

Boonie in to bat for VB



AD WATCH

Simon Canning

MENTION interactive advertising and you'll almost surely prompt people to start talking about websites, emails and all manner of hi-tech trickery.

But interaction in advertising can happen on a far more subtle and inventive scale than mere bits and bytes. Imagine an advertising campaign that takes a sporting figure, puts him in your lounge-room, then has him interact with the telly. Welcome to the interactive world Victoria Bitter style.

The latest campaign from the brand that gave us a hard-earned thirst canonises a new hero for the Australian beer drinker. David Boon, a cricketer of note who also managed to knock back several dozen tinnies on a Sydney to London flight, is the new hero for VB drinkers.

Far from just offering up an ad with Boonie guzzling at a prodigious rate, VB is bringing Boon into homes across the nation.

Not Boon himself, mind, but a small figurine of the moustached willow wielder that does more than just sit on the mantelpiece. Pop the little feller next to you while you are watching the cricket this summer and he'll utter all manner of Boonisms in response to the action on screen.

"Where's me beer," the little figure will cry, or "shot" when a great stroke is played.

The promotion is true to the new flavour of VB's advertising that at once invokes the heritage of the brand but adds a fresh sense of humour to the message.

Our rating . . .



In the market for a raise

Simon Canning

A GLOBAL shortage of creative directors, designers and marketers is putting pressure on the Australian industry to pay more for marketing and advertising talent.

Greg Savage, recently appointed chief executive of global recruitment company Aquent, warns that pay scales are likely to spiral in coming years as overseas competitors strip talent from Australia.

China, the US and emerging markets in eastern Europe are all competing for staff, leaving the local advertising and marketing industry vulnerable.

"A lot of people think skills shortages are cyclical, but I think this talent shortage is actually long term," Savage says. "There are a lot of macro-economic reasons, like there have not been enough trained people, the industry has not attracted enough people."

Savage says companies are also paying a high price for poaching staff rather than developing talent in-house, resulting in pay rates spiralling artificially. "That creates a merry-go-round. But who is actually going to train new people?"

Aquent's annual salary survey reveals more than 80 per cent of companies in the marketing and advertising spheres expect to increase salaries this year.

"In some cases these increases have been long delayed and employers are applying a catch-up mentality as they begin to realise that increasingly employees have the leverage when it comes to salary discussions," the report says.

"We can see how the solid economy, increased business demand and the resulting hiring surge converge to drive up compensation for staff in the marketing, communications and creative sector."

In the creative sector, 23 per cent of companies expect to increase salaries by 8 per cent or more in the coming 12 months. Savage says the burgeoning



Skills shortage: International competition will drive up pay rates, says recruitment chief executive Greg Savage

Picture: Alan Pryke

Chinese market is affecting the ability of companies in Australia to recruit.

"A country like China, and there are others, [is] soaking up a lot of talent in the region. People no longer see their careers as being in one country. They talk about the global market and the same applies to the labour market, and so people will go where the jobs are," he says. "I think Australia is on the outer to a degree. Australia has appealed because of lifestyle, but it is never going to be the highest paid market and in some cases is not going to be the centre of the action either."

He likens the opportunities for Australian marketing and advertising professionals in China in coming years as akin to the early days of the internet.

"The business opportunity and hype about China reminds me of the dotcom era. 'Everyone said: 'You have got to get into it, you are going to make millions.' Now everyone I talk to says: 'You have got to be in China.' But I think more people will lose money in China than make it."

Savage also warns that with overseas markets proving more attractive to talent, the quality of advertising and communica-

tions may also be suffering. "From a marketing perspective, Australia errs towards the safe. It's not the place where you would try your edgiest campaign," he says.

"In places like Europe and Asia you have a bit more of a preparedness to go out on a limb and try something."

Savage says the ability for Australian companies to compete for talent in the global marketplace comes down to leadership. "There are some people who are coming through who are prepared to provide the lead and I remain hopeful that will be the case," he says.

Savage also warns that the recruitment industry needs to revisit its model, moving away from the concept of simply running ads to become talent management firms.

He says the competitive nature of the industry in the fight for talent has opened up the opportunities for freelance advertising and marketing professionals to pick and choose assignments, further driving up the cost of hiring.

"It is the fluid job market that lends itself so easily to the marketing and creative world," he says.

While media companies cherish

close contact with the client, the \$1.5 billion media buying alliance, Group M, last week contacted some media companies to ask for exclusive, innovative media ideas if they want to hold or increase their share of Group M business next year.

Interestingly, pay television sales company MCN last week launched what it's calling an "affinity break", a themed ad break containing five non-competing brands. The first will be themed "hot summer stuff" and will target under-40s viewers with products including Mars bars, Warner Bros theme parks, Sony PlayStation and Coca-Cola.

This is exactly the sort of idea Group M is seeking; unfortunately, MCN thinks it's too good to reserve for just one buying group, even one that controls 15 per cent of the market.

Some media agencies, such as Fusion Strategy, say Group M is abdicating its responsibility for coming up with smart media ideas to the media proprietors.

Of course, agencies that offer communications strategy across consumer touch points beyond the traditional media are in no danger of doing that. A good example of this is Bellamy-Hayden's campaign for Sunbeam espresso machines that promises to "unlock the barista" in people.

Central to the campaign is a free coffee-making course for customers taught by Australian world-champion barista Paul Bassett, along with a free quarterly cafe-distributed custom publication *The Short Black Book*.

The campaign grew out of a consumer insight — that great coffee is made by the person behind the machine — and any advertising will be short term and tactical, almost an afterthought.

Who kicks in for the strategic ideas

LARA SINCLAIR



THERE'S a bun fight developing in the world of media strategy over the value of ideas; not simply who should be pitching them to advertisers but how much the media should be rewarded for its part in the equation.

The vexed issue of who owns the media idea was complicated last week by Group M's demands for media companies to deliver it creative ideas in answer to a group media negotiation brief.

Talented media sales people have always come up with creative ways advertisers can use their medium, often pitching them through the media agency.

If the advertiser in question buys the media idea and it works, rest assured it's the media agency that gets most of the credit. Media companies generally must be satisfied with accepting the booking.

That is being challenged with the development of strategic advertising units at media companies; for example, News Limited (publisher of *The Australian*) is developing tailored advertising packages across the range of News Corporation companies; Fairfax has a business development unit; and Publishing and Broadcasting Ltd has a specialist events division, PBL Live, as well as its cross-media selling unit.

Media companies have invested staff and resources in these units largely to beef up share or retain advertising dollars in an increasingly fragmented media world. As they move upstream, they are increasingly wanting to be rewarded directly for their high-end thinking. Most often this takes the form of a premium charged on advertising packages that may include value-added elements such as promotions, sponsorships and events. But some companies are taking this a step further and looking for ways to be paid for the intellectual property they develop.

"The big issue that media companies have is actually getting [advertisers] to pay for the ideas and not just space in the [media]," says a PBL source. "With the PBL Live thing . . . we come up with a great idea and then we get them to pay for the event to put it on. It gives us an extended budget."

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