

Sports & Scandal: What We Have Learned and How We Prepare for the Future

Tom Dick & Harry takes on the challenge and creates warm campaign for Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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BY LEWIS LAZARE Sun-Times Columnist

Perhaps understandably, many advertising agencies prefer to steer clear of working with religious denominations. Religion is, after all, a very hot-button topic for so many people.

On Monday, for instance, this newspaper ran a cover story about a congregation of Episcopalians who broke away from their church, in part because they were upset a lesbian might lead the Chicago Diocese. And we don't need to remind anyone of the sex abuse scandals that have inflamed Roman Catholic churchgoers across America and dominated headlines the past several years.

Well aware of the sensitivities that come with servicing a religion account, Tom Dick & Harry Advertising/Chicago nonetheless accepted an assignment from the Chicago-headquartered Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to develop a pilot ad campaign to recruit new members. The membership totals nearly 5 million baptized congregants. The print, outdoor, direct mail and online campaign -- which breaks this month in Denver, and is expected to go national in 2008 -- carries the tag line "God's Work. Our Hands."

As TD&H creative partner Michael Herlehy is quick to point out, the agency was quick to play down any reference to God in the campaign -- beyond the tag line. "Advertising can't talk to people about God," Herlehy said. "It cheapens a very personal issue."

The presiding bishop apparently agreed with Herlehy and his creative partners at the agency. So what we have instead is a series of executions spotlighting the many good deeds members of the Lutheran Church have been about over the course of the past couple of years. Though the print executions eschew talk about God, they do all carry creatively realized images of the cross, another religious symbol of great significance.

One execution shows two loaves of bread forming the cross, as the date-specific ad copy talks about how Lutheran church members helped feed 210 hungry children in Lima, Peru, on May 16, 2006. Another pleasing effort shows two noodles forming a cross in a china bowl filled with soup. The copy in this execution takes us to Bismarck, N.D., where on Jan. 16, 2006, 403 homeless people were fed a banquet on china with real silverware. The words of copy in the ad attempt in a few deft strokes to convey the scene and the mood in Bismarck: "Yes, the wind here can be cold and bitter. Thankfully, our hearts are anything but."

The approach is tasteful and informative -- perhaps the best way to market a product like the church.
Lew's view: B+

Richard Bennington has joined Digitas/Chicago as general manager. He will manage the agency's day-to-day financial operations and report to Jim Rossman, Digitas global chief operating officer. Bennington previously was president and CEO of Ignition Advertising, a startup full-service agency specializing in print, television and radio ads for auto dealerships.

Gordon Kane and Mark Mitten, marketing honchos for the Chicago 2016 Olympic bid, will address the Chicago chapter of the Business Marketing Association on Sept. 20, at a luncheon at the Hotel Interncontinental/Chicago.

AT&T launches a new corporate branding campaign today with the theme "Your Seamless World." The campaign is intended to give the brand an edgier, younger, more contemporary image associated with wireless users. Wes Anderson, whose films include "Rushmore" and "The Royal Tenenbaums," has directed six new television spots.

The Chicago Chapter of the National Sports Marketing Network will sponsor a panel discussion titled "Sports & Scandal: What We Have Learned and How We Prepare for the Future" at the United Center on Sept. 18. Panelists include: Nova Lanktree, executive vice president, marketing services, CSMG International; Scott Novak, senior vice president, Dan Klores Communications; James "Big Cat" Williams, commentator, Chicago Rush, and Alan Zucker, senior vice-president, athlete marketing, IMG. Corey McPherrin, sports anchor, Fox News/Chicago, will moderate. Reservations: www.sportsmarketingnetwork.com

Sara Lee brand Jimmy Dean is bringing back its Happy Breakfast Tour, a mobile tour providing consumers with a free hot breakfast. The 12-city tour will kick off in San Jose, Calif.

Insurance behemoth Allstate has tapped Lapiz/Chicago as its new Hispanic agency of record. Tapestry will handle media buying for Hispanic advertising.

Robert Williams has joined AbelsonTaylor/Chicago as a senior copywriter for a cardiovascular product. He reports to Kaye Kilgore, associate creative director. Williams previously was with Sage Products Inc., a Cary-based maker of health and personal care products.

Alex Cantos has been named digital sales manager for WBBM-TV/Channel 2. Cantos will oversee the station's Web sales effort. He previously worked for McClatchy Interactive in Miami