

The Role of the Graphic Artist in an Advertising Agency

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the role of the Graphic Artist in an Advertising Agency. Ever since the use of the computer as a design tool in the advertising industry, the place of the Graphic Artist has been contentious. It is on this backdrop that the writer tends to highlight the enormous role and the indispensability of the Graphic Artist in an Advertising Agency. With a review of a number of literatures, the subject content of both Graphic Arts as a discipline and the Evolutionary Trend of the Advertising Agency were clearly stated. The findings reveal that the Graphic Artist's functions come under the creative department in the organizational structure of the Advertising Agency. He translates the broad outlines into ideas for advertisements producing visual concepts, slogans, copy and storylines for all media and for support materials. By and large, the Graphic Artist is a formidable force to contend with in the realization of the stated goals of the Advertising Agency in any economy.

Introduction

Design has always been a problem solving process involving the capacity to be logical and analytical and relates to human needs in a technological world. The designer is the catalyst between the problem and society and must be prepared to direct his/her energy to objective solutions with full knowledge of the social and environmental impact. This is borne out of the contentious position of the Graphic Artist in this computer age. This is why in determining the role of the Graphic Artist in an Advertising Agency, effort is made to understand the subject content of Graphic arts (Sheridan College, 1983). Graphic design is by no means a new field. The terms used to describe the profession may have changed with the times – Commercial Art and Visual Communication - being two previous titles, but the practice has remained centred on two main elements – Images and Words. Usually, they appear together and their combination can create a powerful and persuasive form of communication, whether in the context of advertising, packaging, books, magazines, television or most recently web design (Tappenden 2004:6). Hence, the Graphic Artist is concerned with the problems of preparing and organizing visual symbols for the communication of ideas and information and satisfying the needs of the advertising and publishing industries.

The primary objective of design education is to form the basis of independent thought, to develop recognition, sensitivity, and social responsibility in the implementation of the design process to real human needs. The designer functions in a design team, interacting with other design disciplines to improve our living and working environment. The professional graphic designer needs visual acuity, a keen sense of color and proportion and highly specialized technical skills, as well as an understanding of prints production methods and the complexity of the Internet. Advertising Agency on the other hand, according to Wright et al (1981:177) is a highly specialized service organization, a corporate body whose duty is to carry out advertising services. It has evolved over the past one hundred and sixty years – from simple media space selling to its present status as the supplier of a complete set of services for its advertiser clients. The agency major functions today include:

1. Advertising programme planning
2. The creation and execution of the programme
3. The coordination of programme activities.

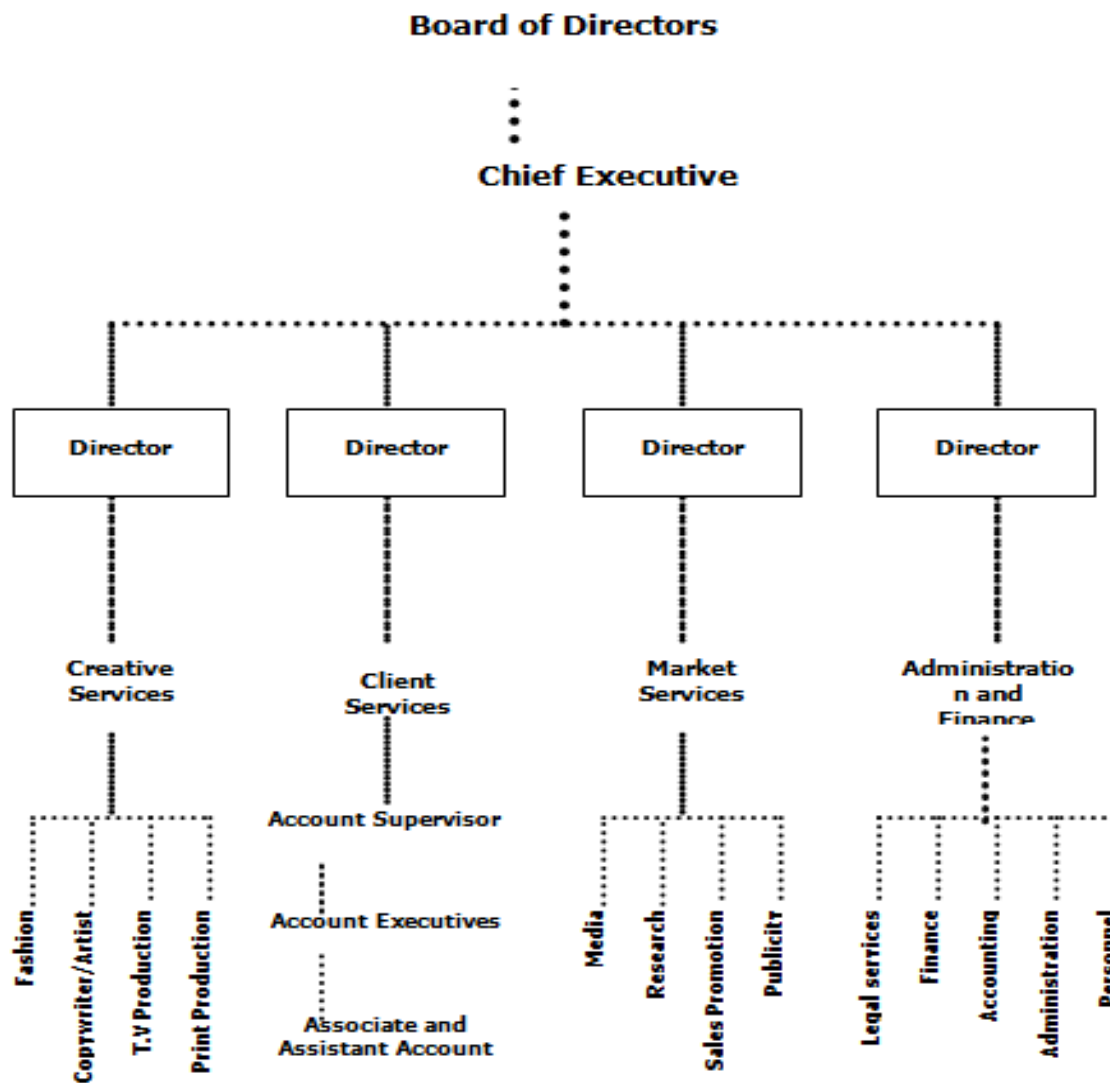
These duties are broadly grouped into:

