-time career
 - Values family
 - Willing to spend a little more for higher quality
 - College education
 - Seeks health information online
 - Completes research before making buying choices



ORLEDOONVIRTU.L

11

Sample Buyer Persona: Working Mom Tammy

- Background
 - Working mom who balances career and family. She is resourceful and is savvy internet user who is willing to look for the best provider but doesn't always have enough time or medical provider expertise to know for certain she is getting everything her family needs.
- Goals
 - Family health
 - Reliable, convenient health care for kids
 - Reduce time spent scheduling and traveling to appointments



ORLEDOONVIRTU.L

12

Sample Buyer Persona: Working Mom Tammy

- Challenges
 - Busy work schedule makes taking sick days for kids difficult
 - Time it takes to travel to care locations
 - Finding new primary physician for kids as they get older
 - Understanding dense documents of healthcare provider information
- What we can do for her
 - Provide online scheduling and same-day appointments
 - Make care easily accessible
 - Offer online resources that are easy to understand



ORLEDOON/VIRTUAL

13

Create a Messaging Guide

- It helps you dig into your brand
- It gives your brand a distinct personality and messaging

ORLEDOON/VIRTUAL

14

Messaging Guide

- Should Include:
- Brand Promise
 - Single sentence that evokes emotion and solidifies the relationship between your brand and consumers
- Vision Statement
 - Short paragraph that looks forward and creates an image of the ideal state of your brand. Should be inspirational and aspirational

ORLEDOON/VIRTUAL

15

Messaging Guide

- Mission statement
 - Answers four questions: What do we do? How do we do it? Whom do we do it for? What value are we bringing?
- Unique Selling Proposition
 - What makes your business different from others in your field

ORLEDOON/VIRTUAL

16

Messaging Guide

- Word Cloud
 - List of words that describe your brand
 - Refer back to this when you make other choices about branding
- Values
 - You need to know what your brand stands for
 - Clearly communicate these values to your consumers and be consistent because they will notice when you are not authentic

ORLEDOON/VIRTUAL

17

Verbal Style

- Make lists of
 - Brand adjectives (e.g. heroic, poetic, witty)
 - Brand statements (e.g. we are formal, not stuffy & we are knowledgeable, not nerdy)
 - Brand talking points (e.g. locally sourced, celebrate the human spirit)
 - Things to avoid (e.g. being raunchy or condescending)

ORLEDOON/VIRTUAL

18

Visual Style

- Think carefully about colors, fonts, photos, etc.
 - All these elements should encompass exactly who your brand is
- Make a list of words to describe the visuals
- Make a mood board
 - a collection of images that evoke a particular style or concept



CALEDONVIRTUAL

19

Create Rules for Social Media

- Make a list of Dos and Do NOTs
 - These will vary depending on your brand
 - Example: Dos – entertain, stay positive
 - Do NOT – be blasé, be too aggressive
- List what is relevant to your audience and what is not
 - This will guide the posts your team creates

CALEDONVIRTUAL

20

Questions?

CALEDONVIRTUAL

21

Thank you!

- Bailey Calton
 - Bailey@caledonvirtual.com
 - (573) 446-7777

CALEDONVIRTUAL

22

CALEDONVIRTUAL

CALEDONVIRTUAL.COM

23

- **Videos for Social Media and Client Websites**

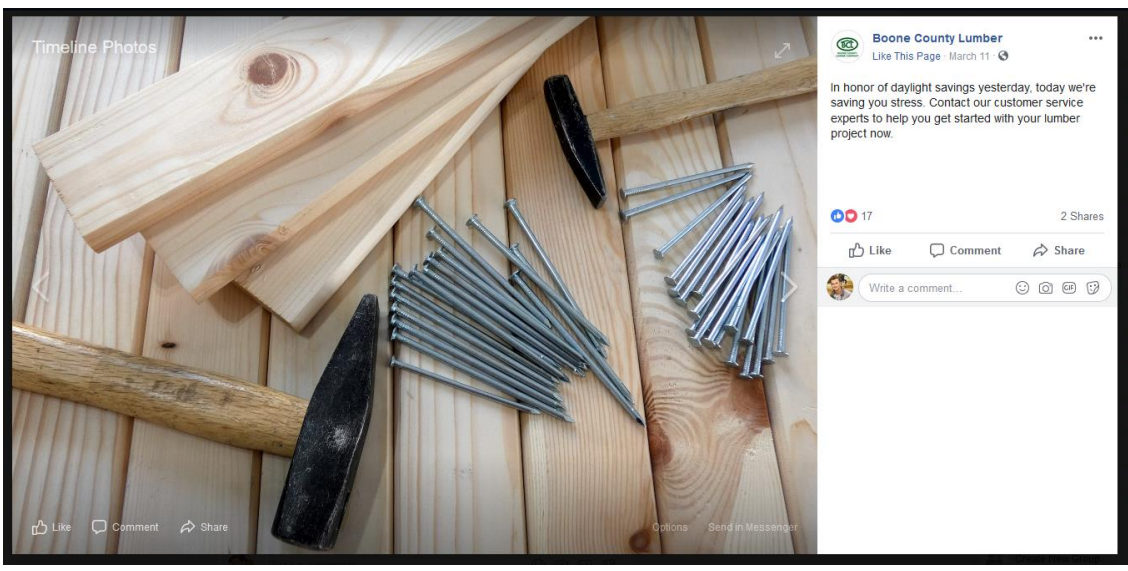
- [Steve's Pest Control](#)
- [Wier & Bein](#)
- [Central States Construction](#)
- [Boone Supported Living](#)
- [Guys, we support you too](#)
- [Think you might be pregnant?](#)
- [Take a deep breath](#)

- **Social Media**

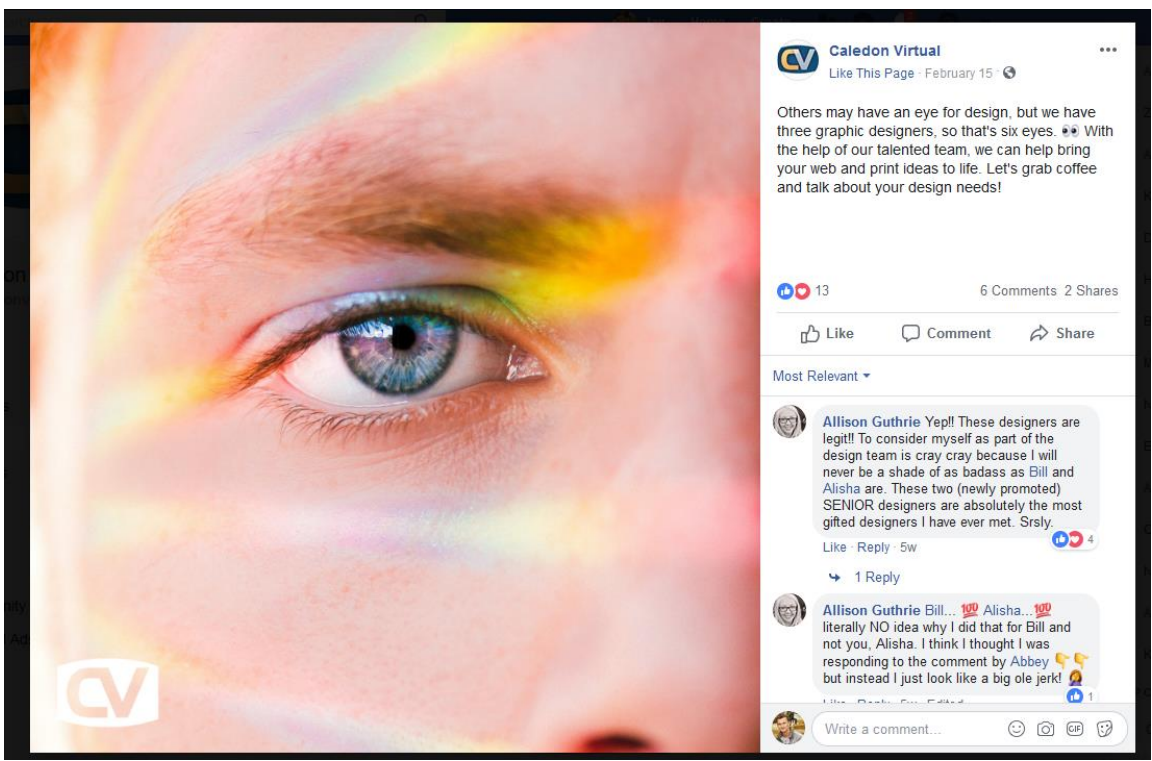
- [Steve's Pest Control posts March & April](#)



- [Boone County Lumber posts March & April](#)



- [Caledon Virtual posts February - April](#)



- [Wier & Bein Marketing posts February - April](#)

 **Wier & Bein Marketing**
February 13 · 🌐

Quinoa by itself = basic and bland.
Quinoa whiskey = sophisticated and delicious.



g on Facebook or in
y.

NPR.ORG
Quinoa Whiskey? Modified Crop List Spurs Distilleries To Try Alternative Grains



Appendix C: Self-Evaluation

I remember my first day on campus at Mizzou. I attended graduate student orientation in Walter Williams Hall, which was still a foreign place to me at the time. Dr. Perry and others preached the seriousness that would be required of us as grad students in order to complete our degrees. From my memory (and I could be misremembering) he strongly pushed us all towards doing a thesis and using quantitative methods.

I had no interest in a thesis at the time and had zero idea what my topic would be. Some of the students around me were excitedly discussing their ideas for topics, which was a bit overwhelming to observe before I had even begun taking classes.

For the remainder of my first year, I continued to think that I would (begrudgingly) complete a thesis. Then I attended my first week of project seminar class, which I only took instead of the thesis seminar class because of a scheduling conflict, and I realized within 20 minutes that I should complete a project instead. In that moment, I finally understood the difference between the thesis and project, and I knew project was for me. Since I have no intention of pursuing a Ph.D., and cared much more about gaining professional experience, a project and internship made the most sense as a capstone option.

Choosing a topic for the professional analysis portion of the project was easy – I did so way back when I thought I was writing a thesis. I opted to research humor in advertising, which made sense to me because I wanted to work in advertising and use humor.

Over the course of two semesters in class with Professor Mike Kearney (one in

Mass Media Seminar and one in Quantitative Research Methods), I slowly developed a sense of how I was going to go about completing my thesis, which, obviously, didn't quite work out as I expected. Fortunately, all that time and effort was far from a waste. I was still able to use all the research on mechanisms of humor, humor as it relates to attention, and humor as it relates to memory for my literature review and proposal for the written portion of the project. All my past research also guided the questions that I eventually asked interviewees when collecting primary data this semester. All the research, conversations with Mike, and feedback that he delivered on writing assignments proved to be helpful in shaping my project, even as I later decided not to write a thesis.

Since so much of the heavy lifting had been done over the first two semesters, writing the proposal was much more manageable. Don't get me wrong – it still took a lot of work, just less work than it would have had I not been able to use so much of the work I had completed previously.

When the time came to interview advertising professionals, I had list of a few candidates that combined individuals that I found on my own and ones who Professor Mark Swanson suggested (I wound up using mostly his suggestions). The interviews themselves went well, despite my uncertainty going in since I had little interviewing experience. Most of the credit goes to these gracious individuals who truly cared and clearly put real effort into all their responses to any questions that I asked. Mark picked the right people for me to interview for this project, as all of them expressed an interest in humor, used humor in their work, and were adept at eloquently describing their thoughts about humor and its place in modern advertising.

The only hiccup in the interview process came when I struggled to get the last few

candidates to complete their interviews. Scheduling them involved constant adjustments and did not always result in the desired outcome. I tried my best to be patient, understanding, and vigilant throughout the process, though perhaps I could have done more to remind the candidates of our scheduled times. Nevertheless, eventually all the interviews took place and gave me the information that I needed.

The information that I gathered from conducting the literature review and interviewing the advertising professionals did more than just help me write this project. It also gave me invaluable insights that I can use in a burgeoning marketing career. The academic articles were useful, but I found more value in the discussions I had with actual people. They not only could directly answer the questions that I had, but they also gave answers about right now. All the journal articles felt in some way dated, but the insights of the interviewees could take into consideration up-to-the-minute knowledge. That's the type of information that I most care about – what's happening with humor in advertising right now.

Now, I'd like to talk about the internship. It took several weeks to find the one I wanted. For a time, I considered an internship with the Columbia Missourian that would have involved traveling to various destinations around the state of Missouri and writing reviews for a special issue that would run at the end of the spring. As fun as that would have been and as much as I would have learned, that was not the experience that I was seeking. I knew that I wanted an internship at a marketing agency in Columbia. So, I reached out to every agency that I could find. Virtually none of these places had an official internship listed, so I explained my situation and asked if they would consider making one for me.

Many places did not respond or simply said that they were not looking for an intern at this time. Caledon Virtual was one of the few agencies that invited me in for an interview. After meeting with the lead content strategist, I could tell that I wanted to work at this place. They had an open culture that appeared to encourage creativity, which is something that matters to me. Fortunately, the interview went well, and the agency liked the work samples that I submitted, so I just had to submit a video to them as the second stage of the evaluation process. Of course, I happened to be on fall break in Minnesota visiting my family when I received word that they wanted a video. I did the best that I could with the resources at my disposal, which were limited to iMovie on my phone and my family as supporting actors. I shot and edited the video that night, sent it in, and accepted Caledon's offer when it came in a couple days later.

When I first began work, I felt overwhelmed with all the new software that I had to learn just to communicate with co-workers and keep track of tasks. Fortunately, everyone was and has continued to be incredibly helpful. I learn from my fellow members of the content team every day. They willingly answer questions about work procedures, content that I produce, and anything else that comes up.

I know I have come a long way from day one on the job when I didn't have much of a role within the organization other than to create social media posts for the agency itself (I was not allowed to create content for the clients yet). Since then, I have proven capable of helping on video shoots, writing blogs, creating content for newsletters, making Google My Business posts, running quality assurance on Word Press site instructions, and putting together monthly plans of social media posts for the agency and several clients.

Creating this much content and receiving subsequent feedback on the content has undoubtedly honed my skills. It has also made me more efficient – this is somewhat of a necessity. We work in a fast-paced digital marketing world that requires quick turnaround times on most assignments, so I've learned to shorten the time it takes for me to research and write a blog then jump over to writing page content for different clients and edit a short video all before lunch. Early on in the internship, this would have made my head spin. Now it's just another Tuesday.

Writing for distinct brand voices is another skill I have acquired at the internship. Since Caledon Virtual serves local clients of all sorts, clients in the alcohol industry, and pregnancy resource centers, I had to learn what writing for each of these brands looks like. Some of them came more naturally to me than others. The brands with a dry sense of humor or the ones that are willing to allow fun content are my favorites. It's the serious, soft-worded clients that still give me trouble. But even with those clients, I know can still write their content – it just takes a bit more time and effort.

Overall, I found my experience in the internship to be extremely helpful, even more so than I hoped. I gained skills and knowledge that will make me a valuable asset to marketing agencies as I progress in my career. For that, I am grateful to Caledon Virtual for the opportunity.

Appendix D: Project proposal

Introduction

Recently I have noticed that when I meet new people, they often say something along the lines of, “tell me your story.” When I mention that I earned my Bachelor’s Degree in psychology and am now studying strategic communication, I often see puzzled expressions. But I’ve always seen the connection—I’m interested in people. Further, I’m interested in what makes people tick, what motivates them, and what moves them.

That’s one of the components of marketing and advertising that I find so intriguing. A large piece of the puzzle is figuring out the audience. I want to know what they like and what will inspire them and move them to action. I have often found that people are moved by a compelling story, and that is another component of marketing and advertising that I find interesting. I want to tell stories. My interest in telling stories began well before my decision to come to the University of Missouri. I have been writing stories for fun since middle school, and I have never stopped. I remember every teacher who ever told me that I was creative and encouraged me to keep writing.

When I finally took creative writing classes in high school and later at college, I became fixated on humor. I had known for years that I loved comedy in movies, television, standup, and the like, but I began to spend lots of time creating comedy of my own. The process of setting up a punchline, the various mechanisms of humor, the pacing, the fragility of a joke—all these things fascinated me. It’s a puzzle and not an easy one to solve. And solving it once does not necessarily mean that it will be easy to solve again.

Of course, I had seen examples of well-executed humor, cases where the puzzle was solved. Of course, I had also seen examples of misfires on attempts at humor. I observed this across many creative mediums, including advertising. Humor is such a tricky and risky strategy to use in advertising because a failure to execute precisely causes the entire ad to implode. Despite the risk, humor is one of the most common approaches used in advertising, as anyone who endures ads will tell you.

I began to wonder how often humor works as a component of advertising. Though I wanted to explore this further, I must admit the irony in writing about something as artistic as humor in an academic paper. Some professionals believe it is too elusive to pin down any concrete formula. Nevertheless, I am curious to see how ad executives view humor's use as a calculated risk and if they believe there are any key elements to rely on (such as incongruity or the rule of three) to effectively elicit laughter. I also wondered if the types of humor and prevalence of it have evolved to adapt to the social media-centric, short attention span public that exists. This is what I want to explore in my study. How do professionals in the advertising world view humor as a strategy for advertising? And how do they view the viability of humor's viability as an advertising approach on social media? Is it an effective means of causing interactions, such as likes and shares?

Professional Skills Component

The professional skills component of this project will put an emphasis on copywriting, idea pitching, and self-editing. I expect to also spend a fair amount of time creating video content.

I have a fairly vast background in writing creatively through various capacities

over the course of my formal education and in real-world practice. While earning my Bachelor's degree from Illinois State University, I took creative writing and communication classes that forced me to write in many styles, lengths and for many sorts of audiences. In pursuit of my Master's in Journalism at the University of Missouri, I have opted for the strategic communication track. I have gained experience in writing blog posts, press releases, scripts for print and radio advertisements, and copy for print advertisements. I have also written culture content for Vox Magazine since May of 2018. I want to continue to develop my writing and pitching skills, so I opted for an internship that affords me that chance to do just that.

As a part of my professional project, for 30 hours per week over the course of the spring semester, I will work for Caledon Virtual, an ad agency in Columbia. During my time there, I expect to write copy for blogs, print advertising and various digital advertisements. Based on the discussion that I had during my interview, they seem interested in my video skills, so I will likely have an opportunity to further advance those skills through work on projects over the course of my time there. I also expect to work with teams to generate big idea for ad campaigns for the various clients, which include those in the alcohol industry, medical field and many local businesses in Columbia.

This internship is ideal for the type of job that I hope to find after graduation. I want to work full time at an ad agency as a copywriter or video content creator. This internship will offer an opportunity to receive professional practice at both.

Literature Review

More than a hundred theories exist to explain what moves people to laugh. Study of the concept of humor dates back to the earliest philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato. Among many others, writers such as George Eliot and Charles Baudelaire also proposed their own theories on humor (Ziv, 1988). Even today, with the massive compilation of humor theory that has accrued, researchers and professional practitioners still debate humor's mechanisms and its applications.

Marketers are especially consumed with humor and its usage in advertising. They seek a general golden rule of sorts or at least a clearer picture of the landscape of humor's selective effectiveness in various advertising contexts. Marketers' interest in humor in advertising is understandable, given the substantial amount of money dedicated each year to humorous ads. Approximately 30 percent of all ads run in the United States feature humor. That figure has remained steady in recent years and is comparable in other countries (Chan, 2011).

