

On Advertising

by Jowell Tan

What we do is Really Weird. I mean, think about it:

What we do doesn't change lives - No one cites watching a commercial as the pivotal turning point in their lives, when they got off their couches and became entrepreneurs, philanthropists, people of note, whatever. No one says "This ad made me realise I was wasting my life, so I turned it around and now I own my own jet."

What we do doesn't even educate people - We made a commercial for McDonald's, for God's sakes. Who doesn't know McDonald's? Or the national bank, or the local telcos? Why do these companies even need advertising? All we are, when we are doing what we do, is merely another cog in the corporate consumer culture that permeates our modern society, feeding the unsuspecting with endless barrages of pretty pictures, telling them to buy X products for Y dollars with a side of coolness, a perception of having gained, all while what really happens is just give the machines more ammunition to overwhelm our senses with.

So, why are we even in this business?

Fitting as it sounds, we work in the most selfish industry for the most selfish reason - Ourselves. I mean, think about it:

When we were young, sitting in front of the family TV, watching show after show go by on the screen, colours and shapes and sounds, dialogue and explosions, we probably only thought one of two things:

"Wow that's cool! I wanna do that when I grow up!," Or "Wow that

was so lame, I could do a better job!"

As you can see, egotism forms at a young age for people who end up in this industry.

Through our formative years, in between lessons in English and Math and Science, we cultivated our aspirations of being the next big thing on television. We volunteered for the schools' audiovisual clubs. We dragged our mothers to auditions for "Child Lead (Breakfast Cereal Commercial)". We followed our favourite actors and forced our parents to binge-watch movies with us.

We entered film school, where we encountered kindred spirits - fellow teenagers who had the same epiphanies while watching the same shows, whose parents would rather their child study Business or Engineering instead. We watched movies in class. We learnt technical jargon, like Aperture and Best Boy Grip. We learnt about incitement and resolution. We learnt about character development. Finally, We learnt how to write a script. And we took them with us to shoot.

As you would imagine, A group of people brought together by their own individual egos will inevitably clash with each other. We found out who our true friends were, and who we could never work with ever again. We noted down the people with complementary ideas, and stuck to them like bees to honey. We somehow managed to get through shoots and edits and presentations without hating each other, although there were fights and breakups and personal realisations ("I thought I was good - I actually suck at this!") along the way.

After graduation, we struck out into the working world, hoping to become the next big director or actor. But after a while we quickly realised no one had the time nor the inclination to indulge our passions. Being artistic for its own sake was deemed irrelevant to

the industry at large. So we shrugged our shoulders. We hunkered down, kept our scripts away, settled for producing 30-second advertisements for companies that didn't really need it in exchange for a paycheck, enough to pay the rent and buy the groceries and maybe buy something nice once in a while.

Beholden to the whims of clients, restrained by the economy of advertising blocks, unable to unleash our ideas unfettered onto the world - Why do we even continue working in this line? Why not just leave and make the things we want to make, unencumbered by outside demands and insensible constraints?

This may sound clichéd, but here's the truth - We're in this business because we consider ourselves lucky to be able to live our dreams, even in its downsized and controlled version.

Where else in the world would we be able to say *"Hey, this idea I have will be good for you but it'll be this expensive"* to a client, then go out and gather expensive equipment and shoot our ideas and put it together and send it out AND get paid for it? Get paid to materialise the things that pop into our heads and put it on screens everywhere, seen by millions? It's even viewed as a challenge when we hit external roadblocks - We simply flex our muscles and work around it. It may seem counterintuitive, but the battles we face going through our work, make that final product just that much sweeter when we see it in the wild.

And there's that ego again, peeking its head out - "I made that! It looks fantastic!" - But the difference between the ego of a young boy and an old man is worlds apart. We've taken that harsh bravado and molded it into hard work.

We're now professionals in an industry we dreamed of being in - I

don't think it gets any better than that. It sure beats being a
Businessman or an Engineer.