- a. Counseling of clients
- b. Receiving briefs from clients
- c. Planning campaigns for clients

- d. Executing campaigns on behalf of the clients
- e. Placing advertisement and commercials on behalf of clients
- d. Evaluating campaign effectiveness and overall advertisement environment

To accomplish these objectives, a collection of specialists, including account executives, creative people, media experts, and research personnel is assembled. These people are organized within the agency structure on either a departmentalized or a group basis. Superimposed on the organization is a hierarchy of managerial people, including top management who has the generation of new business, as a highly important responsibility. Recently, such alterations to the full – service agency as the creative boutique and the in-house agency have appeared. Agencies are paid either by media commissions or by client fees. The commission system originated from the space selling background of the Advertising Agency and usually is figured at fifteen percent of the advertising billings placed in the traditional advertising media. Clients may agree to pay specified fees for work done by the agency instead of using the commissions system, but the later still accounts for more than three-fourth of all agency compensation.

A typical Advertising Agency is structured thus;



Evolution of the Advertising Agency

Space Broker Stage:

Around 1840, various men began to act as sales representatives for out of – town newspaper in such metropolitan centers as New York and Philadelphia. At first, these men acted as simple agents selling space for their clients’ newspaper on a commission basis.

Later on, some would buy a set number of pages from a given newspaper and then resell portions at whatever price could be obtained from advertisers. This has been called the space broker stage in the evolution of modern Advertising Agency. The arrangement led to price-cutting as advertisers sought the lowest possible price. There was little emphasis on planning of advertising by the agent, or on the development of the best possible media schedule for advertiser's inefficiency characterized the advertising field at this time.

Standard Services Stage

In 1876, the N. W. Ayer and Son Agency devised a plan, which was eventually to minimize the dubious practice of Brokering Advertising Space. Ayer entered into agreement with advertisers whereby they promised to place all their advertising through the agency. In return, the agency bought space for its client only at established rates as published by newspapers and magazines. Thus, the agent became a buyer of space for the advertisers instead of seller of space to the advertiser. As this arrangement became adopted generally, agencies in the competitive struggle for clients, started to take on duties now considered normal-copywriting, artwork, layout, media selection and research. Before 1900, the Ayer agency has established departments for both copywriting and art works, and the standard service stage in the evolution of the Advertising Agency had commenced. Over the next several decades advertising agencies improved the quality of their services to clients and added additional offerings. Agency personnel were trusted with solving more of their clients' problems.

Market Services Stage

By 1950 agencies were offering more varied and highly skilled services to the clients taking consumers psychology into account when creating advertisement, as well as furthering the role of advertising in the marketing mix by coordinating it with other marketing procedures. Advertising agencies thus entered into the marketing services stages, from which evolved the so-called full-service agency, which is representative of most large advertising agencies in the United States today (*Wright et al 1981:159*).