Despite its prevalence in advertising, humor has its share of flaws, which makes it a constant subject of discussion. Those who criticize its usage state that humor often distracts from the brand message (van Kuilenburg, de Jong, & van Rompay, 2011). There are also concerns about offensive humor tactics, growing viewer irritation from repeated exposure to the ads, and failed attempts at humor (Eisend, 2009). Supporters of humor in advertising will point out that humor enhances attitudes toward the brand (van Kuilenburg, et al, 2011). A single funny and playful advertisement can shift a viewer's opinion of company to a more favorable position. Incorporating humor in advertisements

can also make them more enjoyable and effective in capturing the viewer's attention (Chan, 2011). Imagine a viewer who sees an advertisement, enjoys it, and remembers the brand. This viewer will recognize that the brand makes entertaining advertisements and will be more likely to pay close attention to future advertisements made by that brand. An especially humorous and compelling ad campaign, such as Apple's Get-a-Mac campaign from 2007, can shape the reputation of a brand in the minds of viewers and provide the brand a financial boost. In the year of the release of Get-a-Mac, a famous ad campaign comparing Apple to PC, Apple saw a 42 percent market share growth, record sales, and increased cultural influence (Business Wire, 2007).

Humorous Advertising

The topic of humor in advertising has been widely discussed and the subject of much academic review. In the study that follows, I will detail my exploration into various humor styles and perceptions of humor in advertisements and their effects on the participants who view the ads. Specifically, I will discuss how the relatedness of humor to the brand advertised and the participants' perception of humor impact the participants' attention paid to the ads, memory of the brand featured in the ads, and their likelihood of sharing the ad with someone that they know (via in-person mention or, more likely, via electronic means such as social media).

Mechanisms of Humor

The literature has a preponderance of data on how different methods of eliciting a humor response, such as surprise (Woltman Elpers, Mukherjee, & Hoyer, 2004), violence

(Swani, Weinberger, & Gulas, 2013) and stereotyping (Beard, 2008), influenced the consumers' attitudes toward the ads. Perhaps not surprisingly, evidence suggests that the message involved in the advertisement impacts the effectiveness of the various humorous ads. A humorous advertisement featuring the solution to a dangerous condition, such as one for sunscreen to prevent sunburn, can be viewed either favorably or unfavorably, depending on the severity of consequence used in the ad. When participants in a study viewed a fake sunscreen brand's advertisements that presented the consequence merely as "a sunburn," the ads worked more effectively when absent of humor. The participants rated the non-humorous ads higher on a Likert scale for attitude towards the ad and attitude towards the brand. However, when the ads presented a more threatening consequence, in this case "sunburn leads to increased rates of skin cancer," the use of humor made the ads more effective, as the participants' posted higher scores in attitude towards brand and persuasiveness of the ad (Yoon & Tinkham, 2013).

Other research examined humor usage in advertisements via experiments. In one such experiment done by Voss (2009), humorous advertisements were presented with negative consequences and had their effectiveness compared to advertisements that did not present the negative consequences. Participants were shown an ad and then gave written responses to display their understanding of the ad's message and their recognition of the ad's humor. When perceived, humor worked effectively in both ads that featured the negative consequences and the ads that did not display the negative consequences. The noteworthy difference is that negative consequence ads were viewed less favorably when absent of humor (Voss, 2009). This emphasizes a particularly valuable trait of humor's usage in advertising—when delivering unpleasant messages, humor can mitigate

the sting that may have otherwise turned off viewers, causing them to dislike the ad and possibly disregard the message.

The use of violence as a mechanism for humor increased drastically during the early 2000s, especially in Super Bowl commercials. A content analysis of a longitudinal sample of Super Bowl commercials from 2005-2009 found that the rate of violence in Super Bowl advertisements rose by more than 135 percent in that timespan (Blackford, Gentry, Harrison, & Carlson, 2011). In Swani et al's (2013) experiment examining gender differences in perceptions of violent humor, it was found that while men tended to view violent humorous advertisements favorably across levels of intensity of the violence, women liked ads less as violence increased. Even though violence did not cause negative attitudes of men towards the ads, as it did with women, men found the humorous ads that did not contain violence to be just as enjoyable and effective (Swani et al, 2013). Given this finding, it stands to reason that violent humor in advertising should only be used when targeting a male audience, and even then, it may not be the best approach.

Although stereotypes are often viewed as negative and harmful outside of the context of advertising, when used in advertisements, stereotypes depicted in humorous ways have typically been viewed more favorably, or at least neutrally (Eisend, Plagemann, & Sollwedel, 2014). Humor execution becomes vital in these ads because viewers perceive the ads negatively when they do not detect humor. Nontraditional stereotypes (e.g. men in roles that would have been occupied by women decades ago) have a more significant positive effect on women, but both men and women view the humorous depictions of traditional stereotypes (e.g. women as housewives) favorably as

well (Eisend, Plagemann, & Sollwedel, 2014). The consensus from consumers and researchers appears to be that stereotypes in humorous forms are harmless and easily recognized as silly mockeries, not accurate portrayals of modern men and women. However, this country has changed rapidly in the past couple years, increasing its sensitivity and focus on political correctness. It's possible that viewers' feelings about humorous stereotypes depictions have already changed, so I will seek updated data on stereotype humor's effectiveness when conducting the interviews for my study.

Two of the most popular and most effective mechanisms of humor are surprise and incongruity (Woltman Elpers, Mukherjee, & Hoyer, 2004). Alden, Mukherjee, & Hoyer (2000) found in their correlation study that incongruity yields greater viewer perception of humor compared to a non-humorous advertisement, and the addition of surprise increases humor perception. One of the keys to the usage of surprise in advertising is the element of playfulness. Without playfulness, surprise can register as fear in the viewers (Alden, Mukherjee, & Hoyer, 2000). Therefore, the playfulness puts the viewers at ease, so they can clearly perceive the surprise as funny, rather than startling and discomforting.

Beliefs of Advertising Greats

This study would be incomplete without mention of the thinking of some of advertising's famous figures. This will help ground the subject matter into the industry. These industry professionals have varying views on humor's deployment in their field. Bill Bernbach rejected rules of humor and stated that "the memorable never emerged from a formula." He believed strongly that advertising is an art, not a science and that

over analysis can have a destructive impact (Oetting, 2016). His views contrast with David Ogilvy, who wanted his advertisements to adhere strictly to a formula that kept the copy brief and forbid the use of puns (Ogilvy, 1985). Hal Riney and Jeff Goodby believe in showing respect to the audience. They insist that the audience be treated as smart, so advertising and humor's use in it should be understated and play to the highest common denominator rather than the lowest common denominator, like they see in certain advertising (Nudd, 2015).

Attention

In the constant struggle to make consumers notice ads, advertisers often turn to humor to capture the attention of viewers. Humor consistently increases the level of attention that viewers give to advertisements. Yet, this does not consistently lead to increased message comprehension. In some cases, humor distracts the viewers, causing them to misinterpret the message or fail to notice it entirely (Chan, 2011). Worth noting is the finding that low involvement viewers (those who are not giving their full attention to the ads) tend to view humorous ads as favorable and persuasive. Thus, even if humor does not fully capture the viewers' attention it will still increase the ad's likability and persuasiveness. In fact, some evidence suggests that humorous advertisements work most effectively when audience attention is low (Zhang & Zinkhan, 2006). An explanation for this may be that viewers paying attention most closely may tend to analyze the logic of the message more than other viewers. If this is the case, these logic-seeking viewers may find a humorous approach less effective than a simple logic-based approach.

Memory

Humor's impact on memory of brand messages is a complicated phenomenon. Merely placing humor in an advertisement does make the message or brand easier to recall or recognize. In fact, humor that does not relate to the brand can inhibit memory of the brand and message, and this impact is especially pronounced in viewers who have a low need for humor. Further, the expectancy of humor also inhibits recall of the message, especially when the humor is related to the message (Kellaris & Cline, 2007). However, Kellaris & Cline (2007) found that when humor is not expected, the application of humor that is related to the message will enhance memory. Recall is damaged when the humor is unrelated to brand message (van Kuilenburg, 2008). Brand-related humor improving recall makes sense, given that the humorous moment is likely what viewers remember best. However, the finding that humor expectancy inhibits message memory in brand-related humorous ads is more difficult to process. Kellaris and Cline (2007) reasoned that the expectancy of humor might serve as a distraction to the rest of the ad's message. Therefore, humor that arrives unexpectedly and it related to the brand will most effectively enhance viewers' memory.

Of course, humor does not impact all viewer's memory the same way. Viewers with a high need for humor tend to recall brands and messages better than viewers with a lower need for humor. Relatedly, viewers with a high need for humor state that they are more likely to purchase the products that featured humor in their ads (Cline, Altsech, & Kellaris, 2003).

Some advertisers may point to broader research that suggests that across all consumers, humor bares no significant impact on brand and message recall,

persuasiveness, and intention to purchase (Eisend, 2009). I contend that a broad view is the wrong way to view humor's deployment. Blanket statements about the usefulness of humor don't apply because humor is highly fragile and specialized. It differs in mechanism and intensity based on each situation. Similarly, pointing out its failure in one instance and generalizing that to a wide array of other scenarios displays a fundamental misunderstanding of how humor works. Humor can be and is effective when used with the proper mechanism, in the proper context, in an ad targeting the proper audience. Humor's effectiveness in advertising likely cannot be broadly measured to conclude that it generally does or does not work. Its effectiveness depends on its timing, mechanism, audience, and the context in which it is delivered.

These findings lead to the research questions for this study:

RQ1: What are the crucial elements of making a humorous advertisement successful?

RQ2: Are certain mechanisms of humor more reliable than others despite differing contexts?

Overview

Based on this review examining the mechanisms of humor to gain a clearer comprehension of what makes an advertisement funny it appears that, instinctively, we all have a certain sense of humor that allows us to identify when something is humorous and when it is not humorous. However, we all have individual tastes when it comes to perceiving humor, which means that there is no universally effective humor style. For instance, some enjoy the physical comedy stylings of Charlie Chaplin or Will Ferrell, whereas other do not find this sort of humor amusing. With that in mind, more rigor is

needed to gain an understanding of humor in advertising. The research examined in this literature review provides a vivid picture of which humor styles work most effectively, and that knowledge can be used to shape some of the questions for the interviews with advertising professionals that will be conducted for this master's project. These interviews will include questions about how humor that relates to the brand message and uses a combination of incongruity and playful surprise approach that is devoid of violence, which does not enhance humor (Swani, 2013), and traditional stereotypes, which may displease a small portion of viewers (Eisend et al, 2014). Other questions will include asking about adding the humorous moment at the very end of the advertisement because this tactic yields the strongest humor responses (Woltman Elpers et al, 2004).

Humor's inclusion in advertising attracts much discussion. The strongest detractors of humor may argue that it is overused and overrated because it does not consistently increase purchase intention. These claims seem dubious, given that purchase intention is one of the most difficult outcomes to influence with a single advertisement. Despite the perceived flaws of humor in advertising, the literature appears to show its value. In fact, most of the downsides of humor can be attributed to improper execution. The literature shows that humor consistently increases attention and attitudes towards the ads (Eisend, 2009), and it enhances recall when delivered in a way that relates to the brand and message (van Kuilenburg et al, 2011).

Looking toward the future of advertising, it can be surmised that humor's benefits toward attention and ad enjoyment becoming increasingly valuable as entertainment becomes progressively essential. Consumers have more control than ever over ad watching (or ad avoiding) with the use of DVR, adblocking software, and multiple

simultaneous screen viewing. Rather than forcing or tricking consumers into viewing ads, the viewers must choose to watch them. Based on this, it would appear that humor's ability to capture and hold a viewer's attention through entertainment, makes it as valuable as any element included in advertising. Evidence suggests that humorous advertising accompanying a program can increase program enjoyment and intention to watch the program again (Benson, 2006). The intention to watch again is key. Therefore, if humorous ads make viewers want to watch programs again, humorous ads will also make viewers want to watch future ads made by that advertisers. Theoretically, a string of humorous advertisements may establish the reputation of the advertiser as entertaining, causing viewers to watch future ad spots made by that advertiser, rather than ignore them as they would with many ads.

As consumers gain more control over the ads they watch, they are empowered enough to choose which ads they believe. Consumers can be clever about discrediting ads that stand out as obvious attempts by the advertiser to sell. Instead, consumers favor ads shared with them by friends. A report from Forrester Research found that 70 percent of consumers trust brand recommendations from friends but only 10 percent trust advertising (Wasserman, 2013). With advances in technology, such as smartphones and social media ubiquity, sharing of ads is easier than ever. Given the ease of sharing and the massive participation in social media, it seemed logical to search for elements that increase the likelihood of sharing. Research suggests that the advertisements that move viewers emotionally (e.g. surprise, humor, or warmth) are shared most frequently (Dafonte-Gómez, 2014). This finding could have a significant impact on the landscape of advertising in future years, but this topic has thus far been lightly explored. To expand

the literature, this study will, in part, gather insights from advertising professionals about humor's relevance in modern advertising and its place in fueling consumer-to-consumer recommendations.

Methodology

To collect primary data for my study, I will conduct a series interviews with a mix of advertising professionals, including copywriters (who write the text for ads and do much of the “big idea” generation in the advertising process), art directors (who collaborate with the copywriters to create the best possible visuals for ads), creative directors (who oversee the entire creative process of copywriters and art directors and help them craft the vision for ads), and at least one account executive (who is responsible for the coordination of advertising campaigns and communicating the research-based plan to all those involved), so my sample will have a balance of perspectives on humor's place in advertising. These interviews will be semi-structured in nature, which means I will come into each interview with a predetermined set of questions to ask each interviewee while also allowing leeway for the interview to pivot based on the various responses that are given. This open interview method of gathering data offers advantages over quantitative methods such as surveys because it is open to follow-up questions to provide clarity, and the interviews' relatively free-flowing nature allows unexpected beneficial feedback to be revealed.

A grounded theory approach will be used to analyze the data collected during the interviews. The grounded theory method is defined as a “qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory

about a phenomenon” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This will allow me to develop codes after reviewing the initial data rather than creating codes that may not be ideal fits for the data that has yet to be collected. Within the context of these semi-structured interviews, grounded theory is most applicable because of the inductive nature of the research. This approach will afford the opportunity to develop a theory that explains the data.

In all, I expect to conduct between eight and 10 interviews given that past research has found that redundancies occur after the fourth interview (Taylor, Hoy, & Haley, 1996), so it is often unnecessary to spend time speaking with dozens of participants. For this study, I will interview as many advertising professionals as needed until redundancies begin to appear.

Overview of Semi-Structured Interviews

As mentioned, the data will be collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with professionals in advertising. Interviews were chosen as the means of data collection because of their inherent ability to gain insight into individual experiences and perspectives on the given issues (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews provide a consistent guide for the researcher to ensure that the crucial elements are covered, and they give the researcher a chance to explore new opportunities as they organically arise in a free-flowing discussion that largely resembles a conversation (Edwards and Holland, 2013). This will give me a chance to dig deeper on certain topics about which an interviewee is particularly responsive. The freedom afforded to both me and the interviewees will give us a chance to delve into the unanticipated thoughts about humor and advertising when those discussions appear to be

headed in a fruitful direction. The key here is to not be restricted by a structured and completely determined set of questions that may limit the data that is collected.

Conversations do not stick to a script, so some structure is needed to ensure that the key questions are asked and answered, but the door will be wide open for additional avenues to be pursued as the conversation allows. With this approach to the interviews, I will be able to find “whys” and learn answers to questions that I did not think to ask. This likely means that my early interviews will influence the questions that I ask in later interviews.

Recruiting Participants

When compiling the list of interviewees, I will make sure to include an assortment of professionals working within the advertising field. Candidates will be chosen who worked in design, some with backgrounds in copywriting, and another who works as an account executive. I also will include a mix of interviewee experience in the profession (some seasoned veterans and some fresher faces), gender, race, and geography. This will be done to gain the fullest perspective of a diverse array of professionals in advertising, rather than only the insight of one gender and race of copywriters, which may provide an incomplete overview. To illustrate the diversity of the interviewees, I will include a table that outlines the demographics of the individuals in my final paper. I plan to recruit at least 13 interview candidates, but I understand that more may need to be recruited in case any participants are not willing to be interviewed for some reason.

In all, I will conduct between eight and 10 interviews and will not exceed that range. Past research has found that redundancies occur after the fourth interview (Taylor, Hoy, & Haley, 1996), so it is unnecessary to spend time speaking with dozens of

advertising professionals for the sake of this research.

The initial contact with each candidate will be made through email. Ideally, I can reach each person directly, but I may need to go through someone in human resources or administration first. The email will explain why I am reaching out, including details on the length and content of the interview, how I will use the data I collect, and where the writeup may eventually be published. I will request an in-person interview for the candidates who are within reasonable driving distance and a video-chat interview for the more distant candidates. I will send these emails in a timely manner, so I can set a schedule and leave myself enough time to analyze the data.

Interviewing Process

To guide each interview and build some momentum in the right direction, I prepared a list of questions standard questions. These questions are meant to be broad. They will begin a line of questions or a subject to discuss until it resolves itself based on its own momentum. Ideally, each interview flows smoothly and does not resemble a dry and lifeless question and answer format. If a conversation begins to flow too freely, I will steer it back in the appropriate direction by asking another one of the pre-planned questions on my list. Each interview will last between 30-60 minutes. A list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Although other questions will inevitably arise during the conversation, this initial list of questions will provide a solid starting point. Also, as I mentioned before, early interviews will reveal helpful questions that I can ask in subsequent interviews, so this list of pre-planned questions will be updated as needed.

Data Analysis

I will take notes during each interview, but I will focus primarily on listening and carrying on a conversation. Since breaks to take notes will likely hinder any momentum of the conversation, I will limit my note taking to the bare minimum and audio record each conversation to ensure that no data is lost. I will take additional notes immediately after the interview to stay organized, and these audio recordings will later be transcribed and those transcriptions will be de-identified.

As I cycle through the interviews, I will develop codes based on themes that emerge within the data that I collect, which is a grounded theory approach. This will make finding commonalities between the content of each interview easier to determine. I will continuously recode the data based on new data from each subsequent interview. Broad categories are certain to emerge at first and will become more refined and specific as more interviews are conducted. This should eventually give me a clearer idea about how these professionals view humor as a strategy in advertising.

Interview Candidate Bios

Scott Shade – Advertising, graphic design, branding, marketing, copywriting, print production, photo/video art direction, new media, instructor, manager and general ideator, are all things that fuel Scott's passion for my profession. He is currently the associate creative director at Woodruff and has more than 20 years of experience in advertising and design.

Ben Pfeiffer - Ben is a senior copywriter at Momentum Worldwide, where he has worked for the past three years. Since graduating from the University of Missouri in 2014, ben has spent his time developing and executing advertising concepts and company taglines. He has experience in print, radio, social and digital advertising.

Chase Koeneke - Chase has worked as a copywriter for Boxing Clever and Group360 Worldwide for roughly five years combined. He currently works for UPBrand Collaborative in St. Louis as a writer. Chase is one of the younger interview candidates on my list, which will provide a different perspective to balance out the interviewees who have been in the business for far longer.

Sam Chandler - Sam worked as an art director at We Are Alexander for over four years before moving to Momentum Worldwide to become a senior art director, where he has worked for the past year. He's a dynamic conceptual thinker with experience turning raw ideas into beautiful executions, which should bode well for his value as an interviewee.

Matt Tornetto - Matt currently works as a senior art director at FUSION Marketing in St. Louis. He has nearly ten years of professional advertising experience and has produced thoughtful design and actionable advertising.

Drew Grier – Drew is graduate of the University of the Missouri with a Bachelor's in Journalism with an emphasis in copywriting. He is currently a copywriter at We Are Alexander where he is working on campaigns for Anheuser-Busch.

