

**Honig:**

# 'Advertising These Days Has to Be Pre-Sold, Sold, Then Post-Sold'

(Marvin Honig, who is 38, has been one of DDB's copy stars almost since he joined the agency in 1964. Among the accounts he's worked on are American Airlines, Procter & Gamble, Ralston Purina, Volkswagen, Cracker Jack, El Al and Sony. In September he was named Creative Director of the agency, and Executive Vice President.)

INTERVIEWER: I know your work, but what are you like as a person?

HONIG: I don't have a need to have a lot of people around me. I like things neat and orderly, in my head, that is, not necessarily on my desk. Who knows what's going to happen with this high-falutin' title. I might crack. It could go to my head.

INTERVIEWER: You came to DDB in 1964 and by 1966 you were in L.A. as creative director. Is there some sort of supervisory quality you have that manifests itself fast?

HONIG: Maybe, but it has nothing to do with becoming creative director of L.A., which was mostly based on my creative ability. As an assistant supervisor in New York, I didn't really get to supervise that much. So, it was like jumping into a deep end of a pool in L.A.

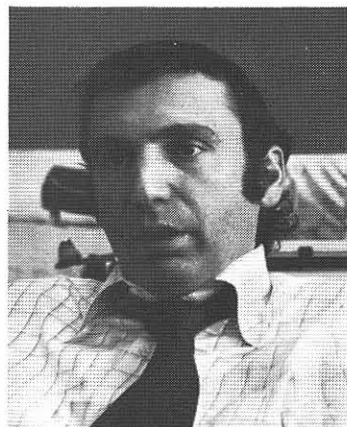
INTERVIEWER: How did it work out?

HONIG: It worked out because I did it. I was learning to be a creative director and they were learning to accept me. Ted Factor was always there to help me quite a bit and after awhile I got the feel of it and it worked better and better.

INTERVIEWER: Surely not everyone who is a good writer is a good supervisor. Besides creativity, what does it take to be able to supervise other people's creativity?

HONIG: You can't be totally interested in your own work. You have to want other people to do well. You have to set aside your own standards of what a good ad or commercial is because somebody else might find a better way to do it, a way that you never would have thought of. You have to recognize that and keep an open mind toward it.

It's very difficult because your first



"The days are gone when we can just show advertising, no matter how great it is, and say, 'This is great, run it.'"

instinct is to say that's not right because that's not the way you would do it. It's mostly having a 360° mind and thinking that possibly they have found a better way than you would have.

INTERVIEWER: And if they haven't found a better way?

HONIG: There lies the most difficult part of supervising. If they haven't found a better way, you better be sure you're right about it, because they've worked on it for days, weeks, maybe even a month and they feel they're pretty right.

Sometimes you know instinctively that something's wrong but you can't verbalize the reason. In that case you not only must find a reason, it must be the right one, so that the people involved understand it and it becomes helpful to them. "I don't like it" is never the right reason.

INTERVIEWER: Let's backtrack a bit. What are your standards for judging between good and bad advertising?

HONIG: It's a very complicated process. There's first of all clients' needs. You're in a completely different world when dealing with a package of soap than you are with a \$4,000 car. Their advertising even appears on television at different times of the day, on different shows viewed by different people.

You have to give every single advertising problem a total look, a full circle and find the best way to present and sell that product. And, you should always be

looking for the newest, most exciting way to do it. At DDB, every team always tries to look for a way to sell the product that's never been done before. It's not the easiest way but it's the right way, the way we should be doing it.

Quite often teams get too close to their problem. They start out creating good advertising but in improving and improving upon it they go past their original idea. They think they're improving upon it but actually they're just making it more involved. A very natural thing is to bring people back to where they were when they started. As an outsider you can be objective about it. You haven't been living with this thing for a week like they have.

Perhaps the best critic of a television commercial is the guy who comes in to deliver the hamburgers when you're at a mix. He looks up at the screen and he reacts, makes a comment and leaves. His comment is probably more important than any of the comments in the room because all those people have been living with that commercial for months.

INTERVIEWER: At how many points should the creative director get involved in somebody else's commercial?

HONIG: Hopefully, at two points—the storyboard and the rough cut. It's that rough cut that's a key time. With re-cutting and re-mixing you can get it to a point where everyone agrees it's better.

INTERVIEWER: Is it possible for the creative director of DDB to see every commercial at the storyboard stage and the rough cut stage?

HONIG: No. I don't think that's possible. But to see quite a few, yes, I think that's possible.

INTERVIEWER: What, in your opinion, has changed advertising the most in recent years?

HONIG: Taking away the 60-second commercial. We've used humor and charm quite well to sell products. And in both of those areas you need set-up time to get your point across. With 30 seconds you lose all the timing and the pacing that's needed. I'm not saying it can't be done but less time has changed the style

of commercials, I think, more than anything else in advertising in the past five to ten years.

INTERVIEWER: Any thoughts on what the future will hold?

HONIG: There are a lot of people who would still like it to be 1965. It was a fantastic period. But it's about to become 1975 and quite a few things have changed and longing for those days isn't going to help anybody.

For instance, at that time it was unheard of to do two or three campaigns for a single product or possibly a single strategy. That's not going to be unheard of anymore. I don't want people to feel they're letting the DDB banner down by doing that. If we don't do it we're not being competitive, we're not being fair to



"Perhaps the best critic of a television commercial is the guy who comes in to deliver the hamburgers, when you're at a mix."

ourselves because if we put three teams on a product there's a good chance that at another agency there might be five or ten teams on a similar product.

There are agencies that stack the work up, have back-up piles to show the client in case he doesn't like the pile that comes before.

We never intend to do that. What we intend to do is to make an internal judgment and decision and, as a result, a very, very definite statement to the client on the advertising we think is the best for them, even though we have three teams working on it. And the teams will be informed of that decision. I don't think

it's a question of losing integrity at all. It's just keeping up with the times and our own form of integrity.

So many clients are having financial problems. Advertising managers are very concerned about their jobs. They want reassurances. The days are gone when we can just show advertising, no matter how great it is, and say, "This is great, run it."

That's why advertising these days has to be pre-sold, sold and then post-sold. That's why we have to work closely with the account guys. They have to know what we're doing. We have to know what they're doing so they can pave the way for the advertising before it gets there. Then when the client sees it, hopefully, it's just the kind of thing he's been waiting to see. And, of course, in the continuation there will be an emphasis on research.

INTERVIEWER: Research, is that what you mean by post-selling?

HONIG: Yes. For certain clients more so than others.

INTERVIEWER: We do a lot now.

HONIG: Let's assume we have the best people. And we'll *always* have the best atmosphere. At one time that was enough. It's not enough anymore. We have to go beyond that to get that advertising on the air.

But in going beyond I don't want to lose the spark of excitement or even the bit of arrogance that's always predominated here.

I think many clients have always been a bit uneasy about DDB—maybe they still are. Maybe that's not all bad because they should always have the feeling that exciting things are happening.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think creative people still think this is the best place to work?

HONIG: Yes. I really do. And they prove it every time they leave. We usually get a phone call after two months kind of feeling out things about coming back. Bill Bernbach created an atmosphere here and even though people have copied our advertising they've never seemed to copy our atmosphere. It's unique, and that's what we're going to build on.