In Nigeria, the first Advertising Agency was the West African Publicity Ltd. (WAP), which was set up by the UAC in Lagos in 1928. It must always be remembered that advertisement is a symbolic appendage to business. Thus, as business became better organized so did advertising, inevitably. New business horizons opened beyond merchandising in the world's period of industrialization, witnessing the blossoming of Shipping Insurance, Manufacturing, Agriculture, Technology, and Aviation, among other ventures that became vast, global business. During this period, UAC arrived in Nigeria widening its operational bases beyond the initial merchandising. But it was in the need to service the widening range of products and services that WAP was born. WAP's operational success goaded the UAC into commercializing it thus setting the pace for agency development in Nigeria. WAP was primarily formed to provide marketing support for the UAC's fast growing line of products and services. But with providence, it grew into an octopus of its own as the father of organized advertising in Nigeria.

The success of WAP and its ability to respond positively to the flux in the era's economic impulses, led to its rapid growth and its metamorphosis into Lint as West Africa Ltd in 1965, with a full scale open market competitive brief. Lint as West Africa Ltd was part of the Lintas International until 1974 when the UAC had to sell off to Nigerians as a result of the indigenisation decree. "Lint as" is a condensation of Lever International Advertising Service, brainchild of the Unilever group. Before 1965, as a result of WAP's growing reach and clientele the need for greater attention to outdoor advertising services (which were WAP's initial area) led to the creation of a full outdoor services company, Afro media in 1959 out of WAP. Afro media itself became indigenised in 1974 and remains like Lint as today in general advertising, a beacon in outdoor advertising. With the increases in the number of agencies, the need for a better organization of the agency scene was felt that precisely led in 1963 to the birth of first known voluntary association - Advertising Association of Nigeria AAN with membership from media owners and Advertising Agencies. By 1973, Advertising Practitioners in Nigeria (AAPN) emerged to protect the interest of Indigenous Advertising Agencies (*Bel-Molokwu, 2005:52*).

Role of the Graphic Artist in an Advertising Agency

Having stated the subject content of what graphic design entails coupled with the evolutionary stages of what is today referred to as an Advertising Agency to isolate the roles of the Graphic Artists, it is pertinent to state that the overriding function of the Advertising Agency is to see that its client's advertising leads to greater profits in the long run than could be achieved without the agency. The agency thus plans, prepares and places advertising to this end. The customer is the key and the agency supplies an "outside point of view" to the advertiser in his efforts to communicate with prospective purchasers of his product.

The distinguishing characteristics between various advertising agencies lie in the creative skills of the personnel of each organization and in the philosophies of advertising held by each agency. Looking through the structure of a typical Advertising Agency, the Graphic Artist functions come under the creative department, made up of artists and copywriters, who translate the broad outlines into ideas for advertisements, producing visual concepts, slogans, copy and story lines for all media and for support materials (such as what is known as 'point of sale' in shops). Once advertising plans are firm, advertisements are designed by creative personnel to carry out the plan. An agency retains a varied group of creative people, including writers, artists, designers, television producers, and graphic arts specialists. The creative functions may be under the department, or it may be divided into several separate departments such as copy, art, broadcast, and production. Creativity involves a novel or infrequent expression, response, or concept. It is more than introversive expression for it must be oriented to and correlate with the marketing situation and serve as a communication problem solver. Advertising creativity is often described as presenting a product in way that people want to buy it (*Wright et al, 1981:177*).

In consequence, the Graphic Artist functions in the art of copywriting whereby most advertising ideas are produced. He writes the words you read in printed advertisement or hear in radio and television commercials. A copywriter thinks in both words and pictures. He sees an advertisement he is preparing as a combination of words and pictures. He designs every illustrated advertisement you see. They select and retouch photographs and often ask to design attractive packages for an advertiser's product. He designs rough layouts (sketches) of the advertisement in the actual size in which the advertisements will appear. From this, a comprehensive layout will emerge. The artwork may then be drawn or photographed before moving to the production department, where necessary typesetting, engravings and preparation and distribution of printing plates to the publications in which the advertisements are to appear. He writes the proposed script (*Encyclopedia International, 1976:65*). In a number of cases, the Graphic Artist according to Uzoagba (1982:46) work either as freelancers or on salaried basis in the Advertising Agency and are of course, regarded as Layout men. If they are buying and directing the art bought from artists, they are called art directors. The Director is of course equipped with the basic information on layout, typography, lettering, illustration, photography, engraving, and printing. Specifically, the Graphic Artist performs the following functions thus:

The Layout Man:

His function is to combine skillfully pictures, typography, lettering, and copy for a good advertisement. He must know when to make a simple and dignified advertisement or to make one that speaks loudly.