Omid Farhang - Omid Farhang joined Momentum in 2014 as the agency's Chief Creative Officer, NA. Prior to joining Momentum, Farhang spent two years at Creative Artists Agency. He began his career at Crispin Porter+Bogusky where he rose from intern to Group Creative Director in five years. Over his career he has won numerous industry awards including multiple Cannes Gold, Clio Gold, One Show Gold, Andy Gold, and a Grand Effie. In 2016, Omid was named to Ad Age's 40 Under 40, and he is proud to serve on the Ad Council.

Laurie Peck - Laurie is an experienced creative leader and award-winning copywriter with a deep understanding of traditional and digital communications. She has a heavy agency background with a cross-disciplinary skillset (marketing and creative). She is an expert at working with cross-functional teams to develop process, as well as developing and directing the creative teams that serve the business. She is a passionate, highly collaborative, hands-on creative who commands the power of the written word to bring

brands to life and help achieve business goals.

Steve Hunt - Steve is an agency veteran with nearly 30 years of experience as Copywriter and Creative Director. Steve has created award-winning work for large and small clients alike, including Budweiser, Bud Light, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, National Car Rental, Coca-Cola, Upper Deck and more. Prior to Cannonball, Steve served as Global Creative Director for Momentum Worldwide.

Tim Dyer - Tim is a managing Partner & Chief Creative Officer, Manifesto; # 124 Inc. 500

He has a background in brand strategy, campaign development, experiential marketing and internal engagement for Fortune 500 brands, non-profits, and disruptive startups. As Co-Founder & Chief Storyteller of Manifesto, Tim leads his creative practice across advertising campaigns, employee engagement, and brand launch/rebranding initiatives.

Ryan Dillon - Ryan is a creative Director at Trozzolo, a marketing and advertising agency in Kansas City, where he has been for the past three years. He previously worked at VML, Bozell, and Leo Burnett as an art director or creative director. Ryan has 15 years of experience working in advertising for agencies across the United States.

J. Michael Roach - J. Michael is an award-winning agency leader with a history of impressive growth. J. Michael has a proven creative management and emerging media marketing expertise with more than 20 years of experience in advertising.

Conclusion

Past research into humor's use in advertising is substantial, but much of it is quickly becoming outdated as the needs of advertising changes. Technology advancements, particularly social media, have demanded changes from advertising professionals in the executions of their various campaigns. While general conclusions can be reached about the effectiveness of humor in advertising, it would be more illustrative to gather fresh takes from creative professionals who know the ever-changing industry best.

Limitations

The advertising professionals interviewed for this research will consist largely of (or entirely, depending on which candidates agree to participate) individuals working in the Midwest. This may not give the broadest understanding that would come from candidates who live across the country or around the world, but many of the agencies where these individuals are employed do work internationally, so this limitation is not a critical concern. Another concern is that this study will not be combined with quantitative data to enhance understanding. Future studies conducted on a larger scale with more time and a larger budget should likely be done in future years to add to the research base. These studies could include a quantitative analysis component.

References

- Alden, D. L., Mukherjee, A., & Hoyer, W. D. (2000). The effects of incongruity, surprise and positive moderators on perceived humor in television advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 29(2), 1-15.
- Beard, F. K. (2008). Advertising and Audience Offense: The role of intentional humor. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 14(1), 1-17.
doi:10.1080/13527260701467760
- Blackford, B. J., Gentry, J., Harrison, R. L., & Carlson, L. (2011). The prevalence and influence of the combination of humor and violence in super bowl commercials. *Journal of Advertising*, 40, 123-134.
- Business Wire. (2007). *Apple Inc. "Get a Mac" Named the Most Successful Marketing Campaign of 2007*. Retrieved from
<https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20070608005253/en/Apple-Mac-Named-Successful-Marketing-Campaign-2007>
- Chan, F. Y. (2011). Selling through entertaining: The effect of humour in television advertising in Hong Kong. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 17, 319-336.
doi:10.1080/13527261003729220
- Cline, T. W., Altsech, M. B., & Kellaris, J. J. (2003). When does humor enhance or inhibit ad responses? *Journal of Advertising*, 32(3), 31-45
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1), 3-21.
- Dafonte-Gómez, A. (2014). The key elements of viral advertising. From motivation to emotion in the most shared videos. *Comunicar*, 22(43), 199-206.

doi:10.3916/C43-2014-20

DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. (2006). The Qualitative Research Interview. *Medical Education, 40*, 314-321.

Edwards, R., & Holland, J. (2013). *What is qualitative interviewing?* London: Bloomsbury.

Eisend, M., Plagemann, J., & Sollwedel, J. (2014). Gender roles and humor in advertising: the occurrence of stereotyping in humorous and nonhumorous advertising and its consequences for advertising effectiveness. *Journal of Advertising, 43*(3), 256-273. doi:10.1080/00913367.2013.857621

Eisend, M. (2009). A meta-analysis of humor in advertising. *Journal of The Academy Of Marketing Science, 37*, 191-203.

Kellaris, J. J. & Cline, T. W. (2007). Humor and ad memorability: On the contributions of humor expectancy, relevancy, and need for humor. *Psychology & Marketing, 24*(6), 497-509.

Livingstone, R. (2011). Better at life stuff: Consumption, identity, and class in Apple's "get a Mac" campaign. *Journal of Communication Inquiry, 35*, 210-234.
doi:10.1177/0196859911413469

Nudd, T. (2015). *Goodby and Silverstein revisit their greatest hits, and notorious misses, in Cannes talk*. Retrieved from <https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/goodby-and-silverstein-revisit-their-greatest-hits-and-notorious-misses-cannes-talk-165597/>

Nudd, T. (2011). Apple's 'Get a Mac,' the complete campaign: Hodgman and Long, ad

characters for the ages. Retrieved from <http://www.adweek.com/creativity/apples-get-mac-complete-campaign-130552/>

Oetting, J. (2016). *23 Quotes From Bill Bernbach on Advertising & Creativity*. Retrieved from <https://blog.hubspot.com/agency/bill-bernbach-quotes>

Ogilvy, D. (1985). *Ogilvy on advertising*. New York City: Vintage Books.

Swani, K., Weinberger, M. G., & Gulas, C. S. (2013). The impact of violent humor on advertising success: A gender perspective. *Journal of Advertising*, *42*, 308-319. doi:10.1080/00913367.2013.795121

Taylor, R. B., Hoy, M. G., & Haley, E. (1996). How French advertising professionals develop creative strategy. *Journal of Advertising*, *25*(1), 1-14.

van Kuilenburg, P., de Jong, M. D., & van Rompay, T. J. (2011). 'That was funny, but what was the brand again?'. *International Journal of Advertising*, *30*, 795-814. doi:10.2501/IJA-30-5-795-814

Voss, K. E. (2009). Using humor in conjunction with negative consequences in advertising. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising (CTC Press)*, *31*(2), 25-39.

Wasserman, T. (2013). *Report: 70% of consumers trust brand recommendations from friends*. Retrieved from <https://mashable.com/2013/03/21/70-percent-brand-recommendations-friends/#mP5QJizvwsq3>

Woltman Elpers, J. M., Mukherjee, A., & Hoyer, W. D. (2004). Humor in television advertising: A moment-to-moment analysis. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *31*(3), 592-598.

- Yoon, H. J. & Tinkham, S. F. (2013). Humorous threat persuasion in advertising: The effects of humor, threat intensity, and issue involvement. *Journal of Advertising*, 42(1), 30-41. doi:10.1080/00913367.2012.749082
- Zhang, Y. & Zinkhan, G. M. (2006). Responses to humorous ads. *Journal of Advertising*, 35(4), 113-127.
- Ziv, A. (1988). National styles of humor. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

APPENDIX A

Sample Interview Questions:

1. What kind of approaches do you use creatively in advertising?
 - a. Can you give any examples of these?
2. What do you believe an effective humor ad looks like? How would you define it in your own words?
3. How do you view humor as a creative strategy to increase interactions (likes and shares) with ads on social media?
4. What role do you see humor playing in ads displayed on social media, where catching instant attention is crucial?
5. Are there certain brands or products that would or would not benefit from a humor strategy?
 - a. Why or why not, are there any examples?
6. Why do you believe or not believe humor is effective in advertising?
7. What goes into creating humorous ads?
 - a. What are the ingredients you believe are necessary?
8. How do you utilize humor as a creative strategy to connect consumers to brands?
9. Do you view certain mechanisms of humor (e.g. violence, stereotyping, surprise, physical comedy, incongruity, random humor, puns, self-deprecation) as more reliable?

Appendix E: Professional analysis source overviews

The following are brief biographies of the eight advertising professionals that were interviewed.

Drew Grier – Drew is graduate of the University of the Missouri with a Bachelor’s in Journalism with an emphasis in copywriting. He is currently a copywriter at We Are Alexander where he is working on campaigns for Anheuser-Busch.

Craig Stewart - Craig has worked as a copywriter for seven years. He is currently specializing in creating engaging college sports hospitality events for UPS, and above-the-line and retail marketing communications for SunTrust Bank. Continuing to develop talents in new business pitches and taking on larger roles in client thought leadership

Chase Koeneke - Chase has worked as a copywriter for Boxing Clever and Group360 Worldwide for roughly five years combined. He currently works for UPBrand Collaborative in St. Louis as a writer. Chase is one of the younger interview candidates on my list, which will provide a different perspective to balance out the interviewees who have been in the business for far longer.

Lauren Hystead - Lauren has worked as a copywriter for eight years, working primarily in the Midwest. She worked at TRISECT Agency and SOCIALDEVIANT in Chicago after graduating from the University of Missouri. She also hosts a podcast about freaky things.

Miranda Cowan - Miranda graduated from the University of Missouri-Columbia with a Bachelor of Journalism, Emphasis in International Strategic Communication and a minor in Spanish in May 2018 and currently work as a Copywriter at Moosylvania. She worked on 360 degree brand campaign on Dairy Queen.

Tim Dyer - Tim is a managing Partner & Chief Creative Officer, Manifesto.

He has a background in brand strategy, campaign development, experiential marketing and internal engagement for Fortune 500 brands, non-profits, and disruptive startups. As Co-Founder & Chief Storyteller of Manifesto, Tim leads his creative practice across advertising

Scott Shade – Advertising, graphic design, branding, marketing, copywriting, print production, photo/video art direction, new media, instructor, manager and general ideator, are all things that fuel Scott’s passion for his profession. He is currently the associate creative director at Woodruff and has more than 20 years of experience in advertising and design.

campaigns, employee engagement, and brand launch/rebranding initiatives.

Marissa Cuconato - Marissa has nearly 10 years of experience as a copywriter. After graduating from the University of Missouri she worked at agencies in New York, where she currently lives and works on campaigns for brands like Nivea, Oreo, and Target.

Appendix F: Interview Transcripts

Interview with Drew Grier

Thursday, February 7 at 7 p.m.

- Jared: The first question I'd like to ask is how long have you been working in advertising?
- Drew: I've been working in advertising. For five and half years. I had an internship, I had a couple of internships. It started, I believe my junior and senior year, then here, so three years I'm actually in the industry.
- Jared: So still pretty new to the game?
- Drew: Yeah.
- Jared: That's good. I'm looking to get a mix of some people who haven't worked for super long and those who have had, you know, 10 plus years of experience.
- Drew: That's perfect.
- Jared: All right, and the jobs that you have had, what have they been and what kind of roles have you performed? You are a copywriter, right?
- Drew: Yup. Copywriter. My first job was, with an agency working on Busch. So I was a junior copywriter. I worked with experiential programs, writing out of home ads, billboards, and doing a little bit of digital and quite a bit of social. Currently, I'm working on smokeless tobacco. That is a lot of social, and it's experiential in the sense that we've done quite a few pop-up shops for the brand, a little bit of radio, and a little bit of TV. So kind of a mix of everything at this new place. And then of course you have the nonstandard totally different things each day.
- Jared: What kind of approaches do you use creatively in advertising?
- Drew: I mean it really depends on the client obviously. A lot of times we will go for a heightened sense of recognition, so people will relate to that guy in that ad, or they think that they totally do whatever is happening in the

social posts, you know. And then in tobacco, we do a little bit of humor, but really I think you don't want to be too funny because ultimately there's a warning on everything that says this product causes cancer. So I think some of our brands are a little more stoic maybe. You kind of go through the full range depending on what client you're doing.

Jared: That makes sense. Well, I'm glad to hear that you've used humorous approaches.

Drew: I don't know if that answers your question. I probably rambled.

Jared: No, no, no, that, that's good stuff because what I'm mostly looking into for on my project here is humor in advertising, different mechanisms that are used and humor's usage in the current landscape, especially, you know, with hypersensitivity and now political correctness kind of running rampant. I just want to see how humorous changed or if it's being used in different ways – that kind of thing.

Drew: Cool.

Jared: So when you use humor, how would you describe what an effective humor ad looks now? It could be something that you've done or maybe even something that you've seen.

Drew: Yeah, well I would say for the most part, and I can't really speak to the past since I am newer to advertising and honestly, you know, until I started really focusing on advertising in school, I didn't pay much attention to ads. So I don't know if this is something new or if this is always the case, but I think most humor in advertising is a fairly, you know, inoffensive. Obviously that's on purpose.

Jared: Sure.

Drew: Brands don't want to unnecessarily stir up controversy. It's always a marketing effort, so there's usually nothing too specific in there that could divide people. Skittles has very odd advertising or Starburst has very weird ads, but those are very specific types of humor. I think for the most part, people kind of try to be very broad and not laugh out loud, funny, but get a chuckle kind of humor. And that's my totally my subjective opinion.

Jared: I mean, that's fair. I actually agree. I think, I mean, generally, especially with the type of ads that you and I see most commonly with the bigger

brands, they want a broad appeal. So obviously they want to be inoffensive. And then some of the stuff that I've covered, you don't want to be too funny. You mentioned going for the chuckle because that can distract from the overall message of what they're trying to communicate there. But just a slight chuckle to give it a positive association can be enough. Again, and that I'm an expert either, but that's what I'm coming across.

Drew: Yeah definitely. And I will say I think even to that point, they might be going for different levels of humor. So, Moon Pie's Twitter is a very specific kind of humor. It's very absurdist. That's different than traditional advertising where you are watching a 30-second commercial that may be funny. So in that case you don't want it to be too funny because people just remember the commercial and not the brand.

Jared: Yeah, I get that.

Drew: Twitter people are going to that brand's Twitter to see the content. So there was no worry that they're going to forget who the brand is, you know? In social media I think, you have a little bit more leeway to be actually funny. Whereas on pre-roll ads, it is not always going to happen.

Jared: That's a good distinction to make. Do you think the humor is used more in the social media or it's just that you use it a little bit more aggressively or how would you define that difference?

Drew: I'd say that people try to be more humorous on social media. Still, they're averse to anything that is very specific or has any sort of edge to it. It's, again, very broad and pretty dull and kind of hitting people over the head with it.

Jared: Yeah.

Drew: In terms of, you know, the number of brands that I think are actually funny, I would say that number is way higher on social media. I don't know why exactly. Theoretically, people spend so much more time on the Internet than they do watching, you know, television or anything like that.

Jared: Do you think it's that people currently go to their internet usage more so for humor than they do for the places where they find standard advertising? Like, on TV? Is that why the humor is integrated more into

the online stuff?

Drew: Yeah, it could be, yeah, it definitely could be. I think that it's generationally that difference. Younger crowds don't go looking for sitcoms on TV when they want humor, the way that older generations did. Now, the younger crowds look online.

Jared: As far as interactions, shares, and engagements, have you found that humor can make those more likely? Is that something that you discussed at you with some of your agencies? Can humor consistently accomplish that?

Drew: Yeah, it's definitely something that's discussed all the time on. And It really just depends on, in my experience so far, it really depends on how comfortable the client is with attempting something that's actually funny. And then also how relevant the humor is. A lot of brands preschedule their social content. They might be, you know, two months ahead or four months ahead. Planning out posts and they just pick arbitrary holidays to celebrate on their social media channels. And I think it's a terrible way to relate to people or appeal to people's humor.

Jared: Interesting.

Drew: Good funny ads are funny because there's some kernel of truth behind them or it's tapping into what people feel. That's why I like standup. Comedians are constantly coming up with new material. It has to be somewhat relevant or it's, it's going to flop, you know?

Jared: Yeah, I agree with you.

Drew: So to answer your question, humor is probably more likely to engage because it's eliciting a response and they're being aware that it's eliciting some kind of response. Whereas if you're using a social feed to simply put out some statement or if a brand is notifying you that they have a new flavor of something, you'll file that away, but you're not going to feel compelled to engage. Whereas when you're laughing out loud, you're going to feel more compelled to add onto the joke. In that way, it kind of becomes this community thing.

Jared: So people definitely could be drawn to something that's funny. Likewise, they would be more likely to share it with somebody or reply on social media. So that's a good a usage for humor.

- Drew: Yeah, it's a good platform for humor.
- Jared: Yeah. As far as attention, do you think that humor can be something that's used in that way since people are kind of just overflowing with things to capture their attention and they are often have a two-screen experience going on. Do you think that humor is an effective way to attract focus?
- Drew: I would say, yeah, I would say it is. I think though that especially on social media and again, I'm going to bring up the Moon Pie, it helps to be consistently funny. It's a good way to get attention that actually leads to consideration of your brand. I think if you have a one-off joke or someone shares something from a brand that's kind of funny once or twice, the attention is going to be very, brief. I think the thing that really gets attention actually would be something more serious. Even though I think there's a lot of problems with it, it gets people's attention because oftentimes it's talking about something that people feel compelled to give their opinion on or compelled to do something about, to help to donate money. Whether it's slacktivism or actual activism is up for debate, but that sort of stuff is better for generating buzz than humor in general. But that's just my opinion.
- Jared: Fair enough.
- Drew: I also think that could potentially just be my own bias because I think really well-done cause marketing campaigns are interesting because of the tightrope they're walking. They walk a line that is a fingernail width thick. You can unintentionally be very offensive about something very important. So I think those are the most compelling. I think there's so much humor out there that I don't need. I don't necessarily need a brand giving me that when I can go to YouTube and find something that is a thousand times funnier.
- Jared: That makes sense. Do you think that humor can be used effectively in capturing occurred events? You mentioned that you've worked with clients that plot their social media stuff out months in advance. But if they do capitalize on something that happens right then and there, have you found that to be really effective?
- Drew: Sure, like the Bud Light thing that just happened – they called out other brands for using corn syrup.

- Jared: Yeah, then some of the brands kind of went at each other on social media.
- Drew: I think if it's timely, yeah. I think if it's timely then it works great.
- Jared: Ok, cool
- Drew: I think that brands can have spat, draw attention and cause engagement and all that, but at the end of the day, it might not actually move the needle as far product purchases. I don't know this for sure, but that's what I'm thinking.
- Jared: The next thing I wanted to ask is are there certain types of brands and products that just should steer clear of humor completely?
- Drew: No, I don't think so. I don't think there are brands that should steer clear completely of humor, simply because I think that there's a way to approach nearly any subject in a way that's funny and also kind of, you know, not make, it doesn't make light in this situation but maybe makes a certain situation or certain topic easier to talk about. I think that's one of the great powers of comedy is that it allows people to talk about things in a way where they still feel open and vulnerable and they're willing to share things with other people. There are definitely brands that should be aware that what everyone in the agency thinks is funny might not be funny to consumers.
- Jared: Great point.
- Drew: In today's climate, there's a lot of people that don't think many things are funny. So, that's a question for brands and agencies in terms of how much backlash are you willing to get for any given tweet or any given post. There's definitely some risk that comes with humor.
- Jared: Do you think that humor is any riskier than another type of attempted emotion. They may be trying to evoke some sort of a feel-good ad that just totally bombs in some sort of way. Do you think that one of those two approaches is riskier?
- Drew: Yes, because I think with feel good ads, even when one flops, people still consider it in good faith. They think the intention was good because they're trying to elicit an empathetic or sympathetic response. Whereas with comedy, people can interpret jokes because they are so cultural and they are so subjective. Someone could interpret a joke as being horribly

offensive and someone else could say that sounded inoffensive. So I think humor is more subjective than something that's more feel good or more so trying to be sincere. Even is a sincere ad bombs, people can understand that the intention was noble.

