

# The approval of the client, a mere formality.

Mike Everett

It goes without saying that CDP in its heyday was a wonderful place to work. But the way the agency approached making commercials was more marvellous still.

For a start, there was a quality-control system that would have done justice to a German car plant. Every script had to pass through no fewer than three levels of scrutiny. Firstly, it had to gain an emphatic nod from your group heads. In the case of Paul Smith and me, these primary inspectors were Terry Lovelock and Vernon Howe, the men who wrote the Heineken campaign.

Only when a piece of work refreshed the parts of their sense of humour that other scripts couldn't reach were we allowed to move to the next level of approval: John Salmon, the creative director.

John was a man who could spot a logic flaw a mile off. He also had a deft touch when it came to turning down work. So masterly was he, that you had no idea how rude he'd been about your meagre effort until you were long gone from his office.

Once in a while, though, you managed to produce a piece of work that was so original, so brilliant, yet so instilled with its own internal logic, that it was allowed to land on the desk of the final arbiter, Frank Lowe.

Now stories of Frank are legion. Suffice to say that if a script passed his steely gaze unscathed, it usually got made. In those days, the approval of the client appeared to be a mere formality. If the agency has signed off the work, the client was expected to do likewise.

And so to production. Usually there would be talk about showing the script to 'Alan', or 'Ridley', or 'Hugh' or 'Adrian'. These of course were references to Alan Parker, Ridley Scott, Hugh Hudson and Adrian Lyne, all of whom have since gone on to pursue successful feature film careers. But, at the time, they made commercials, mainly for CDP.

Alan Parker had been a copywriter at CDP and was to all intents and purposes the Collett's in-house director.

I remember the first film Paul and I made with Alan: a Mellow Virginia commercial in the 'Live in peace with your pipe' campaign. It was more or less the first time we'd ever been on a film set.

We pitched up at the call time, keen as a butcher's knife. 'What do you want us to do, Alan?' we asked eagerly.

'You see those chairs?' said the great director, pointing to two wooden seats in a distant corner of the set, far from the camera.

'Yes,' we replied. 'Go and sit in them and keep your mouths shut.' Advice I've been sorely tempted to give many clients on film shoots since.

That was another thing: I don't ever remember a client

turning up to a shoot or pre-production meeting. Just as well, when I recall one such meeting.

Frank was uncharacteristically silent as he studied the script we were about to shoot. It was obvious that something was bothering him.

Eventually, his face lit up as he realised what it was. 'This bit here,' he said, pointing a bony finger at a wad of dialogue towards the end of the script, 'why is it there?'

'That's the bit about the product, Frank,' we nervously explained. 'Exactly,' said the great man in triumph. 'Let's get rid of it.'

Thus the client's much-cherished marketing strategy was unceremoniously dumped from the script. Needless to say, the finished film was all the better for it.

Several years later, Paul and I were shooting the famous 'David Bailey? Who's he?' commercial for Olympus.

Again we were using Alan Parker. By now we considered ourselves to be on good terms with Alan and his legendary bear-like producer, Alan Marshall (later to become a Hollywood producer).

Even so, we thought long and hard before asking either of them a question. Some way into the shoot, I noticed Parker was shooting the whole film using long lenses.

This intrigued me, particularly as it necessitated placing the camera and himself in the church porch, far from the actors and out of earshot of their all-important dialogue.

Eventually, curiosity got the better of me and I plucked up the courage to speak.

'Why are you using a 200 millimetre lens to shoot this, Alan?' was my intelligently thought-out question.

'Because it's fucking raining and I don't want to get wet,' was his faultlessly logical reply.

The lesson I learnt from all this? Take time to write the best piece of work you can. Then give it to the best person you can find to film it. Oh yes, and don't ask too many questions along the way – especially damn fool ones.



Copywriter MIKE EVERETT Art Director PAUL SMITH Photographer ALAN BROOKING



Client B&W MELLOW VIRGINIA Director ALAN PARKER Creative Team MIKE EVERETT & PAUL SMITH



Client OLYMPUS Director ALAN PARKER Creative Team MIKE EVERETT & PAUL SMITH



Client MICHIGAN Director PAUL WILLARD Creative Team MIKE EVERETT & PAUL SMITH