



Then We Set His Hair on Fire: Insights and Accidents from a Hall of Fame Career in Advertising

By Phil Dusenberry

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We Bring Good Things to Life

It's Not TV, It's HBO

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These aren't just advertising slogans; they're game-changing insights. And according to ad industry legend Phil Dusenberry, whose team at BBDO created these and many other brilliant campaigns, one big insight is worth a thousand good ideas. An idea can lead to one clever commercial. But a true insight can define a brand for years to come and turn an entire industry upside down.

Dusenberry, who turned BBDO/NY into a creative powerhouse, shares his best advice and funniest stories in *Then We Set His Hair on Fire*. You are there with Phil as he...

- * Frets before a \$60 million pitch to GE's Jack Welch, knowing that BBDO's clunky proposed tagline ("We make the things that make life good") just isn't going to cut it.
 - * Initiates the all-star team that devised Ronald Reagan's groundbreaking 1984 reelection campaign.
 - * Helps FedEx sustain its success after the overnight delivery business became crowded with competition.
 - * Works with Gillette's management to distill the insight that its shaving systems are "the best a man can get."
 - * Leads the team that gave New York City a renewed spirit after 9/11, with an unprecedented television campaign.
- And last but far from least...
- * Sets on fire the hair of the most in-demand celebrity spokesman of his time, in the Pepsi commercial heard round the world.

In this entertaining yet practical memoir, Dusenberry reveals what really works

in the fiercely competitive game of trying to stick in the consumer's mind. And he shows how anyone can approach marketing problems from a unique angle and hit home runs, not just singles.

Many things have changed since Phil Dusenberry started writing ad copy, but his insights are as true now as they ever were. This is a fun-to-read book that will change the way you think about advertising.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

When author Phil Dusenberry began his career at the giant ad agency BBDO in 1962, advertising--and really all of marketing--was a very different industry. Products were simpler, customer segmentation and targeting less sophisticated, and even the vocabulary of sales and marketing less extensive. In the ensuing four decades, as Dusenberry rose to become Chairman and Chief Creative Officer of BBDO, the world changed. Still, the relative simplicity of a bygone era comes through in *Then We Set His Hair on Fire*--it's a refreshing read and a throwback to the time of David Ogilvy's classic, *Confessions of an Ad Man*.

Partly a memoir, partly a textbook on classic advertising campaigns, and partly one man's discourse on the complicated art of persuading people to do a simple thing--"buying more stuff"--Dusenberry's work will satisfy different audiences. Most obviously, eager business students wanting to learn the behind-the-scenes details that went into the creation of world-famous advertising campaigns will find a trove of rich anecdotes. Dusenberry describes the epiphanous moment that led to GE's two-decade slogan, "Bringing Good Things to Life." He then weaves an entertaining narrative around the clients and campaigns that defined his career: HBO ("There's no place like HBO"), Pepsi ("Generation Next"), Cingular ("Raising the Bar"), even President Reagan's 1984 re-election campaign ("Morning in America"), and others.

Dusenberry pays brief lip service to the science of advertising, describing the kind of background research that underlies great ad campaigns, but he admits a greater faith in gut instinct and the all-important insights that drove his clients' success. The alternative? Dullness and failure. According to the opinionated and colorful Dusenberry, overly careful reliance on empirical data leads to copycat advertising, which in turn produces the worst of all situations: a "parity economy" in which goods and services are relatively commoditized, without the kind of special differentiation that creates lasting businesses.

Instead, Dusenberry exhorts his readers proverbially to "move the needle" in non-trivial ways, to get "sauce on your sleeve," to "stand for something," and every once in awhile, when circumstances warrant, to make the boldest of all moves, "betting the farm." These axiomatic phrases might seem trite from another author, but somehow, Dusenberry makes them seem trenchant with his never-ending stories. In one of the newer stories, for example, he recounts how BBDO staged a pro bono campaign for New York City shortly after the 9-11 terrorist attacks, using celebrities such as Henry Kissinger, Robert DeNiro, Billy Crystal, Ben Stiller, and Barbara Walters to illustrate the power of the dreams that draw so many young people to the city, even today.

It's those powerful dreams that have become lost in so much advertising today, and which Dusenberry recalls in spades. While his playfully titled volume cannot be taken as a comprehensive, scientific manual for better advertising, it does well in reminding us of the qualities from advertising's origins that remain ever-relevant.

--Peter Han

From Publishers Weekly

In Dusenberry's practical if sometimes self-congratulatory memoir-cum-handbook, he asserts, "A good idea can inspire a great commercial. But a good insight can fuel a thousand ideas, a thousand commercials." The book is as thick as Campbell's Chunky Soup with instructive anecdotes from his long and storied career as former chairman and chief creative officer of BBDO North America. With illustrations from BBDO accounts including GE, Federal Express, Gillette, HBO and Pizza Hut, Dusenberry stresses the importance of strategic

insight for distinguishing your brand and cutting through the proverbial clutter. GE's tag line, "We bring good things to life," which endured from 1979 to 2003, was built on the corporate giant's pervasiveness, for example. Dusenberry addresses the challenges of branding in today's "parity economy," doing research, creating ads that actually "sell more stuff," launching a brand, distilling what it stands for as the starting point for generating insights, and building a superior creative team. Throughout, he strikes an authoritative but conversational tone as he offers behind-the-scenes observations (e.g., on the infamous Michael Jackson Pepsi commercial). Dusenberry's theses are hardly earth-shattering, but his firsthand take on some major campaigns of the past few decades make the book worth a browse for aspiring marketers. (*Sept.*)
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From [Booklist](#)

Dusenberry, advertising's legendary chairman and chief creative officer of BBDO North America, offers his insights in business and how we get them, how we recognize them, and how we keep them coming. We learn that insights express the fundamental rationale for a company and inspire ideas that, if they are good ideas, lead to action. The author's personal view of the advertising industry during the last 30 years is entertaining, with numerous stories about famous business and political personalities that explain how he encouraged creativity in his staff and how their powerful advertising campaigns changed the market's perception of companies such as General Electric with the theme, "We bring good things to light." Guidelines to foster creativity in all companies, not only advertising, include hiring people smarter than you; being a tough boss; being open to accidents, failures, and miscellaneous surprises; and getting a life outside the office--great ideas are often born from personal experiences. This is a beneficial read. *Mary Whaley*
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