Jared: What types of approach do you personally to use? Is Humor your favorite method to go about or do you prefer another way?

Drew: Humor is definitely not my favorite approach to write because a lot of clients don't want to risk things and the humor they end up approving isn't humor anymore. It's some watered-down version of something that people won't laugh at. Writing something that has a point of view, is funny, and gets approved by clients is so hard to do.

Jared: Okay, okay.

Drew: I hate myself for saying this, but I like to write things that are empowering. You know, I grew up reading novels for the most part. Hemingway and others were writing things that were kind of stoic and pointed. So I think that's what I naturally gravitate toward.

Jared: What do you think are some of the key ingredients of a successful humor ad? For example, maybe the keys are incongruity or something that's totally surprising? Or does it need to make some sort of reference to something familiar?

Drew: I think it has to be timely or culturally relevant. Then I think it has to have a point of view. That's where it gets tricky because not everyone's going to have the same point of view. Then, and this seems obvious, but there has to be something we recognize as a joke. It needs some kind of set up and punchline or some situation that is, you know, actually funny. I think most spots that fail at humor are trying to be funny with absurdist comedy. They just think that you can just have some familiar situation then make a lot of awkward pauses where people are staring at each other for a long time and it's feels weird. And so that's funny. And that's not funny in my opinion.

Jared: Fair enough. How, how about this: I'm going to run through a couple of different mechanisms of humor and you tell me if you think that they're a viable today or maybe it should be avoided more. Let's go with a humor that relies on physical humor or a violent comedy in advertisements.

Drew: I think it totally depends on the product. And so for violence, if it's or slap sick, if it's animated characters or something, that's totally different than real people. And then it also depends on how the violence is directed.

Jared: Interesting.

Drew: So if it's directed toward women, that's obviously going to be a lot riskier than if it's a bunch of bros palling around.

Jared: How about stereotyping in humor or a traditional stereotyping versus nontraditional? Which one of those of those have you seen?

Drew: I would say in general that's not viable. I think that there are people that have stereotypes of certain ethnicities or a group that are just off limits at this point. Maybe some could work, but I doubt many clients would approve it.

Interview with Craig Stewart

Tuesday, February 12 at 7 p.m.

Jared: What kinds of approaches do you use creatively in advertising in terms of maybe different types of emotions that you're looking to evoke or that sort of thing?

Craig: I think a lot of times it starts with the brand that you're working on. I'll just speak to specific brands since they're well known ones, with a Michelob ultra or something like that where you're really trying to make people think about the choices that they're making. They're trying to be a beer that's all about a healthy lifestyle. It's the same beer. I mean, it's not the same. There are differences, but you'd be more healthy not drinking beer, obviously. But for people who want to drink beer, this brand is about saying that they are here to support you. They're trying to make people feel more positive, uplifted, inspired versus a Bud Light where you're trying to pitch to everybody and they're willing to lean on humor or lean on whatever they can to sort of try and make people just think about Bud Light. My natural writing voice is much more in line with how Bud Light talks.

Jared: Okay, yeah, I know what you mean.

Craig: If I'm writing, a lot of times I end with a button or a punchline or something and that works really well for Bud Light. But if I'm writing stuff for Michelob Ultra, I have to actually go back and remove those and figure out a way to end it off an inspiring note or something that. So I think a lot of it comes down to the last thing that they say. It really does have to be brand by brand, but sometimes you're working so quickly that you don't necessarily get the time to do that the right way and it just ends up being your own voice.

Jared: Sure. When you worked with Bud Light, is humor something that they ever focused on? Were they emphasizing trying to be funny or what are those conversations like?

Craig: I wouldn't say it necessarily. You have to look at the voice that they've developed over a really long time. I think for a while they tried to sort of dial it back and be a little bit more about a brand attribute, whether that was being fresh or being whatever. And you can kind of see it with what

they're doing right now because they've been doing the “dilly, dilly” stuff for the past three years now.

Jared: They have been using that for a while now.

Craig: With their Super Bowl spots, their corn syrup ones, they're still getting that device, but they're using it to talk about a product benefit and not just make a joke or be funny or whatever. So I think they're trying to sort of figure out a way to do both at the same time, which can be done and they're willing to spend the money to do that because they spent so much time and effort building that campaign.

Jared: Yeah, it seems that way.

Craig: So they're using the funny people that they've built to tell that story in a way that was moderately humorous. I think sometimes it's more successful than others.

Jared: Sure, humor is such a fickle beast.

Craig: Definitely. So... I think when you work here, you're given a voice guideline, right? And it's usually it's, we are this, we are this. So that might mention that the brand is lighthearted and irreverent but not rude. If they're trying to be funny, sometimes they're drawing a box around it so that you don't end up doing something that would hurt the brand or be seen in a way that could get offensive. So they're definitely not being funny just be funny. It's a very particular kind of humor that they're trying to get after. And I don't know if it's 100% wanting to be cautious. It's more just needing to be aware. To soften the impact, they might use cartoons. They don't want to go out there and take really bold chances to be incendiary or funny or satirical in a way that might push people the wrong way, but they are willing to try things and do things within reason. They're not stiff, if that makes sense.

Jared: Yeah, I get it.

Craig: But they are also trying to be benign and appeal to the masses, especially since that brand is the biggest beer in the world. So they can't make anyone to mad, you know? They're an interesting example in the world of humor.

Jared: Do you think that the bigger brands are less inclined to go with humor

versus a smaller company that would be more willing to take risks?

- Craig: I do think smaller companies, by nature, are more willing to take risks. You can get away with a lot when you're a smaller company, just because you have nothing to lose. And then you kind of can look at how there are certain companies that are just very traditional, the Fortune 500 type of companies that have been around for 150, 200 years. They use a very different type of funny. It's almost more a nod to the Dilbert cartoon, where it's funny to a business guy but very dry and understated.
- Jared: Yeah, I understand. That makes sense for a big business.
- Craig: Yeah, if anything it's certainly not surreal, but I love when brands go out and do really surrealist type of stuff that you see on Adult Swim on Cartoon Network. I personally love when brands really go do something very strange and weird. And mostly it's because I work in the business and I want to know how they sold that. How did they get somebody to pitch that and then have someone on the client side that loved it and ran with it.
- Jared: Yeah, that's kind of amazing.
- Craig: Skittles is a good example of very surreal stuff. Very weird, but it's still within the boundaries of marketing. There are some that are even more out there. I mean Skittles pox is definitely a strange idea. They give me hope that I can sell a super weird ad one day. To get an ad like that approved, a lot of times it has to be somebody that works there. That Skittles employee was either involved in the birth of it or loves it so much that they're going to really move it forward. Clients have to really be on board with an idea like that.
- Jared: What do you think that an effective humor ad looks? You mentioned the kicker at the end and how crucial it can be to have that last line. What else do you think it needs to have to work?
- Craig: Yeah. I don't know. That's a good question. I think it needs an actual joke in it, or it needs to be interesting from a comedic perspective. Think about Geico. They do one-note jokes. Whether it's the candle doing Hump Day or whatever, and they play it out and they do 10,000 of them. And I don't love them, but I know a lot of people do. So that's just me being me being a snob. But I think they work the best when there is a solid comedic premise behind it and a catch phrase never hurts, I guess, for the beer

industry anyway.

Jared: How about timeliness? Maybe capturing some sort of current events, that kind of thing?

Craig: I mean, yeah, if you can actually do it, that's huge. The question is how. One example is Oreo making an ad when the lights went out at the Superbowl five years ago and made a social ad in 15 minutes. It worked for them because of the timeline and it worked because whoever was in charge of the social feed that night had been empowered to do whatever they wanted. They didn't have time to sell that thing, that idea through 10,000 people. They just had management of it and they just did it, and it worked. So I think timeliness especially, but then when you're talking about traditional TV, the production timeline on that is so long. It can be hard to actually nail it on something that's timely enough that it doesn't already feel dated. I feel that was easier probably 10-15 years ago than it is now.

Jared: Do you think that the humor is more prevalent in social media than it is in some of the more traditional medium?

Craig: I do think that because I feel on social media there's two ways to get attention - that's either be funny or take a stance on something that's going to either make people feel outraged or actually support a stand on something.

Jared: Interesting.

Craig: Wendy's is a really successful example of that. They have a really good Twitter feed. Totino's Pizza Rolls is great too. They really have surrealist and very weird humor. It's the kind of humor that is a perfect example of a brand trying new stuff in a social media space. They do a lot of surreal, existential memes and that kind of stuff.

Jared: Do you think that the food industry and food products lend themselves better to humor, especially in social media?

Craig: I don't know. Wendy's and Totino's are two examples, but I'm not certain if it's a wider trend. I think it could be, yeah.

Jared: You seem to think humor is a one of the best ways to engage on social media. Do you think that people will be more likely to engage with that?

- Craig: It's going to be a lot more successful than just saying, "we make really good beans" or whatever your product is. To me it's in that space everything's happening so fast and you have to be doing something interesting and I think you can look at a lot of brands on social media, and you'll see a lot of stuff that gets one retweet and three likes. And most of those are proudly people who work at the agency that's doing it. Humor is tough. I think humor is a valid way to play on online, but you need somebody who speaks the language of it. You need someone who knows what makes people react and what makes people laugh on Twitter.
- Jared: Definitely, some people have a knack for it.
- Craig: I'm not very good at that. You need someone who speaks the language and can play by Twitter's rules a little bit. It's so specific. You almost can't do setups and punchlines. You have those instances of jokes based on "me in real life" stuff. To succeed on Twitter, you need someone who understands all that.
- Jared: Yeah. Even if it's objectively funny, it might not play as well across all the different mediums across social media and television and all that.
- Craig: Yeah. And I think that when people just take their ad and then chop it up and put it on social media, that doesn't do anything. I spent a very small amount of time working on social calendars for a while, and it's really, really hard. I think that people who invest in it are seeing benefits of it and the people who think they can just hire an intern or somebody to just run the social media accounts are the people who are finding themselves in trouble or not getting the reactions that they want. If the social media is run by old white guys who are out of touch, it's probably not going to do very well.
- Jared: Do you think that there are certain types of brands and products that should just avoid humor as a strategy, or is it open to anyone if they play a correctly?
- Craig: That is a good question. I think the issue is doing it correctly. I think you see that brands get themselves in trouble when they don't necessarily do it correctly, or they're trying to make a joke but it's not well timed or well nuanced. I've seen pregnancy tests do "the most important thing you'll ever pee on." That doesn't seem like the type of company that would use humor, but it works it's done well.

- Jared: Have you come across this in your personal experience, certain brands being averse to humor?
- Craig: It was just coming down to their voice or a lot of times. They said, “oh, that's just not us. That's not how we talk.” I spent a lot of time working on a bank and they were very conservative. Even it was doing it was doing posters inside of the bank. So even if it was a joke that worked and it also offered a brand benefit, it still got rejected. They rejected all my funny ideas because they didn't think of themselves as funny.
- Jared: Yeah, for sure. Super broad question here: Do you think that humor in general, is effective in advertising in terms of forming a positive association with the brands and maybe leading to making sales are making purchases?
- Craig: I think humor is a way to be memorable, especially in TV. And being memorable is kind of the best thing that you can ask for. When customers are in the aisle or wherever they are, you kind of show up top of mind because there's emotion at work. It can be successful. I've been personally a part of some very successful ads that were based on emotion. But if you don't have some emotional story to tell, if you're just trying to say that you sell the best beans or whatever, for example, then it's easier to use humor. If you're funny, it's going to be more memorable than the 10,000 boring companies that are all out there. So many companies, like insurance companies, for example, are trying to be funny. They see humor as a good way to be memorable.
- Jared: Do you think humor works best in TV?
- Craig: Yeah, I think it works best in TV because you're seeing it a lot. It can also be cheap on TV, which can get very expensive on production side. Think about when you're watching a sporting event and there's just a sea of ads, especially during the football season, you see the same 40 ads over and over. I think if you're funny and it stays funny, it doesn't get annoying or it doesn't wear on you, then that is going to be more memorable than something else. And I think, I think that TV is a good medium for that because you have a structure – there's 30 seconds, and you've got to get whatever you're trying to do done in that time. I think humor works really well for social, and it works really well on TV. But that doesn't mean it's always easy. Humor is an interesting animal in the marketing game because everyone thinks that they can be funny. Then we all know the

brands that think that they are and they're not and they get very annoying by the end of football season.

Jared: Right. So how can you tell if something's going to be a funny repeatedly or if it's going to get annoying?

Craig: I don't know the answer to that question. I think that's something that advertisers can prepare for as they're making something, but sometimes it's impossible to anticipate. I think that a lot of it comes down to your gut and your experience and your taste. You kind of just have to trust the people that are writing it and putting it together, which is where it gets difficult. If a client doesn't trust their ad agency, then that's when things get watered down or things get more complicated and they add layers on top of stuff and it's something that might've been funny at one point, but it is now annoying or not funny at all.

Jared: You mentioned humor can make something memorable. Do you ever find that something's funny and you remember that it was funny, but it doesn't link to the brand?

Craig: Yeah, yeah. I think that that's a huge issue, especially in crowded industries. For people who don't actively pay attention to ads, it can be a problem. I think we've all had those conversations with our parents or people who don't work in our industry, and they're like, "oh I love that one." And then you're like, "who was that?" And then they had no idea. So I think it's, again, it's kind of a good point. I do think it's better when it's funny, but it's also speaking to a product benefit or it bakes in something that does make it more connected to the brand. I think that helps. It helps to link a brand benefit to a joke.

Jared: Is that something you guys talk about when you're going through ideas and coming up with concepts, that you want to link a benefit of the brand to the joke?

Craig: I mean everything starts with the creative brief, right? So it's if that's the story that they're trying to tell. It doesn't always work this way. You should always have one message that you're trying to get across and if you can make that message funny or interesting, I think that works better. Then again, just doing something that's funny for the sake of being funny isn't ideal. And that's the hard part because you could come up with weird and goofy and fun ideas all day long. But will they actually answer the

question that has been presented? Will they actually do the thing that's been asked to do?

Jared: Right. It's kind of like, yeah it's funny but so what?

Craig: Right, and that's why I've seen some places try to quantify if something's funny. To me, that's ridiculous. I listen to enough comedy podcasts to tell you that the people who were legitimately funny and not advertising funny, would say that that's an impossible game.

Jared: How do you think that humor has changed? Maybe even within the time that you've started working, have you noticed any sort of changes within the last few years as people become more aware of the sensitivity and the potential backlash if a joke doesn't land?

Craig: I think that that actually might be why you've seen more goofy humor or surreal stuff versus actually making a joke about something that's happening out in the world, especially if it comes to something political or something that is a divisive issue. I don't know if that's wrong, to be sensitive to the fact that, people can be offended. Most brands have a stake to lose. They're not South Park. They have to be mindful of who they are and sort of speak to the way that a brand has been set up. This is just my speculation versus personal experience, but I do think brands are more careful and more mindful and there are hopefully more diverse opinions in the room when something is being made. It's not as good as it should be, but hopefully it continues to improve.

Jared: That's a really good point. Just getting the voices in the room can make a real difference in making sure something is funny and won't cause issues.

Craig: I mentioned a lot of times when something comes out and it doesn't get received very well, it's because it's a younger generation that's reacting negatively to the message and maybe older people that are putting it out that didn't understand why it was problematic. For example, I'm working on some stuff for Pride right now and I have gay coworkers, and I'm bringing them in on everything. I just definitely know that I'm covering my butt and, of course, I'm also being respectful of their opinions. If you aren't checking that stuff, you're being negligent.

Jared: Yeah, that's a good point. That's definitely a process that more real agency should be going through, getting into diverse opinions.

- Craig: To be flatly upfront, it's a problem across the industry. It's pretty dominated by white men. And there are some successful women and there are successful people with other diverse backgrounds, but in my experience working here in St. Louis, there's not enough African American voices. There are not enough Asian voices. There are not enough of any of them. I don't know how to solve that problem.
- Jared: One last thing I want to ask: what kinds of mechanisms that humor do you find to be effective? I'll give you a couple of examples: surprise humor, physical humor, random, surreal stuff, stereotyping, or maybe violence.
- Craig: Me personally, I love weird, the weirder the better. That's just my personal taste. but I do think, I don't know for brands what works best. I think it comes back down to what the brand themselves is. I don't think surprise is always the best way to go. I would also stay away from stereotyping. That's something that might have played well years ago, but it would likely be met with backlash today.

Interview with Chase Koeneke

Saturday, February 16 at 7 p.m.

Jared: What's your current job? Where you work?

Chase: So I work in a place called Upbrand. I celebrated my one year with them in January. They're a cool place there, right down St Louis. They're in a building called Pacific. It's, literally the heart of downtown. I live downtown too so it's an easy couple blocks walk to work. They are a smaller agency, about 16, 17 people. And that's been nice. My first job was with a much larger agency called group 360, and then they've changed their name to We Are Alexander now. That place was 200 plus people. And I mean it was nice, but you were kind of being a junior copywriter at that time. You did the junior copywriter work and then it's all they kind of let you do. That was, I don't know, a little tiring. At some point, I didn't feel like I was progressing or getting some of that stuff down. I met a lot of great people, but a big place like that has a lot of turnover. So one of my friends there, who was the assistant creative director, he said, "hey, I was thinking about leaving. maybe you should think about it too." So then I went to a much smaller place called Boxing Plover, which was 30 people. And that was a lot of fun. I felt like I got to wear many more hats and did a lot of really cool things. but that business just kind of slow guide and we went from 30 down to 20, the 10 down to about a eight. And then, just, we couldn't, we couldn't get business.

Jared: What do you think happened there?

Chase: There was maybe a little bit of mismanagement. So that ended up dying in December of 2013, I guess. And then that same guy who told me to leave then said I should look for something else. So I call and said, "Hey, you got anything open? And he said, actually, yeah, we totally do." So I was able to sneak in there and I've been there for a year and having a great time working my way around here. Yeah. I honestly, I think I like the smaller agency thing. There's certainly something you get out of a big agency where you get to work on bigger brands, get to do cool things like we Alexandra or are they working and has a Bush stuff. Oh Wow. I'm working on Bud Light and on Stella Artois. Those are brand's that my family would know. You can tell them, and they go, "oh yeah, I've heard of that." And now I work on smaller things that not many people have

heard of, local things. Some bigger things, like I'm working on a tequila right now and some other cool clients, but nothing with the name cache of Bud Light.

Jared: How was the turnover at your new place?

Chase: Turnover? Yeah, since I've been there, none. We've had one intern come and go. Other than that, they've been really stable, which is one of the things I'm looking for out of an agency after the last one died. This, this place has been a new interesting experience to pull every day and to know, oh, hey, you're going to be there next week or next month. It seems to be a good, tight knit group. People who want to keep doing these things. And so yeah, we've been lucky enough not to have any sort of turnover lately.

Jared: Yeah. It's definitely nice to have that security and stability. Just curious because I'm interning at a place right now and in Columbia, Missouri and probably about 16 or 17 people, same size as the one that you're at, but there's been a lot of changing since I've been there. I don't know if it's just a coincidence, but there have been a couple of people leave and then like four new hires just in the last month or so. I haven't asked around too much to know if that's the way that it always is.