The Illustrator:

He makes drawing of advertisement and illustration for magazines, stories, and books. After reading the story in a book, it is his job to pick out the best situation to illustrate. As an illustrator, he creates drawings in pencil, marker, paint, and dyes, using virtually every medium to illustrate effectively in black and white or in colour for books, magazines, newspaper, advertisements including most forms of advertising and graphic communications.

The Photographer:

As a photographer, he retouches the pictures for best possible reproduction due to the limitations of the camera, the film and printing papers used. The photographic designer also creates advertising art in numerous forms through the effective use of black and white and colour photographs. The photographer takes photographs of people, scenes merchandise, machinery and other subjects for use in advertising and selling. He has to select or arrange suitable background and where necessary position or arrange subjects to be photographed.

The Paste Up Man:

The Graphic Artist prepares the final art, positioning type, illustrations, and photographs in accordance with layouts. The end product could be catalogues, brochures, package design, advertisement, and magazines.

The Typographer:

This involves typesetting in a type shop to the specification of the designer or layout man.

T.V. Graphics:

The T.V. graphic designer creates slides and animated films for television commercials, educational and a variety of films incorporating paper-cutting techniques, illustrations, photography, typography and a wide variety of special techniques. Cartooning is used in features syndicate and includes gag cartooning, advertising cartooning, animated films, T.V. films, and comic book illustration, a drawing with humorous or satirical intention.

The Applied Designer:

The advertising designer specializes in the visual effects of advertising layouts for media including newspaper, magazines, and brochures through effectively designing and selecting type, illustrations, and photography. This calls for a knowledge of design and colour and embody the principles of advertising, merchandising and display.

Corporate Designer:

The designer creates the original design and finished artworks for a mark or logo that will be used by a company on its stationary, equipment, uniforms, buildings, vehicles and advertising.

Package Designer:

The package designer creates appropriate packaging, labels, point of purchase display and other devices to enhance the appearance and merchandising utility of the product.

Studio Graphics:

The designer creates folders, brochures, annual reports and calendars from layout stage through to finished art, incorporating the principles of design using colour, typography, illustration and photography.

From the above stated functions of the Graphic Artist, it is obvious that Graphic art is a field directly connected with the immediate needs of industry, commerce or government. Graphic art is perhaps the most commercialized area in Art. It is an aspect, which moves, and it is applied. The knowledge of the graphic arts can provide job opportunities not only in the advertising agencies but also practitioners can be gainfully employed. As stated earlier, the Graphic Artist functions in the creative services Department in the overall structure of the Advertising Agency. In his position, he receives the creative brief. The creative brief is the set of instructions, directives or requests that enables the briefing party to explain its advertising objectives and the briefed party to appreciate those objectives. It is the omnibus advertising documents and should be most carefully prepared. The brief is the prelude to the creative proposal and its importance in advertising is like the report of a patient to the doctor. The total life of a campaign could be in high risk if the brief is defective. The brief is the mandate for action in advertising.

The creative director or manager having received his own brief directly from the advertiser (if he was present at the briefing) or from the client service director (if he was not) also sets out to brief his team. The basic creative brief aims at generating ideas and results in two – dimensions. The briefing executive in presenting his creative briefs to his subordinates takes into account the components of copy which comprises Headline, illustrations, sub headline, body copy and signature and artwork which is made up of illustration and layout. These two are the key ingredients of creative work in advertising. With this in mind, the briefing executive will be able to provide the vital operational information to his team (*Bel-Molokwu, 2005:66*). Key information for the creative brief must include the following:

1. Budget limits
2. Selection of creative options e.g. still or motion
3. Identification of creative work to be done (in specific terms e.g. copy, rough or story board)
4. Recap of media to be used (to guide team in using the right specifications)
5. Production guidelines
6. Costing of all creative work, including peripherals
7. Finishing schedules e.g. deadlines for submission of scamps, finished work etc (scamps are preliminary first sketches both for copy and for visuals)
8. Information about the campaign e.g. duration e.t.c.
9. Specification of individual assignments with completion deadlines.
10. Advertising message and objectives for creative works.
11. Contributions to brain storming

Conclusion

From the above analyses of the role of the Graphic Artist in an Advertising Agency, his services cannot be dispensed with. It is true to state that graphic art is now computerized as a result of advances in technology for social and economic activities, advertising, and book production and communication explosion. There is no gainsaying the fact that the computer is a marvelous invention, but it cannot draw, design or think for you. Although, an integral part of the modern design process, a computer is merely a tool to be mastered and used well.

It must be remembered that good designs still begins with a pencil. Therefore you must allow your concepts, rather than the process, to drive your design. In consequence, the Graphic Artist is a formidable force to contend with in the realization of the stated goals of the Advertising Agency in meeting the demands of its numerous clients.

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