Chase: Yeah. This is actually kind of unusual to have something that's stable. You find a lot at least I've found a lot in the St Louis market and been same in advertising in other places, but you don't really seem to move up within your own agency if you want a promotion, if you want a raise, that's something where you usually have to go somewhere else. And I don't know exactly why that is, but it, it seems to happen pretty much everywhere. The and kind of bad thing is that this is such an incestuous industry and especially in spots where everything is really close together. Like I, I worked at group 360, which I'm in my apartment now and it is across the street that way. I worked at boxing clever, which is three blocks that way and now I work nearby again, so I'm in a very lucky position where I can just find agencies that are close.

Jared: It sounds like the area is an advertising hub.

Chase: Yeah, absolutely. It really is a nice advertising place. One reason I think there's a lot of turnover is that advertising is really cheap these days. If there's a lot of condensing, there's a lot of companies that are bringing in people, but they're not quite rising up as much. It's harder for these big

agencies to, to keep with the amount of money that you'd make to keep all these people. And when stuff happens, there's a lot of turnover. There's a lot of people leaving because they see the writing on the wall. There's a lot of people being like, oh, I should leave, but the kind of nice thing is that because a lot of people go a lot of places. Like my first year I would go to lunch with people, and they would talk about the people they know at other places. And I would just think that I don't know who the fuck any of these people are, but soon someone would say they're from a little town called blank that's is just 10 miles north of Columbia. So like, this is my niche. I know Hallsville I know Columbia, now I'm going to move into the big scary city and I, I just don't know anybody. Am I ever going to know anybody? And within a year, everybody that I met and liked led to me slowly building up my network. Some went to momentum. They went to Boxing Clever. They were from tons and tons of places. So then a year later I was that guy going like, oh yeah, how's nick? He's over there. That's neat. I'm insider. I have a network now and a really nice, like I said, when Boxing Clever shut down, I was able to call my friend and ask if they were looking for anybody. And they are like, yeah, we actually are. And it was nice to just make that one call. We'll find something like that.

Jared: How long did it take you to get to that point?

Chase: To feel like I had a network, I would say honestly about a year. It really was that first year at group 360. And I think a lot of it was because it was such a big place having 200 people there, a lot of whom left for other things. You were able to start building a network of these 200 people and now like 50 of them are in different places. So now I know 50 people in 50 different places, and that was nice. I think if I had started at Up Brand and was in this group of 16 people and it was the same 16 people the next year, I don't feel like I would have really grown much at all.

Jared: All right. What types of approaches do you like to use in advertising in terms of, for example, maybe different types of emotions that you'd like to evoke? What's your favorite approach to the use?

Chase: Sure. So with copywriting, and advertising to a larger extent, part of it is putting aside what you want, what you'd like to do for sure, or putting your own approach aside because you need to speak in the voice of the brand that you're talking from and you need to know the answer you're talking about. I find that especially with copywriting because it's word based and you need to look for those voices when you do things. But

personally, to answer your question: I'm a humor kind of guy. I like doing any stuff. I like doing clever wordplay stuff.

Chase: I try to work those in when I can. Even though that the client isn't necessarily looking for that option, I like to give them that as one of the options. Just so that you have that as an option. And you tell them it might not be called for by the situation, but this is something we could do. I think humor for me, it's just something that, and I'm not saying I'm super funny or anything, I think it's something that comes a little more naturally to me than writing something really dramatic. And I think it's something that I appreciate more in the advertising that I see as well. Like I'm looking for something that's clever, and I'm looking for some that makes me think a little bit. I'm looking for something that references a thing that I've watched or read or played. In that sense, I like to kind of pay that back and reference my own kinds of things. Those get through and sometimes they don't. That's kind of just how the business works.

Jared: How receptive are the brands to the clients, typically, when pitching a humorous idea?

Chase: I would say it's, it's really tough and it really varies by brand. One of our clients that we work on is BJC Barnes, a hospital that's looking for fun or specifically they're working on stuff for their employees. So it's a lot of that stuff. It's a lot of really genuine, it's a lot about how to build your career. It's a lot about how you should have faith in us because we have your back and that kind of thing, that we did good work here and wanted to continue doing it. If a brand is an exotic Tequila, which I've worked on, that is way more interested in having fun in showing their side of things and doing things that are clever. And that's just kind of it. It does vary by brand. I think advertising has kind of a split a little bit. There are definitely brands that are going way more in on the safe way, and then there are brands that are saying yes to risk. Eh, there's kind of a chilling effect right now. I almost don't want to bring it up, but something like the Kevin Hart thing or you see celebrities that are getting on with things, or just people bring that they probably shouldn't be bringing. And I think that's had kind of a chilling effect on some brands of like, oh, well then we don't want to do comedy at all. Like we don't want to want to even dip our toe into that water and potentially get caught on anything. So anything that we see that might even be hinting at that, we don't even want it. But then I think you have other brands that are willing to be bold. I think of something like a Wendy's that's like, "we want to have fun because we have to beat a

McDonald's" or something like that. "Nobody's going to pick us over McDonald's unless we can do something to surprise and delight them." So I think there is kind of a split going on where some brands are really leaning into humor and they really getting value out of it. And other brands just go, you know, that is too much of a pitfall for us and we just don't want to touch it.

Jared: So do you think that humor can work well if a brand is maybe not the top dog in their field, but they're trying to compete with something like a McDonald's, the way that Wendy's is?

Chase: Absolutely. I think the brands that do the most in terms of humor are the little guys trying to compete with the big dogs. I think if you look at really any leading competitor brand, you're going to find that the competitor tries to have more fun, like it's a "we try harder" thing. Some of that stuff is clever. The Wendy's thing that we've talked about, I think, as much as I think Pepsi is the worst fucking drink in the world, they definitely have more fun commercials than Coke. Coke is very much, "we're all about friendship. We're all about sharing." It's not as fun if somebody is all about world peace. Pepsi just had a Super Bowl commercial with Steve Carell talking about how Pepsi's the one you want, which I totally disagree with because I've tasted it, but they are definitely out there trying more and brands that try for a lot are more fun to work on.

Jared: What do you think an effective humor ad looks like? Who Do you think are some of the ingredients?

Chase: I mean, humor has some pretty fundamental elements in all its forms. Whether it's standup comedy or advertising, a joke usually has an element of surprise. A lot of it is doing something unexpected or taking someone's idea of what is expected and then turning it on its head. Wordplay is certainly something I like for making connections. Those are fundamental elements of humor. And if you can execute them well, then that's what we'll decide is funny. If you execute them poorly, then you're boring or maybe offensive. So in terms of what a humorous ad looks like, I go to something really old school: The Volkswagen ads, the really old Volkswagen ad, the lemon. You know, if you're doing anything with Swanson, I'm sure he's brought it up.

Jared: Yes, of course.

- Chase: But yeah, like the idea that you already have preconceived notions about this car and then the line is telling you exactly what you think this car is and, and you're not expecting that. You're expecting, okay, this car company's going to try to sell me on this car, right? What do they think about it? And Volkswagen saying, yeah, it's a lemon. And they go into it further. And now that they've gotten your attention, now that they've gotten you to say, oh, that's clever. That's kind of funny. Then they can come in and say this is the car you see right here. To us there's nothing wrong with it. We're not going to hard-sell it to you, and we are committed to making really quality cars. So that I think is a pretty classic example of humor, even if it's not a laugh out loud funny, funny ad.
- Jared: Sure.
- Chase: One that really sticks in my mind is Mountain Dew's baby puppy monkey commercial. That is just so absurd that it's what, two, three years later since that debuted and I still remember it. I remember it, but there's a funniness to it because it's such an absurdist premise and that is, I guess, another classic example.
- Jared: Yeah. I kind of liked that one too because I remember the first time I saw it, I just thought that it was bizarre and I kind of dismissed it. But then after I saw it a couple more times, it got funnier to me, which usually doesn't happen.
- Chase: The context too, that it was in the Super bowl was definitely a statement that this is big time for advertising. You saw the other ads that were going on that year and I don't remember any offhand, but I just remembered the feeling of kind of funny. Here's your Chrysler ad that's going to be talking about how Detroit can come back and you know you have your other things that are like kind of clever. And then this one's just completely off the wall and it's so different from everything else that I think it created this effective memory planting. People think it's funny because it's something that they haven't been before and that goes back and to the fundamental element of humor of doing something unexpected or surprising.
- Jared: Yeah. So it really sounds like you think the humor can make a brand stand out and catch attention.
- Chase: Yeah, I think it's what brands want. Ultimately brands want to relate to you as the audience so you can feel more loyalty to them. So you can

think, wow, that brand is just like me or it's like what I want to be. A Nike ad is trying to sell you on the idea that you can be an athlete. If you wear our shoes, you can be more like an athlete than you are now and that appeals to you. Then you can relate to Nike on that level and then become more of a fan of Nike. Humor can do the same thing. I feel like I enjoy comedy movies. I like going to see Seth Rogan or Andy Samberg or those kinds of guys on the big screen and now I'm watching this advertisement that is also funny. Oh Wow. You know? Wow. Wendy's really got, like they really got McDonald's. Maybe I'm a Wendy's guy now and that is what brands are ultimately doing. It's a little crass to break it down into really fundamental elements, but it's not so much about like an art or anything, it really is that science of we need to find a way to split the neurons of our audience and very specific way. But like us, how can we do that? Well, humor, to me, that works. And it's not very artful or graceful. Like as much as I'd say, aw man, advertising, it's such an art. Like, you go in and it's just finding the perfect word and it just makes this beautiful tapestry and it's, it's really more of a science.

Jared: Oh, hmm, okay.

Chase: It's that this specific word is a word that people don't respond to. So we don't use that and that's where you get things like SEO, search engine optimization of like, these are the specific words that people use. So we need to make sure we use these specific words in not only our Meta descriptions, but in our tweets. And in any of our copy that we do, we need to make sure we hammer on these words because they are scientifically focus grouped out to figure out that these are the words that people care about. And honestly it's probably a sort of a mix. It's taking these words that are guidelines. It's knowing that a brand like a Tequila brand will want to say things that are social and are about a lot of friends and a lot about saying that they want to have fun. Then it's about finding ways of putting those words together in interesting ways that can be profound.

Jared: Yeah, I see what you're saying.

Chase: I think part of that is also us not wanting to blow our brains out and us wanting to make something that we actually enjoy and are proud of in the end. So there is a kind of a give and take of here's the science based stuff of what we know what works, here's the funds fun part of it. The part that you'll actually enjoy doing, could honestly be a spark of what is, is the

new thing that makes, that then changes the focus group to want that thing. And then the cycle kind of continues. That's a really roundabout way of going and saying it, but that's kind of how things are going, I've seen.

Jared: Do you think that humor can be effective in winning someone over to a brand? It can change brand loyalty if maybe it's a field that doesn't necessarily lend itself to somebody's sticking to one sole brand, but do you think it can change their purchasing decisions?

Chase: I think humor can get somebody off the fence, but I don't know if it can completely change what somebody feels. As I mentioned before, there are zero things that Pepsi can do to win me over. I can appreciate and respect them, but a better product at the end of the day is something I want to associate myself with or partake in. For example, if I'm on the fence about Dr. Pepper and Dr. Pepper does something really interesting and funny and it gets my attention, then I think that maybe I should try a Dr. Pepper. So I think it's more of something that can tip. But if the consumer is hard on something, then it's much tougher to change somebody if you can change them at all.

Jared: So how about with a brand like Pepsi where you don't want to drink it, but you do think that their advertising is entertaining? Does that ever make you talk to other people about it? That you think that maybe through the people you spend time with, maybe they could consider buying Pepsi more just because it's on your mind because of the advertising and you're talking with them about it.

Chase: Potentially. Yeah, it's tougher for somebody in my position. I work in advertising and a lot of people I know work in advertising, we're going to talk about advertising that just happened. So we're all kind of tainted in that way. That's one of the reasons I really hate going through using the Internet because I know that I have a bunch of ads targeted to me, not because I actually want them targeted to me, but because I've had a bunch of other stuff for these clients and I'm getting nurse nurse's shoes. I don't want to do like ad blockers and things like that, but to answer your question for like a more normal person for more typical person, I think that, yeah, it's taking that conversation, for somebody out there who doesn't know anything about mountain dew, doesn't really care about mountain. Do they see the puppy baby monkey thing and they talk about it with a coworker the next day and maybe that coworkers a little bit more on the fence. And to hear a friend say they kind of liked that commercial?

Yeah. Yeah. And they kind of want to be part of the crowd and, there's certainly an influence you can have, being part of the conversation as well. It doesn't have to be a direct thing. It can be an indirect thing. Hashtags are a great example of that. If I went to Twitter streams right now, I'm sure six of the 10 things on there would be things that I haven't even heard of or didn't even think I cared about it.

Jared: Yeah, that's true.

Chase: But knowing that it's in this collective consciousness right now makes me more interested in checking out what it is. So indirectly I can be affected into actually buying a product because somebody or thousands of somebodys have decided that they like it. They want to talk about it. And me being a human being, I want to be part of a crowd as well. I want to get in. I you think of somebody who's reached through like a friend who just saw an ad. That's what stuck with them.

Jared: Do you think that consumers are going to be somehow more convinced because they heard it from you rather than seeing the ad themselves?

Chase: A hundred percent yeah, absolutely. Even if you're not recommending it, they are more likely to be influenced if you're mentioning it. If you're recommending, it sky rockets. If I walked into work tomorrow and said that stupid ass Mountain Dew commercial with the puppy baby. I hate that. That at least brings it up in somebody's mind where they might go, I don't know what you're talking about. There are plenty of ways to just get it in the conversation and that's halfway to home. The rest is actually winning them over in some way, whether that's because your product's good or became directly engaged with what you're doing and liked it. But I think any mention of a brand sometimes even negatively can have a positive effect eventually.

Jared: Yeah, definitely. Do you think that there's a medium that's best suited for humor or maybe just some that are better than others?

Chase: I wouldn't say that there's one specifically better than the other. I think you'll have brands these days that have decided themselves that they think, some sort of better than others. We go back to Wendy's: you look at Wendy's TV commercials, they're kind of funny, but they're not really that funny. They're just more or less showing you what they have to offer. You go on Wendy's Twitter – that is where it's real there. They're doing the

snark and all that stuff. I think Wendy's has found that, that they are more comfortable playing in that space because they think the audience in that space specifically is more attuned to that, whereas a television viewing audience, might not be. So even though I think you could have a very funny campaign on TV, social can be the best for certain voices.

Jared: That makes sense.

Chase: Some brands have decided that TV they view as a place for an older audience. So they want to do less of that Twitter and social media unless it's for a younger audience on the whole. So maybe they think they can do this more modern humor. I think humor can work in any media, but I think you'll have people who think that humor is more effective on certain platforms and, and not as effective on others.

Jared: How about specifically with the clients that you've dealt with? Have they seemed to have different preferences?

Chase: I think it's tougher for me in a specific sense because the clients that we have, we don't work on the entire business. We work on a part. So for that, we really just only do their social media, we've done a few other things for them, but we kind of focus on here's what you do on Instagram and Twitter and we can affect that stuff a little bit and maybe we can have something really that works on this platform. And then we can say, hey, you should take that to another platform and try it there. Because it's working really well over here. For a bigger brand that gets the whole piece of that pie, they would be able to speak to that a little bit more effectively. So I'm trying to think of an example where we've done where the messages really been different across them, but, I'm not really thinking of one. Sorry.

Jared: Okay, no worries. How about, do you think that humor shouldn't be used more for a brand that is trying to reach a wider audience? So like a broad appeal of humor or more so for maybe a smaller brand that has a niche target?

Chase: It's a real double-edged sword because humor works when people think the thing you say is funny. You can tell the same joke to two people and they'd react two completely different ways for it. And one of the reasons I think a lot of brands are not going to have humor is because they're just worried that they're either going to potentially offend somebody on like

way into one spectrum. But on the other end it's just like, maybe somebody just won't think that's funny. If I have this really great reference that harkens back to the classic Andy Samberg movie *Hot Rod*, like, wow, there's going to be a real subset of people who get that. And they will think it's hilarious. And they're going to be brand loyalists forever. And then you're going to have 95% of the people going, I don't know what the hell are you talking about. And that's not very funny to them. So yeah, I think brands should consider humor more when they're making their advertisements and they're thinking about their messaging when they're going after different audiences. But it's a really tough thing to make a joke that everyone thinks is funny and is also a good joke. The more people you please, the less interesting it kind of gets and that's where you get, again, in all sorts of facets. There's the saying that a horse by committee is a camel. That's right. Yeah. Camel is a horse by committee. I guess not horses. A horse is objectively much better, but there are people who want to nitpick little things or don't find this to be as interesting or as useful as other people. And then that's how you end up with something that you look at and go, I don't know, I guess it works for everybody. And, I think you get the same thing in advertising where, for humor at least I can make a joke that I think is really funny and then an editor comes and says we should tweak this joke a little bit. Like editor kind of gets it, but they think it'd be better and more effective. Then the client has input by the time it gets to TV, people don't see the original intent. It could become a too many cooks in the kitchen situation. What used to be really good because it was a singular vision has been diluted into something that's kind of now just whatever. That's another thing about the puppy baby monkey thing is somebody thought of that. And if that is the diluted version that we got, I can't imagine what the singular vision part was. If it's something where someone at Mountain Dew just decided that they were going to go with this person's idea and didn't change a thing, then that's also pretty in a miracle in its own. Yeah. So either way it's a mirror that thing showed up on our televisions. It's, yeah, it's amazing.

Jared: That's pretty amazing that, yeah, it could have been toned down from the original idea.

Chase: Like, I don't really know what puppy baby monkey is. That seems a little stupid and weird to me, but like monkeys are funny. I mean, everybody loves monkeys. It could've just been a monkey stealing or mountain dew, which could have also been funny, but maybe not as funny.

- Jared: Do you find certain mechanisms of humor to be more effective? Like for example, maybe a violent type of humor, stereotyping, surprise? I think you mentioned surprise or maybe something that's surreal.
- Chase: Potentially. Yeah. I really love, sitcoms. That's always been a form of television that I've enjoyed. Sure. And, and you get a lot of slack out of those, especially in older ones. Like I think of like a *Three's Company*, if you want to go really far back. A lot of it is people falling down, people getting hit with things. If we're talking like that as a violent form of humor like that, that is certainly a very base form of humor. It's really fun to watch YouTube videos of guys getting kicked in the nuts. It's just funny. But I think there are certain types of humor that I appreciate more. And I think it's because it's something that only I could appreciate, or I would appreciate more than the average person because I've seen *Hot Rod*. So I would get that joke that other people wouldn't.
- Jared: Sure, since people have different experiences and tastes.
- Chase: Yep, I think to answer your question, there are certain types of humor I think are more effective than others. But it depends on what you mean by effectiveness. Is it effective in making somebody laugh? Is it effective in making them buy your product? Those can be three different answers. That's why it's so important to talk to your client beforehand to get a really solid creative brief from them.
- Jared: Definitely.
- Chase: You can have situations where a client is willing to drill down and talk to a very specific audience in a very specific way. And that's where they might give you a little bit more freedom to take your singular vision, humor, whatever you want to do, and give that a shot because in those moments that can be really effective. That's where you get, that's where you get a lot of alcohol brands that send those brand ambassadors to bars because they can have one on one conversations and, and really relate to some on a human level. Would, would you put that same person on a super bowl commercial? Maybe not. That's not where they shine. Maybe that's not like how they relate to somebody, when they can't talk to the other person or hear from the other person because they're on a TV commercial. So, it's definitely kind of a medium thing of where who you're talking to impacts how you can make the most effective message.

- Jared: How about effectiveness in terms of memory, like linking the humor to the brand. Do you think that is something that sometimes gets lost with brands and the audience? They might think the ad is funny, but they don't know what the ad was for.
- Chase: Oh, totally. For the meta-commentary on it, there was this commercial where it was just two guys in a Chevy commercial, but it was two guys on the farm and they're talking and they're talking about old Superbowl commercials. They didn't say specifically who the brands are for. And that was part of it. It was a nod to the audience and how they might not remember. And I honestly think they wrap puppy baby monkey thing in that commercial. Then the end of the commercial was that these companies should just put what they're selling more clearly in the commercial, and then they drive off in their Chevy and it says Chevy. But that's absolutely part of it. It's finding a way to balance attention, delighting them, surprising them, making them laugh and making them you feel, and then also to connect that with your brand.
- Jared: Yeah, that's a lot of goals to juggle in one ad.
- Chase: That's why you get the old cliché of making the logo bigger for clients because they know I could get somebody's attention, no problem. I can do something that is totally off the wall, but unless you can associate it with my brand, it's useless to me. Or you'll have people play on that. That's where you get things like the timers, like a countdown clock. I don't know what this ad is, but I love me a good countdown clock, so I'm going to tune in.
- Jared: So how do they go about doing that? How do they go about making sure that their brand isn't forgotten?
- Chase: Well, the easiest way that a lot of clients do is get our brand in earlier, get our brand in as soon as possible and keep it going throughout. Show it as many times as you can. I imagine that Coke would love a commercial that has just a bottle of coke pouring into a glass for 30 seconds. That gets their logo in the spot the whole time. It's perfect to people. People won't possibly forget what our, what our thing is. And then also it gets you that appetite appeal because you see the pour, you see the bubbles going off, like, that's the perfect ad.
- Jared: Perfect, in that one way, I suppose, but it's not exciting.

- Chase: Exactly. You'd play it and people would say that it's just bottle pouring for 30 seconds. It's boring as fuck, and I don't care. So there is a balance needed. For example, if there's a lot of fun early on, but the commercial ends and you never see that as coke, that's also a failure on the other side. So it is finding that balance. You'll get clients who try to push back and say to get it in early and often. I think we try to push back. It's much more memorable if you can start making somebody feel a certain way and then hit them with the surprises. Like the most famous commercial I can think of that that's seemingly been running forever is the Corona Christmas ad. The one with the palm tree with the lights on that you don't see Corona until the very end of it, but you feel exactly that moment for a while. I think it's only a 15-second ad, but you feel it for sure.
- Jared: Yeah man, that one is a classic. That's exactly how corona would make me feel. And that's because they've cultivated a really strong brand connection with how they want people to feel.
- Chase: I think part of it is getting the brand in at a crucial moment instead of throughout the commercial. For example, when that horrible monstrosity is ripping the soda out of a guy's mouth and taken it for itself. And the crux of the commercial is around the product itself. So you think about the product a little bit more. There are different ways of going about it, but those are at least a couple I can think of off the top of my head.
- Jared: One last thing here: Do you think that humor is one of the more effective ways to get people to engage on social media in terms of maybe likes, shares, comments, or do you find that other things can be more effective?
- Chase: Yeah, I think humor is probably the way to social media. I think a lot of brands have seen that. It's easy in the grand scheme of things. It is easy to make a joke that somebody gets in 140 or 280 characters. It's much harder to make somebody cry in that same amount of space. So you'll see a lot of brands that can lean on humor because it's faster way of getting somebody's attention. It's not necessarily a more effective way. It's equally effective. So you'll find that a lot of places do humor on social media because it's easy.
- Jared: I agree.
- Chase: It's not necessarily easy to create. It can be really hard. Like we talked about finding the perfect words that go in for every place, but it is easier

than trying to tell a full story. You can't tell *Old Yeller* in a tweet and have it be effective. I could probably tell *Hot Rod* in a tweet and have more of an effect of what that is.

- Jared: Do you think that humor is better for ads right now in 2019 when people are just sort of jumping for their attention from one thing to another and looking at multiple screens at the same time?
- Chase: Yeah, I think that it might be true. The humor has also been devalued a lot because of that. You kind of become a little desensitized to it. Like we're all comedians now because we see tons of jokes and humorous things put in our heads all day long.
- Jared: I have experienced that, yeah.
- Chase: But I mean, if you can find a really good humorous premise that kind of breaks through the regular humor kind of clutter of Facebook and Instagram and Twitter, I think that also leads to a more genuine connection. Think back to film silent movies with guys getting pies in the face. And at the time, people thought that was hilarious because nobody was doing that stuff then. Today a pie in the face is really cliché and cheap.
- Jared: Interesting point there at the end. So it's kind of like you have to look for things that are fresh in humor because it's constantly evolving and because people have been trying to be funny for so long and people have been consuming you are for so long that a lot of the stuff that was funny is just not so much anymore.
- Chase: And just like fashion things are cyclical too. I find *Seinfeld* really funny, like that was more of the time that I grew up. So you have a generation today that might say that show is not funny. That's a joke my dad would tell it is because he watched that show at that time. Maybe another 10 years later when your dad's the one making the advertisements and he want to sneak in a joke because he thinks it's really funny. And you might have a new generation of people saying that's totally fresh because the generation before is just talking about *Fortnite*. And the same cycle of the things that you find funny or interesting or a genuine in through your formative years, those are things you bring back up later when you can actually affect what the public conversation is. And then that affects another generation and that's where that cycle keeps going.

Interview with Lauren Hystead

Monday, February 25 at 7 p.m.

- Jared: What brands have you worked with that used humor as a part of their strategy?
- Lauren: Yeah, so I don't remember the exact phrasing of the strategy at the time, but working with Slim Jim, there was an idea that the snap of a slim Jim is what takes you from normal life to awesome. It was the snap of a Slim Jim. So everything we did had product in it and it had people biting into it for the first year. So that I worked on it. It was very transformational. After a while, we kind of shifted the strategy of Slim Jim a bit to be more about actual reasons that people buy it. And one of the main ones that are client kind of homed in on was that it will provide fuel on the go.
- Jared: Okay, okay.
- Lauren: It's a stick of meat wrapped in plastic. You can eat it in the car, you eat it while you're walking. So it was all about portable protein even though it's not good for you. Still, we were trying to make it seem good, but that was more just about portability and fuel to keep you going. They still wanted it to have the light, Slim Jim tone and the humor and stuff. But that one was a little bit harder. So we made this campaign that was called, "no excuses," and it was basically poking fun at the people who said they were too busy and didn't even have time to eat lunch. Then Slim Jim would come in and say, "if you were really that busy, you wouldn't have time to tell me about it." They just need a slim Jim. There are no excuses. So it still had that kind of brash humor that they used so much, but it's stemmed from the strategy. So it always served a purpose more or less.
- Jared: As far as humor goes, what do you think are some of the key ingredients?
- Lauren: I think, the first thing that comes to mind is, I think the most effective humor ads probably aren't funny to everybody. I think trying to make an ad that appeals to everyone, especially a TV ad, probably isn't that good or that funny. So I think knowing exactly who you're trying to talk to and making humor more specific to your audience or even specific to your brand, knowing that not everyone's going to be entertained but the people who you want to entertain will be. I feel those are usually more successful, at least for me. And they're probably more possible now because

everything's so targeted. Smart TVs have made commercials highly targetable. So not everyone seeing the same ads at the same time anymore.

Jared: True. Good point.

Lauren: I feel that works. Some of the ads that I enjoy the most, probably aren't the most active. They're the ones that I'm just wondering what is happening. Who paid for this? Why is this happening? So I feel if you're making effective funny ads, people need to remember the brand. The brand needs to play a role more than just a logo slapped on the end. I think it's more creative to make it make sense for the brand instead of just being super random.

Jared: Unless you're Skittles and your brand is just really random, then it's fine.

Lauren: Yeah, exactly. They would come to expect it.

Jared: Is humor more effective on some mediums than others?

Lauren: Yeah, I definitely think social and TV always has been effective, but they're different. TV is the most expensive form of advertising a client can do, which translates into it being super precious to them because they're spending a huge chunk of their budget on it and production and the media buy. And a lot of clients can't do a ton of TV ads. Some giant companies can do a million and it's fine. They don't care. But a lot of clients do two or three TV spots a year. So it's super precious for them. It has to work super hard and get people to buy their products.

Jared: Sure, that makes sense.

Lauren: Then you go onto social media where your dollars go so much farther, a lot of times, brands just kind of chill a little bit more. They try things because it costs them almost no money. So they are a lot more willing to push boundaries or make longer content or just try things that they might be a little scared of trying on TV. So I feel, digital and social and stuff has really opened up possibilities for humor. After a little push, they are willing to give my funny ideas a shot.

Jared: Do you think that humor can be an effective mechanism for making something memorable? Or do you think that it's more of a distraction? How would you go about accomplishing that?

Lauren: Yeah, I think it definitely can be a distraction, but I think that's when it's not that good or it's not strategic. I guess if it was just random for no purpose, and it's funny, but it doesn't help anything, then that's no good. So I think I definitely have learned to accept the fact that I'm in advertising. I'm not a comedy writer. It used to frustrate me when brands complained about not showing the brand enough. Now I get it. I still think the point of advertising is not necessarily to sell things but to establish brands and make brands relevant and all that stuff. So I feel the best humor is not a distraction, but I think it adds huge benefit to people remembering what they saw and sharing what they saw. The best funny ads make people not only laugh but also text their friends and share the ad on social media.

Jared: Yes, that's what I think as well.

Lauren: Exactly. That's what I'm saying. Wendy's has pretty funny Twitter. And, I feel it's not just a distraction. It can help people naturally engage, naturally share more than they would be something that isn't funny. It makes people want to share and makes people care about your brand. And so yeah, I think it can help a lot.

Jared: If you were trying to make it the most memorable, are there things that you can pinpoint that would really make people remember brands?

Lauren: I think, I mean it's, so it is an element of surprise that usually helps or some sort of, leading people down a path that they think they have been on before or, they know what's coming and then throwing a wrench in that a little bit. I think a little bit of an element of surprise helps. I also think, and this is very executional and probably not that relevant, but when you're actually making content video or whatever, making things really visually interesting so people want to see what they missed. I think that can be kind of an interesting way to do it. But yeah, I think it's really different for different brands, I guess. And what the intent is.

Jared: Let's move away from memory here. What is the best way to execute humor on social media? Is humor a good fit for the medium?

Lauren: Yeah. A lot of the social media experts are just regular people like you and me. But I met one who he did things a little differently. He went against what humor writers would want, which is to save the punchline and have that element of surprise. I see it all the time now. The first two seconds is

the punchline to hook people and then you go back into the story and you see that exact same punchline 10, 15 seconds later. But they start with them very best part within three seconds and then they get you back in.

Jared: Interesting.

Lauren: So I hear all the time from clients and Facebook reps and stuff that if you don't hook people in the first two or three seconds, they're gone. Which makes it challenging to then write humor because humor is, you want to tell people the story and then deliver a punchline or a surprise or a twist at the end to make them laugh. Sure. But if they're not going to sit and watch your video, they're never going to know. So yeah, it was this sort of, you would edit the exact same story for TV differently on social media so that people are poked in the eye right in the beginning.

Jared: I see that a lot with videos for social media where they did the first few seconds approach. They try to entice before the ad is skipped.

Lauren: Yeah. Yeah. I think one of the big struggles with advertising right now is it can be a really, really good ad, whether it's funny or emotional, and it can be really memorable, but you have to first get people to watch it. No one has any intention span anymore, including me. So you have to figure out how to hook people before you can figure out if it was the right tone or the right amount of brand name or anything that. That's one thing that we struggle with.

Jared: What else have you done to capture attention very quickly? Other than trying to be funny within the first couple of seconds, have you found a lot of things to be effective?

Lauren: Yeah. No, it's a big struggle. I think that comes down a lot to editing. I'm talking a lot about video production. I don't know if that's good or not, but I feel, yeah, there's usually, especially on social and digital and stuff, there's something right in the beginning. Sometimes it's a graphic or a surprising clip of people in the ad or something. But, yeah, I don't know. Good question. It's sometimes as simple as just instead of posting something that starts out slow in the beginning, there's motion right away. So it captures people's attention. There's a ton of people who work at Facebook who do hours long presentations about how to get some stamps, thumb stopping content. And it can come down to graphics with motion. You honestly can't rely on sound since so many people have their sound

off. So even if it's funny, people click to hear it, but they usually have it muted at first.

Jared: Do you think that there are certain brands or products that would not benefit from humor? Some that should just kind of stay away from that strategy altogether?

Lauren: Well, I'm going to say yes and then I'm going to struggle with examples. I don't know, I feel there are definitely brands that it would be surprising if they used humor. But I tend to think about how everyone who's a consumer is a person and people want to laugh and they want to be entertained. I mean, maybe not a funeral home. I don't know. Although there was a billboard in my home state for a funeral home that just says, "have you called your mother today?" Which is very dark. But I think kind of funny. I don't know if they're going for humor, but it makes me laugh. And there's so many different kinds of humor, but I don't know. I don't know if there's a hard line where it's this kind of company or this kind of brand should never try it. I think if everyone did it would just be a shit show because I'm sure the jokes wouldn't land all the time. But, I don't know, people are watching TV to be entertained in one way or another. We could probably make a joke about just about everything in my opinion.

Jared: Speaking specifically to different mechanisms of humor. What do you like to work with? What do you find to be effective in terms of using violence or random or surreal humor?

Lauren: I do a lot of Improv and my favorite shows to watch are the ones where it's not punchline, punchline, punchline. It's, character-based or, real scenes that are just a wacky person in them or they find truth. You find comedy in truth, which obviously you can't have five-minute-long commercials, but my favorite commercials that I've written are, they're not wacky humor, which I've done before, they're more just dialogue based between real people that or just funny or a little off. So that's what I gravitate towards. Then when I'm watching TV, Skittles is always hilarious and it's surprising. It's just things that are surprising I think that I gravitate towards.

Jared: But you noticed witty humor styles have been used a lot recently?

Lauren: Yeah. It kind of feels that way. I think, I, yeah. I think dialogue-based

comedy is so prevalent now. Starting with, maybe not starting, but *Seinfeld*, *The Office*, this whole generation of people who come up with just quick wit and quick comebacks. It's just real people being really funny is what we see on TV. So I feel people gravitate towards that a lot.

Jared: What's kind of the evolution of humor? Do you have an idea of what is coming next?

Lauren: No, I'm trying to think of shows that are just starting, but it seems like a lot of fresh voices and similar styles from what I'm watching and what I can see.

Jared: Do you get a sense that advertising and maybe be humor vary by geography?

Lauren: Kind of. I have a lot of friends in New York who are in comedy and advertising actually. I think certain regions might put more emphasis or more importance on different types of comedy in different places. Chicago is Improv city, so many fucking Improv theaters here. The people who are most well known in Chicago in comedy are improvisers, which is not the case anywhere else really. Then my friend is in comedy in New York and another is in advertising and they overlap a lot. A lot of comedy is so standup focused there. And so just those two styles, there's a ton of stand up here and there's a ton of Improv in New York, but the importance and the prestige is different in each city.

Jared: Certainly.

Lauren: And the type of humor you'd get out of that then totally changes. Improv is much more personal and based on connections and all that stuff. And then that produces a lot of writers who write very differently than people who are in stand up. And that's more jokes or storytelling. Then there is LA. The only thing I know that's very different about LA is the weird stuff out there. Kristen Wiig and Will Ferrell do a lot of wacky characters and stuff. And a lot of Comedians who go out to LA want to be sitcom writers. So I feel, at least in my personal experience and friends that I know in these certain places, what you want out of comedy is different. And that changes the type of comedy that is there because people have different goals. But I don't know if actually what people find funny is different based on where you are.

Jared: So discussing how humor would play differently in different regions isn't something discussed in client meetings?

Lauren: No, I haven't had that come up. We talk about a lot of concerns with humor, but location is not really one of them.

Interview with Miranda Cowan

Wednesday, February 27 at 7 p.m.

- Jared: Where do you work? And how long have you worked in advertising?
- Miranda: It's an advertising agency in the Maplewood area, St Louis. I've worked there since I graduated, since the start of June last year. I've been there about eight or nine months.
- Jared: In the short time that you've been there, what kind of roles have you taken on?
- Miranda: One of the big parts of my job is social content creation and community management. I have a few brands that I develop social content every month, kind of planning out the content we want to feature, working with the art director to make sure everything's executed and then I'll write copy for it and schedule it, manage it. The Facebook and Instagram and Twitter communities, I interact with fans, respond to comments and messages and kind of grow those communities. I work on a lot of email marketing and web design for PayPal credit. We do a lot of email campaigns, the digital banner campaigns, and some website design for them. That's another big part of my job. And then I just started getting into 360 experiential campaigns.
- Jared: What type of approaches to you like to use creatively in advertising?
- Miranda: For any particular project or...?
- Jared: Kind of just whatever you want to, wherever you want to take it. In terms of getting some sort of emotional reaction, like humor or motivating someone.
- Miranda: I think one of the things I really like about working here is they push you to think about it as not advertising a brand, but I'm engaging a community. Rather than just pushing messages on people, we have it be more about the communication. I really like that approach so we bring in to all of our brainstorm. Like, how can we do this, or produce this content but in a way that's inviting them to join the brand. I think that's better content because you're looking at things from an engagement perspective. If it's entertaining and it's more fun, it's more valuable to the consumer than a

sales message.

Jared: Yeah, definitely.

Miranda: Probably one of the biggest approaches I use each day is looking at the side of the category. And one of the things we do is we look at what other brands are doing in the field. Sometimes we will look outside of the industry that we're working on to get inspiration for just how to mix things up. Then I'm constantly improving things because if you stay with any category and brainstorm and just look at your competitors that are in that category, then that creative starts to get really stale. And kind of looking and seeing what's working at other categories has been really helpful.

Jared: Have you had an opportunity to work with humor and some of the stuff that you've created?

Miranda: One of my brands is a really playful brand. That's been entertaining. I think it was tricky to nail the theme at first because I feel like humor is a catchall term, but there's many different types of humor. Nailing the right one for the target is definitely hard. But I feel like once you have tonality down, you can produce fun creative work.

Jared: How would you describe it there? The type of humor for that brand?

Miranda: I would say it's kind of a young brand. It's targeted at probably college kids. We'll just do kind of like slap sticky stuff for that sort of humor. For Valentine's Day we had a post with a cookie cutter tin and inside it was filled with shooters but was made like a box of chocolates. Then there was some funny line that went with it. It implied that you should give this gift and a box of chocolates to your Valentine. And it was really fun. Sometimes we'll do a *Mean Girls* post. We just try to tap into stuff that we know our audience watches.

Jared: That makes sense. I see that kind of stuff all the time because I intern at an agency right now and the social media stuff, especially with some of the women in the office who make content, they love to make *Mean Girls* references and it seems like it plays pretty well just based on like the number of interactions with those types of posts.

Miranda: Yeah, I know. It's kind of funny because I feel like there'll be a point when *Mean Girls* references aren't funny anymore. But for right now, who

we're talking to, it's like spot on. It seems like a lot of places just quote their stuff.

Jared: What do you think is your own particular sense of humor is? What do you find funny?

Miranda: I kind of like smarter humor or more dry humor, I would say. The humor brand I'm working on right now, I love. I also like witty memes. A co-worker and I found this meme and it said, "I can read your brain and it's written in comic sans." And I thought it was funny. It's stuff like that where there's an added layer of nuance to it. That's probably my favorite kind.

Jared: What do you think an effective humor ad looks like? What are some of the key ingredients?

Miranda: For humor to work well, it has to reflect your audience and it has to be on brand. I think you can have a campaign that's really funny, but if it's not building a brand's personality or isn't something that they can own, then it's just funny for the sake of being funny and then it's not a brand that you're going to remember. And I think, on the flip side of that, you could have something that matches the brand well, but it could just not be funny to your target. I think it's kind of finding that sweet spot of something that worked for the brand and for the audience. I think it kind of has to have some sort of messaging to it besides the humor because I think if we're going to do a joke, just do a joke. That's great. But at the end of the day, what's it saying about your product?

Jared: Yeah, you need more than just a joke.

Miranda: I think whenever we try to do humorous stuff for my agency, we're going to do something funny, but it also has a call to action. We did a quote Mug with a funny quote on a Mug and did like a mixed drink recipe. It was to get a laugh, but it was also kind of, a way to promote the brand. I think making sure your humor campaign is sending some sort of benefit or idea or something about the product itself is crucial.

Jared: Do you think certain mechanisms of humor are more effective than others? For example, like using violence or some sort of physical humor, maybe incongruity, self-deprecating, or others.

- Miranda: I think there are types of humor that work less well than others. I wouldn't say that there's some that work better. Going to a gray territory, where brands can get called out for being like disrespectful or for dissing or offending somebody. I think often times it's not what's going to work the best. It comes down to doing something funny that won't offend the audience or get yourself in legal trouble.
- Jared: What types of humor do you think brands should steer clear from?
- Miranda: I think anything that is putting someone in a negative light or leaning heavily into stereotypes is not a great territory to go to right now because a lot of brands are being called out for racial stereotypes, gender stereotypes, age stereotypes. Putting somebody down is probably going to get you in hot water. I think anything really political too could also do that because you're going to automatically divide your audience.
- Jared: Do you think that that has changed at all recently? Or has it been like that as long as you can remember?
- Miranda: I think it's definitely a new change. I think that you could get away with a lot more years ago. I think it's just the result of like society changing that we're starting to see more people care about ads I think than before. I think before ads could do stuff because, you know, they could just do it and get away with it, but now people are starting to pay more attention and call out problematic stuff in the media. I think ads are lumped into that category.
- Jared: You think that there are certain mediums you have to be more careful on?
- Miranda: I would say so. Sure. Social media can be tougher because it's one of the few channels that you have the ability to have your audience talk back to you. TV or radio or print, you know, something goes wrong, you just pull the spot, you stop running it and you can issue an apology. But in social, it's shared thousands of times. People can brighten the comment section, tag their friends and it can go everywhere all within an instance. I think in social, that's where we take the most chances because it's a test and learn environment, but it's also where you have the most risks to have something blow up in your face.
- Jared: Interesting balance there. It seems like it's most prevalently used medium for humor, but it can have the quickest and most powerful backlash.

- Miranda: Yeah. It's kind of funny, a little bit ironic. Because it's risky, we'll create our social media content and we'll vet it internally through art director, copywriter, creative director, account managers, social VP and then we'll send it to the brand and then they vet it and then we schedule it. It has to go through a ton of layers before it gets out there. That's a way to kind of catch anything that could be problematic.
- Jared: Same, that's how we do our content – in monthly batches. For most of our brands we have to go through that every time we post something we just produced. Ahead of time, it had to be signed off on.
- Miranda: Yep, it seems like that's common.
- Jared: Do you think that humor can be used to catch attention?
- Miranda: I think it can. I think it probably has the potential to catch someone's eye over other content or other approaches. On the flip is that you could have it be buried because it's humorous and everything else around it is humorous. Think about Super Bowl ads and stuff like that. When everybody does humor, suddenly your campaign doesn't stand out, and it's also lot harder to be funny when so many other brands are all being funny and then you're getting ranked by who is funnier. It depends on how saturated the market is. But if it's done really well and it connects with your target, well that connection is better than just a dry, informational ad.
- Jared: I think it's kind of a combination of the market and the medium itself.
- Miranda: Yeah, I think so. We were looking at a campaign for All State, and it works well because all of it just stands out. All of their competitors were using fear tactics – besides Geico – for their ads. It stood out because it was funny and memorable, but it also was different from what the competitors are doing. If everybody was doing humor and they were also doing humor, it wouldn't stand out as much. it kind of depends a little bit. I also think it just kind of depends on the brand.
- Jared: I wonder if All State has seen any sort of change in its success after those campaigns. I've noticed other insurance agencies incorporating humor into their ads now. With Geico, some of their recent stuff is pretty much just a random funny bit that is in no way related to the brand.
- Miranda: Yeah. Yeah. It would be interesting to see when it performed better. Now

that other brands in the field have started using humor, I wonder if that has hurt All State.

- Jared: It seems to me that the approach, the way that Geico is doing it, it could work if you just have a sufficient amount of funds. Because if they just had a one off or maybe even just a couple that were funny, and then at the end it said, "Geico," people might not see it enough. In that case, it's just going to totally go in their mind and then immediately out. But if they keep running through all the different ads all the time, maybe people just start to absorb it, and then they'll start to think about Geico.
- Miranda: Yeah, I totally agree. I think that's Geico's stuff is working well right now. And it's because it wasn't just funny to be funny. It was all adding to the brand. They kind of built their whole brand personality and tonality around the campaign and they kept doing over and over and over again. That's something you don't get with a one off.
- Jared: Yeah. You really have to be committed to make it work in that way. It's the same way that Skittles operates, where it just does it sort of surreal humor and that's just synonymous with the brand of Skittles.
- Miranda: Yeah. Finding that way to make humor your own and in your brand's tone is super important.
- Jared: Do you think there are any brands or products that just would not benefit from humor and should steer away from it completely?
- Miranda: I think I'd say for pharmaceuticals it's probably not a good idea to use humor since it's a more serious topic. I think banks run the risk, as does anything that's more serious. Certain brands are composed or intelligent or informed, and that's what they should stick to. Humor isn't the best fit for them. Again, I mean brands have proved me wrong, like the insurance companies that are doing humor ads. Those brands are doing really well. But I think, for the most part, there are better approaches than humor for serious brands.
- Jared: I agree that it's safer. It's definitely tougher too. Generally, do you think that humor is effective in terms of advertising and conveying a positive association with the brand and leading to making purchases?
- Miranda: Yeah, I do. I think if it's done well, it can be super, super powerful. I think

anything that invokes emotion or human connects with people on a human level is going to do better than rational ads because at the end of the day, most of our purchases are emotionally driven rather than math driven. I think that humor ads can make you feel happy and make you have a good experience with the brand and make you more likely to buy it because you like it better when you've had a more positive experience with it. But I think when it's done wrong or done not well, it has the potential to really hurt the brand. But I don't think that means that you shouldn't do it. We use humor with quite a few of our brands and it works really well. It's an effective emotion to tap into.

Jared: How about in terms of memory, do you think that humor is more likely to help or hurt remember the brand?

Miranda: I think it depends on, how it's done. I think if the humor is tied very closely with the brand tone and personality and it's delivering a message, then it's great. If it's funny and it conveys a benefit of the brand, then your mind's going to remember it. But if the joke is disconnected from the brand or the message, then you'll remember the funny but not the brand or message of the ad. You've got to make sure the funny doesn't overpower the ad.

Jared: Have you lived in the Midwest your whole life or you moved around at all?

Miranda: Probably mostly West. I did like an externship in Spain for a while and I lived in Texas for a raw, for an internship. But anything more than like, seven months I've been here.

Jared: Have you noticed any sort of changes geographically and sense of humor or the way that every time or the way that humor is used in advertising?

Miranda: I have. In Texas, I didn't really notice a big change. I was working at like national advertising agencies where we advertised all over. There's definitely a disconnect with sense of humor in certain places. I don't know how to describe it, but the Spanish sense of humor is very different from American sense of humor. That's what makes it funny to makes ads that will funny both here in the U.S. and internationally.

Interview with Tim Dyer

Tuesday, March 12 at 4 p.m.

Jared: For how long have you worked in advertising?

Tim: I guess you could say 17 years in advertising.

Jared: What kind of approaches do you like to use in advertising in terms of evoking emotion or that sort of thing?

Tim: I mean emotion would be a huge part of it, but I think your biggest partner that we tap into it, more calling upon storytelling devices that ended up being legendary, kind of larger than life. We use a little bit of humor, but we're probably more on the emotional side of the scale.

Jared: Can you give me any examples of what you've done? Any examples of when you used humor?

Tim: Sure. Our most famous funny thing has been meat sweats for Arby's, which you may or may not have seen. We were certainly leveraging a joke that has become part of a small subculture. Some people know meat sweats, and a lot of those people will be interested in Arby's.

Jared: For sure. Arby's has the meats and they'll give you the meat sweats.

Tim: Obviously the doesn't take itself too seriously, which fun. We were more behind the scenes on like something that was for Volkswagen. You have really kind of unpack why people love Volkswagen. We call that concept smiling, which is the, you know, basically this idea that in more miles, more smiles per miles as far as the people driving the car, they enjoy the experience of it, which is kind of how they came up with the idea that they ran with. So that's kind of what we do. We come up with ideas like a meat sweats or whatever it is, and sometimes we try to create culture and other times we capitalize on a part of culture. It's a little bit of a little bit of storytelling, a little bit of like wink and smile.

Jared: Good stuff. Have you noticed that you tend to use different tactics depending on the medium like for social media versus print or videos? Yeah. Yeah. No, no doubt. I mean, yeah, I would say, look, we're channel agnostic, so we'll use all kinds of different tactics for different things.

- Jared: That's an interesting way to think about it.
- Tim: I mean, some of them we don't necessarily specialize in. so for instance, like, work on elevator bays. That's not the most conventional medium, so we use different tactics for that than we would in a video spot. Other times we'll do a kind of a page takeover kind of concept. A lot of our stuff is digitally focused.
- Jared: Yeah, that's a major trend, obviously.
- Tim: A lot of times the medium is the message, so we use that as a tactic, so to speak. I think it's key to find ways to marry with the message a little bit more, you know?
- Jared: Yeah, totally. Do you find that humor is used on social media more often than other places?
- Tim: Yeah, I would say we do. I mean, social is like the one place where you can detach from your own brand significantly. Like everybody gets a longer leash so you can try things that you wouldn't try on other mediums. I think you get more latitude on social to play with humor, certainly more.
- Jared: Yeah, I agree completely.
- Tim: I can give you some fun, crazy ideas that never happened as well. So for instance, one of the best worst ideas I ever had was when we worked on marketing for Game of Thrones. This was before it had launched. Even though the show isn't funny, we actually did use humor as part of the launch because we didn't understand what Game of Thrones was about completely. It hadn't become a cultural phenomenon yet. But our humor still worked because it helped people grab onto this very serious and very heavy thing. We definitely use humor for that. And then I'll tell you about launching another show. Shark Week was another one I had chance to work on multiple years in a row. And we'd always come up with crazy ideas, like for instance, some of the things that we would do with entertaining things would be to put a projection mapping at the bottom of a pool in a famous hotel that looks down and see sharks swimming in the pool. That's kind of a funny thing.
- Jared: Yeah, I love that idea.
- Tim: The best worst idea that ever came up with it never flew was, was a very

simple tactic. It was basically to launch a street campaign with amputees. And they're holding signs that say Shark Week.

Jared: Man, that's dark.

Tim: It is. And, again, it never happened, but that was like, would it garner buzz? Absolutely. Was it culturally inappropriate? That's where things get a little dicey. I've worked with brands who used to use a lot of raunchy material. Tons of it. But they're evolved a bit in part because of what we did. We helped to kind of clean it up a little bit and make it more clever. That's what you might have seen from some things over time. They shift away from raunchy into clever.

Jared: Yeah, for sure.

Tim: We work hard with brand development and product development. We try to tell stories and do more than just go with simple raunchy stuff. We want to tell stories, and humor is a way that we use to do that. We build DNA profiles of brands. Then we can bring the brand to life in funny ways.

Jared: When you're trying some of those things that are funny and maybe a little bit dicey, do you find that it's more acceptable based on a certain clients or certain mediums or what's a bigger obstacle?

Tim: I mean, today, man, everything's trickier culturally. People are very, very sensitive. Things can be misconstrued very, very quickly. Things have changed over time because the cultural conversation with women in the #MeToo movement is saying that women feel like victims of this, of men and their predatory behavior and stuff like that.

Jared: Right, right.

Tim: So, some of the ads that worked in the late nineties, for instance, absolutely has no place in culture today. There is a very present dichotomy in culture right now, which is that we have no tolerance for insensitive joking and things from certain people. But depending on who says it, the joke can be fine and funny. People of a certain race can make jokes that others can't. That kind of thing. All I'm saying is we're in a very strange environment where parody and word wordplay and things like that can be dangerous and cause harm. Despite all that, I still think it's a very powerful device to use.

- Jared: Even despite all the risks? Okay, okay.
- Tim: I think there are taboos right now. Sex is mostly verboten. Stereotypes are pretty much off limits in advertising too.
- Jared: What kind of mechanisms or humor do you think are acceptable today?
- Tim: Well, what's left? You can use good, clean humor, I suppose. That is a great question, man. One thing I'll say is that I think you always have to recognize someone's going to be offended. The question is, what is the group being offended? Are they a minority? And I don't mean that in a minority in the traditional sense. I mean a minority versus majority and simply like that. A minority group is a group that would have feelings that are culturally obscure. With Arby's and meat sweats, they're poking fun at vegans, you know, they know that vegans are passionate about animals and animal rights or PETA, which maybe that's kind of their sworn enemy that they're giving a wink and a smile. Back to your original question, you're saying kind of like what's taboo and what's off the table, right?
- Jared: Yeah. I mean more so not what doesn't work, but what does work.
- Tim: I think what does work is the ability to make a joke where you're offending a specific group of people on purpose. And I mean doing it carefully, and not malevolently at all, but with the notion of saying, that there's some people who might be disenfranchised by this, but they can also understand it. It's in good humor. We can laugh and respect one another.
- Jared: You said that sometimes you can offend a small group, a minority group, but are there certain groups that you find that are off limits? Like you can't offend these people?
- Tim: I'm sure there are. I mean I guess the question is, I mean, is offending people the ultimate offense today. That's true, right? Which is tough because I think almost all things that are funny in some way are poking fun at something. And it could be poking fun at the person who is telling the joke. It could be a self-effacing comedian. Who's that famous comedian who is self-effacing and talks about his family a lot?
- Jared: Brian Regan does that.
- Tim: I'm thinking of someone else.

- Jared: Jim Gaffigan.
- Tim: Exactly. Yup. Great. He's just particularly good about taking a genre of people that you may identify with in some way and using making fun of it in a non-threatening way. So you could argue that self-effacing humor is about not taking yourself too seriously. People appreciate that.
- Jared: For sure.
- Tim: Other times when we use humor, we want to emphasize authenticity and purpose. We probably stay away from anything cliché, like anything strongly sexual.
- Jared: That's good. Let's move over to a memory. Do you think that humor can be an effective way to make somebody remember a message and a brand? Or do you think that there are other ways to help somebody remember that's better than humor?
- Tim: Know what I think there are, I think there probably is a secure way for people to remember a brand, but also goes back to the tonality. Like, I think a brand shouldn't necessarily, I think brand is a bigger consideration on what tone it uses first and foremost. So many of us can remember the joke, we remembered the twist, the turn, the thing that we liked, but we don't really remember the brand. Brands used to routinely blow money on expensive ads. Now that is much less frequent because they would just spend it on social or something. Now brands will be much more careful about making sure they're remembered if they spend big. They cram their brand and logo into the ad as much as possible.
- Jared: Yeah, I'll see that sometimes.
- Tim: Let me ask you, do you remember any Super Bowl ads this year?
- Jared: I remember a Serena Williams ad. I think she did an ad for bumble. That's one of the only things I remember.
- Tim: You got it. Yup. A lot of times people don't remember those Super Bowl ads. It's a big platform for brands, but it doesn't always have a big impact on consumer memory. We have had plenty of clients consider running Super Bowl spots but back out because the cost was too high and the gain wasn't worth it.

- Jared: A couple of the questions I wanted to ask you, oh, one thing is, do you think that humor varies geographically in terms of what plays, what people find to be funny or not funny? Maybe just in terms of, let's say in the United States.
- Tim: Yeah. I would say absolutely geography must play a massive role in humor in advertising. Not that all ads need to be catered to each region. I guess I see a lot that have transcended local levels of humor, so they work across geography. I'm not sure. Maybe it's a not such a huge factor. So are you asking me to identify some examples?
- Jared: No, I'm just asking if you think that the majority of the time it plays across the country and it's a rarity to find ones that only play in certain regions. You think that's accurate?
- Tim: That's probably true. Right. Portland, Oregon may have a different taste than other areas. Sometimes there's a right versus left thing or things like that. But I still think we've got polarizing audiences, so it's kind of hard to say. I definitely think if you're launching something nationally, it's got to be fairly, you know, not divisive. Certainly when it comes to humor.
- Jared: One more question I'll ask you here and then we can wrap up. It seems like it's easier than ever to ignore ads since people just have the multiple screen experience and they have so much control over what they see. Do you think that humor is a good way to catch attention and get somebody to actually pay attention?
- Tim: I think so because our attention spans are short. There is something to humor working, yeah. I'll watch a video ten times if it's funny. I think I'm much more likely to pay attention to something that's funny compared to something that lacks the humor, you know? There has to be something to make people watch. Humor can be a good way to make that happen.

Interview with Scott Shade

Friday, March 15 at 4 p.m.

Jared: What kind of brands have you worked with in the advertising industry?

Scott: Well, plenty. We worked with one potato company. And it was grown with a natural enzyme, which was pretty groundbreaking compared to some of the other things on the market that are just chemicals that aren't so good for us. But one of the strategies that we went with was the headline or slogan of the campaign was bald is beautiful. So basically you don't want your potatoes to sprout and get those tubers coming out. And as a result, we created this campaign and we created five or six characters, all with different hairstyles, if you will. But they were potatoes with two brewers. We did a Princess Leia. So the tubers came from these crazy two writers that were wrapped in, we had a Mohawk punker dude who had tubers just down the middle. We had a guy named Doc and he had like the handlebar, the classic Western handlebar mustache out of tubers. Some have dreadlocks and we had a lot of fun with it and we were able to create a fun campaign now of a natural enzyme. So you know, when you can do something that's fun and people will respond to out of a promise that isn't all that sexy, it's a pretty good success. Another success locally is ongoing. We just launched a campaign for the Columbia Convention and Visitors Bureau called meet Como. And so from that we selected six locals and had to sell their stories and to get people to visit Colombia from different points of view. So we had a very diverse pool of locals that we interviewed. We make videos, we've done a website, we did digital ads, and we've done print work. There's a billboard on 70 on the Kansas City side and a billboard on the Saint Louis side. And it's been really fun. We were able to tell the stories of why they live here, which is giving visitors perspectives that they might not find in a travel book or Travelocity or something like that. So these are sort of those hidden little gems about Columbia that only the locals know. It makes you feel like you're sort of an insider. So that was our approach to that.

Jared: How about any struggles that you've had?

Scott: Yeah, I mean, there've been lots of them. I think that, you know, one of the things is that it depends on your budget, and sometimes the vision that the client has isn't always what we feel is right and on brief. You struggle

with that a little bit, trying to get them to realize that you're just trying to make them more money, you know, in a way that they might not necessarily understand or see the value of. I think just educating clients is important. We let them know that we write these things called creative briefs for a reason and it shows that all the work that we do should be based on some sort of research or data or insights or experiences. It's not just creating funny headlines or pretty pictures. It's much deeper than that.

Jared: When you run into struggles to say, particularly with humor, what I trends have you noticed?

Scott: What trends?

Jared: Yeah. Any commonalities? When you're struggling, are there recurring roadblocks? Is it that the client maybe is risk averse or worried that something's going to be offensive?

Scott: Yeah, I guess, I mean, my answer to that is that attorneys really get in the way of what we do. You wouldn't necessarily think that, but in certain industries that are so heavily regulated that there's an attorney involved who helps the marketing department. Sometimes they will cause roadblocks, as you put it. They'll stop certain ideas out of a fear of being sued or out of a fear of being on the record for something risky. We're running into a lot of issues now where we can't say absolutes. We can't say, well, we're the best at doing this or we're the fastest or you know, because that would require some sort of documentation that proves that you are. So it's a challenge to get around that because in advertising, what we want to do is create a claim, right? To put your stake in the ground of what is the point, what are the points of differentiation. And I think that those have become very, very narrow now because you can't just say we do this better than our competition because unless you've done the research that proves that it's better than the competition, you can't say it in an ad.

Jared: What adjustments do you make now then?

Scott: A lot of it is really watered-down language. We offer really great products. We can say that. We cannot say that they are the greatest. So it's all about can you validate it? Can you prove it? In certain industries, you know, we can get away with it in some instances, and it depends on how you spin it. So that's the other thing. You just have to get way more creative on how

you say it.

Jared: That makes sense.

Scott: I mean, it's not necessarily a bad thing. You want to be able to, if you're going to say it keeps everybody on us. If you're going to say this product works faster than anything on the market, then it should work faster than anything on the market.

Jared: Right, you don't want to be misleading people with a message that you're saying.

Scott: Yeah, advertising gets a bad rap as it is. So to legitimize what we do by basing everything we do on some sort of research, that's a good thing.

Jared: How do you think that humor differs in your experience? Across different mediums?

Scott: Well obviously, you know, video and TV humor is more effective because you get to see talent and actors and body language that's associated with that because a lot of the times delivering a humorous punch line or humorous line involves some sort of facial expression or body language. When you don't have that in things like print, it's kind of harder to get the full effect of it. But if you use it as a campaign and people have been exposed to the other mediums, then the visual and audio tactics that are in that campaign are in the consumers' minds when they see the print. We've seen it, we've been exposed to it. For example, you know, Flo from progressive? We know her body language and we can hear the sound of her voice. So when we see a print ad, that's already sort of ingrained in the campaign for us.

Jared: Okay, interesting point. So you're saying that if it's a part of a campaign, it's going to be more likely to be effective than a one off print ad. Those probably are not going to play the same way because people don't understand it fully.

Scott: Well, I don't think that one offs are anywhere are as effective. You know, I think that part of what we do as an agency, we call the three 60 approach. We're really bringing in every discipline from public relations to content to social to create a digital strategy, and that involves trying to figure out what the best formula of tactics is going to be to produce the most results.

Each one offers us different things. You know, we'll offer content solutions on Facebook and Twitter and Instagram that resonate a little differently. Then there's traditional media. So I think we have found a pretty good formula in terms of providing our clients with more than just a one off tactic because it's a richer experience.

Jared: With social media, do you think that, or I guess just generally, what are your thoughts on humor on social media?

Scott: I think that if it's appropriate, it's effective. I think that you have to be really good at humor to make it successful because a lot of it is cliché. A lot of it we've seen before, a lot of it is, you know, like I on Hulu now, Safe Auto is running these ads that are funny. They are funny, but it's obvious that they're trying to keep up with Geico in the humor land. I don't know if part of their objective is being met or if they're just mimicking their competition. But I don't know how great that approach is since we don't learn about their products.

Jared: Yeah, what I've seen from GEICO recently, it seems like it's just a random, silly little 30-second bit. And then I don't see a link to the brand, other than I guess that is their brand – to be random.

Scott: I think it's brilliant. I think it's really funny. The lobster and the hot tub thing, you know it's funny now, but I think that they've put there. They were the first to put their stake in the ground that insurance can be funny, and now it seems like all insurance companies are trying to do the same.

Jared: I really have noticed that trend in recent years. So it seems like humor has to be really established and it's not something that you can just kind of halfheartedly do. Sometimes it has to really be a part of your brand.

Scott: Yeah. I think each brand has to be committed to their brand style. Think about certain questions. Is it part of your brand? Is that the way you're going to reach your target audience? Then you have to step back think about who is your target audience? Jokes that are funny to me are not necessarily funny to you because we're a totally different age demographics. So I mean, who are you talking to? So if you establish that and establish that kind of humor that fits, then I think you're going to be successful at it.

Jared: Do you think that there are certain target audiences that just should not

have humor used on them?

Scott: Well, I think that there's lots of industries. It all depends again on the creative brief and the data and why are we doing this? What is the objective of our communication? There are some things that just aren't funny. Then they are certain things that shouldn't be funny. It just depends on what you're trying to say.

Jared: What do you view as some of the mechanisms of making a funny ad? Do you prefer particular strategies, like a physical humor or surprise or incongruity or surrealism, like you might see in some modern stuff. How do you view those?

Scott: I like some of the stuff that we've written. That's funny. I feel like it's come as an accident almost. We don't always set out to make a funny ad. Collaboration is key. I think that we all have things that are funny in our heads, but then we'll read it out loud and no one laughs. I think the more you collaborate on things like that, the more you can build on that. Yeah, that's how it is with the Saturday Night Live skits. Some of those skits are hilarious and some of them you wonder what they were thinking.

Jared: So, do you think any type of humor can lead to more consistent results? Are any more reliable than the others?

Scott: I think one of the components is the call to action. So you've shown a funny bit, and then I don't know what I'm supposed to do with that. Geico's ads sometimes have nothing to do with insurance, but then they drop their name and I'm sitting here talking to you about it for 15 minutes. It works okay for them, but it doesn't always work. So the call to action is a supporting concept because I think that's part of tying it up with a bow.

Jared: Right. Do you think that humor can aid memory? Do you think that humor can distract from the message or is it more likely to help?

Scott: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, there are some things where you're just like, oh, that was really funny. And two days later you don't remember the brand. You have no idea. You just remember it was funny, right? Sometimes that's it.

Jared: Yeah. How do you make people link the funny message to the brand?

Scott: I think that there are different strategies and different ways to do it. You

know, I think the whole Progressive thing. You know, Flo from progressive, she has her name tag. So we're constantly being fed these subtle reminders that Flo is with Progressive. I think that that's successful if you just throw that out there and don't attach it to your brand in any way.

Jared: Sure, I agree.

Scott: I mean it's a really, really old brand, but the Double Mint Gum, they used to have twins who were the spokespeople. So it's constantly reinforced with the twins, which mean double – double the fun, double the mint. It all worked together really well.

Jared: So do you think it can also work when the you just drop the name in at the end?

Scott: I think that you have to establish that structure, and it has to be the same each time. You have to be the same every single time. If you can put together this format that works the same way every time with different messages, I think you're going to be successful with that. Old Navy does it really well. Target does it really well. Nike obviously does it really well. Within about two seconds of an Old Navy commercial, you know what it's worth. You know it's Old Navy. They don't say a word, but you still know the brand.

Jared: So it really keeps coming down to consistency of brand messaging.

Scott: Yes. Three things and make it successful. Time, frequency, and money.

Jared: Do you think that humor in advertising varies across the U.S.?

Scott: No, I don't think humor resonates more in New York City than it does in Sedalia. I think that there are probably pockets wherever we live where people think that's not funny or appreciate that. I don't think it's a national thing. I think it's a human behavior thing. Yeah. I don't think it's geographic.

Interview with Marissa Cuconato

Sunday, March 17 at 1 p.m.

- Jared: What are some brands that you've worked with in your advertising experience that wanted to incorporate humor?
- Marissa: Well, one big one is Jif. They wanted to sell this product shift power ups. And it's this new kind of protein bar for kids, but it's got some health factors that appeal to parents. So they want to be funny, but their idea of funny is charming and heartwarming and not necessarily pushing the ground of, of what you think of as the funniest ad because you can have, you know, charming humor or witty humor or irreverent humor where you're just kind of disregarding the rules of, I don't know... does that make sense?
- Jared: Yeah, so for Jif, because they're all about moms and family values, so they don't want to get too bold with their humor.
- Marissa: For sure. We run into issues if we push the humor too far because we can risk being offensive and, you know, being off putting to your target market.
- Jared: Right, it seems like they care more about being wholesome and family centric than laugh out loud funny.
- Marissa: Yeah. So that's where I feel each brand sinks – they want to be funny, and our biggest challenge is when we're writing, we want to be as funny as possible. That's what people want. They want laugh, they want to laugh. They want a funny. I mean some brands want to pull at your heartstrings. In that case, the brief would be completely different. But you can kind of bring multiple things to the table. So when we are briefed, we bring a bunch of different concepts and prove them out via scripts for commercials. So sometimes it's funny, sometimes it is sappy, and sometimes it pulls at your heartstrings. But when it comes to humor, there are different levels of it. Jif is probably the one where we'll be in a meeting and we'll say something that they'll think is funny, but we're also thinking that this is barely pushing the limits.
- Jared: That sounds about right for that brand.

- Marissa: Other brands that I've worked on, they really want to push the humor even further. For instance, the NFL. We have them as a client and we did the Super Bowl spot. I don't know if you saw it last year. The one where Eli Manning and Odell Beckham Jr. did the dirty dancing thing on the field.
- Jared: Yeah, of course. I remember.
- Marissa: So their target market is obviously way different than Jif moms. A lot of times the brands are under such scrutiny that, especially with their target, they don't want to push anything too far. That's kind of a big problem that we face as far as humor goes.
- Jared: Other than humor, are there some strategies that you find particularly effective?
- Marissa: Okay. Well I guess the best way to go about it if you're not going to be laugh out loud funny is to just be more clever about the way that you say something. So if it sounds clean and clear, I guess, then you can get away with feeling you've done a good job. And I'm trying to think of an example... I'm working right now on the National Wildlife Refuge System. They really want to push people to get back outside in nature. So our enemy is technology. So I'll write headlines that say things like, "you can't roam free and a 600 square foot apartment," which isn't funny, but it's, you know, clever and it gets you thinking in a new way. But it's not something that's going to make you slap your knee and laugh out loud. So I guess that's, that's kind of the other way that we go about it.
- Jared: Okay. How about just when you're totally not trying to be funny at all? Do you work with stuff where you're trying to be uplifting or, I don't know, heartwarming or maybe where you're just pushing information?
- Marissa: Yeah. So another way is, with the National Wildlife Refuge, the next kind of step is writing this anthem type of piece that says something like, "here's to the crazy ones," or something. It's meant to be inspirational, operational and uplifting, and it's kind of poetic in the way that it speaks. So I feel there's different techniques. You can try to be poetic and uplifting.
- Jared: What do you think that an effective humor ad looks like? What do you think are some of the key ingredients of it?

- Marissa: Yeah. It can't be trying too hard. You can kind of tell when an ad has either been pushed by the brand to have to say certain things. And you know, in that case, if the client says you have to say all of these facts about our product or whatever, you can lean into that and make it kind of so absurd that you're talking about all of these. They call them RTBs (reasons to believe) about the product. When you lean very hard into them, people get that you're just going over the top and not trying too hard. If you're trying too hard to talk about the product and be funny, but the brand is pushing too many RTBs, you can tell that it's not a good marriage.
- Marissa: Sorry, can you remind me the question again?
- Jared: The key ingredients of the humor.
- Marissa: Yeah. So it can't be trying too hard. Okay. I think the talent is a big ingredient in that because it comes so far. If I'm someone writing the ad, I can write something that I think is funny, but then if you don't have the person that's prepared to deliver it the right way, then it won't land. And oftentimes on set, the talent might feel the line isn't naturally spoken. They might, adjust on the fly, and that's sometimes when you get the best performances. Especially when you're trying to do stuff that's funny, the directors will bring a lot to the table in terms of capturing the line that you wrote, but they'll also try new things. Or they'll freestyle for a little bit. And some actors can do it, some can't. And some directors are better than others. But, think that the talent brings a lot to a funny commercial, especially when you're working with celebrities.
- Jared: Sounds you think it's pretty important to have talented performers and directors. They can give their creative input, and regardless of how much effort you guys have already put in beforehand, they can make it better.
- Marissa: They are. Yeah, that's, you know, you'll bring in a director and they then put their own spin on it. They don't necessarily rewrite thing. They'll, they'll reorder it or they'll bring a different style to it that you didn't think of. And then the cast adds a whole other layer. I think that's a very important element to have the right actors and directors because if they're wrong, the ad will fall flat.
- Jared: Have you run into issues where you've had what you thought was a really good, solid script and concept and then the talent just wasn't the right fit and you had to just recast?

Marissa: Okay. Well, once you've got your cast, when you're on set, you can't really drop them. You kind of have to work with what you've got. I've been on two sets where I've been continually writing new lines for a funny script, as we tried to make it work with the talent. So if you have the time, you can try new things on set. So I was writing new stuff until we were wrapped. We just try to get the best takes and then you'd go back later and look through what you have. And once you're putting the pieces together, we go with what sounds the best. Sometimes if they delivered it with a little bit of attitude one time or maybe they laughed a little bit in the middle of it or they had a different personality, that all brings a different dynamic. I mean, when you think about it, in terms of Comedians, you can have two comedians delivering the same thing, but one of them will deliver it way better just because of their tone and the way that they pause or the way that they tell the story. So I think delivery is a huge part of it. So, to sum up, you want a script that's not trying too hard and you want the right casting.

Jared: I'll shift gears here a little bit and talk about humor in other mediums. How about social media? How do you view it, humor as a strategy on there? Do you think it's a good way to go about getting likes and shares and interactions?

Marissa: Yeah, I think everybody wants to write funny. Everybody wants to laugh. Everybody wants to see something that's funny. I think people also equally like heartwarming, inspirational stuff. But you always just want something that's going to bring levity. If you can laugh about something, it just makes everything better. So in social media, I think humor goes a long way. It's all up to the brand because tone plays a huge part. Each brand that we work with has a different personality, a different tone that you have to be able to display.

Jared: Okay. Do you think it's a good way to capture attention? I mean on social media, people are just scrolling through really quickly and if they don't see something that catches their eye right away, they move on and forget about it. Do you think humor is a good way to go about it, or are there other ways that you think are more effective?

Marissa: I don't know. I mean as somebody who spends a lot of my scrolling through memes that are fun, I personally think that humor is a way to get people to stop. I think one thing that brands might struggle with on social media is not being relatable and talking to a person because when you're

scrolling through your feed, it's an intimate experience. You're scrolling very fast. So if you're not relating to that person's life in that moment, they're just going to blow past you.

- Jared: Yeah, I agree with you about the whole idea of relating. I like that idea.
- Marissa: Yeah. I think that as much as you can breakthrough and try to be relatable to people's behaviors on Instagram and Twitter, that's what you should do. That's when you're going to be more successful. You can't just go out with your same exact message on social media and pretend that's going to be effective. You have to cater it to that audience and tailor it to the platform.
- Jared: Yeah, I agree. I think it's a pretty specialized realm. They really have to have somebody who has a feel for it, a feel for the target. It's not something that you can just throw anybody into. An inexperienced intern likely won't succeed much.
- Marissa: Right. I mean we have special social media people at our agency. I worked at a digital agency and was doing a lot of social for a long time. The social media people at my agency know exactly how people lose interest if you don't say that name within the first two seconds. Another thing is just being able to sprint and get shit done and think of ideas pretty fast. And the old way of doing things is completely gone now. So even a lot of my bosses don't necessarily understand the behaviors of online advertising.
- Jared: Do you know if your social media team plans posts out months in advance? Do you think that works?
- Marissa: It depends on what you're trying to do. Some planned stuff can be funny and can work. Other times something will happen and you just have to jump on it immediately. And you don't have anything built. You just have to put out a tweet or quickly come up with something and hope that it works.
- Jared: Do you think there are any brands or products that should just completely steer clear of using humor?
- Marissa: Yeah, maybe. I think Canon, for instance, they're a camera company. I think that they've built a brand story that feels a lot more inspirational, and you can imagine anything and go create it and whatever. And it's a lot more uplifting about the possibilities that you have to open creative doors

with this camera or whatever. I feel they don't really need to play in the humorous realm because their audience is all about creating and creating their content.

Jared: Okay. So it's not necessarily the humor would be offensive or something for them, but you're just saying that there might be a better way to go about it.

Marissa: Yeah, their persona doesn't have room for it. I mean, I think you can be clever, it just doesn't feel that they've built a humorous reputation. Apple too, you see some stuff that they do. It could all make you chuckle or laugh, but most of it is very smart, meaningful advertising. Nike isn't usually funny, and they are arguably the most successful advertiser out there. So, humor isn't always the answer. I think brands just need to know who they are and kind of stick with it. Brands that are constantly trying to reinvent themselves don't really have a personality.

Jared: That's a great point.

Marissa: That's where those brands have the opportunity to kind of take the chance with humor. If you already have a reputation that works, like Nike, then you don't need humor. For a brand that isn't established, humor is worth a shot. I think the important thing is to pick a lane and stick to it.

Jared: So you mentioned that you think humor can be used for a brand if they are trying establish their identity firmly. Do you think that that works, or does humor really need a brand to commit to it and have a campaign and establish a voice that'll last for years?

Marissa: Well, I do think that they have to establish a voice that lasts for years, but you can test out humor as part of the reinvention process. You can ask yourself questions about the types of humor you want to use and what you want your voice to sound like. Humor really does breakthrough because, especially when you look at categories that don't use it much. For instance, we're working on Therma care. The rest of the category of pain relievers, Advil and Excedrin and Aleve, they all feel the same. They all try to make you feel like they're your mom and they can take care of you. So, if you want to break through in that category where everybody is acting the same, humor would be a great way to do that. So you also have to look at what the rest of your competition is doing.

- Jared: Have you noticed any difference in the way that humor, various geographically or especially in advertising?
- Marissa: Yeah. In the United States, it's really hard to get things through that you think are going to, because brands are just really scared because they fall under a lot of scrutiny. I think the U.S. is very scared about not being politically correct. Other countries, like ones in Europe are just less concerned with that. Here brands are tip toeing around except for big brands, like Nike that want to make a statement and aren't afraid. But most brands are afraid of falling under public scrutiny.
- Jared: Yeah, definitely. Social goes nuts about that stuff.
- Marissa: Definitely. But in Europe nobody cares. To them, it's whatever. Maybe it's just that these countries are a lot more laid back. Maybe it's because our country is a lot bigger than some of the smaller countries around the world. We have a lot more diverse opinions so, I'm sure that plays into it. I just think that people get offended pretty easily. The people that get offended tend to be focal point.
- Jared: Speaking just about the U.S., do you find that certain mechanisms are more effective than others? For example, comparing incongruity, stereotyping, violence, random humor – those styles of humor.
- Marissa: Stereotypical humor is hard because people don't want to be offensive to anyone or any type of group. For the others, I'm not sure. I don't know if it comes down to the writer or actor or the brand. Sometimes physical humor works, but I usually, to me that's not as funny. But sometimes the stuff I like is almost too clever. You have to be more on the nose. I mean that's annoying feedback to hear because it sounds like they want you to do a worse job and be dumb.
- Jared: Where are you getting that feedback from? Who is telling you dumb it down sometimes?
- Marissa: The brand managers that we present work to. They work closely with the brand and with the consumer. The brand managers don't want to waste money on something that's not going to perform well. So they have all this data that's supposedly used to make decisions, but I don't always think advertising is necessarily something to be measured. It's something you feel or you don't feel when you see it.

Jared: Just comparatively, have you found more success with particular types of humor?

Marissa: It's all relative, it's so subjective. If I think something's funny, but my boss doesn't, it dies. I like to add buttons at the end. I think that's an important part of a good funny ad. I also think it so often depends on the brand and the brand's audience. So, it's not like there is a best type of humor. But there might be a best type of humor for your brand.