

“WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE SOME OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL BRANDS OF THE 21ST CENTURY NEED LITTLE, IF ANY, ADVERTISING TO BE SUCCESSFUL. IT'S REALLY CONNECTION THAT BUILDS A BRAND NOW”

Mad Men: Now and Again

By Daniel Scheffler (@danielscheffler)



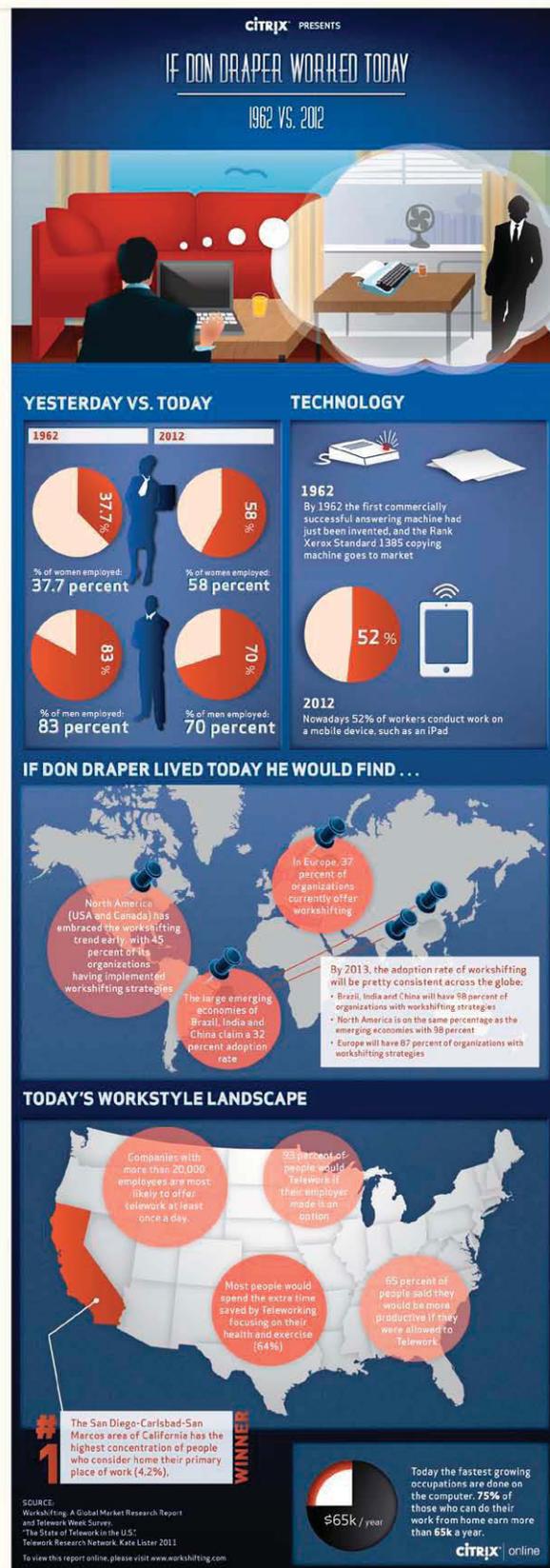
‘MAD MEN’ is a TV series set in New York in the 60s, and is a kicky memento of the height of advertising, as we know it, in a most contemporary way. The fictional Sterling Cooper (née Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce) agency with a throne seated lynchpin – meet Creative Director Don Draper, the lying son of a gun womaniser and masculine partisan of the show.

With tremendous critical acclaim, Emmys, Golden Globes and more, the show is currently on Season 5 in the US. The show has prided itself on depicting specific parts of American culture and society with accentuation on booze, smoking, sexism, adultery, homophobia, feminism and racism all within the burly perimeters of advertising. A mouthful of inappropriateness for a TV series which has, of course, been to its absolute advantage as issues that plague today, as much as they had in the past, are discussed by virtue of the show.

Don Draper blurred out the most valid piece of advertising basics with his: “Advertising is based on one thing, happiness. You know what happiness is? It’s the smell of a new car, it’s freedom from fear; it’s a billboard on the side of the road that screams whatever you’re doing is ok. People want to be told what to do so badly, that they’ll listen to anyone”.

So if advertising in ‘Mad Men’ days was firmly about the art of coaxing, advertising right now, at this very moment, is about the art of engagement. The 60s was about the hard hit levels of product to manipulatively encourage consumers to buy with sexuality and self-esteem queries as the driving force. Consumers were uneducated and cajoled to remain in the dark and detained at an apparent healthy distance from the brand. Now, it’s all about closing the gap between consumer and brand and promoting relationships, engaging, connecting, and ultimately forging a joining together through experiences – sorry brand experiences would be the right term. The question that does come up is what are the ultimate benefits of either of these termed authentic experiences and what will be the next evolution now that engagement and building relationships have finally overplayed their hand.

Rei Inamoto, the chief creative officer at New York’s AKQA, says that art and copy is as ‘Mad Men’ depicts, last century and that a 21st century Don Draper knits art and code. ‘Advertising’, as in ‘Mad Men’, helped build brands by communicating a message often crafted by a team of an art director and a copywriter (Art & Copy). In the 21st century, what builds a brand isn’t mass communication. We



designers, user-experience people, content creators, and writers working in unison with teams of coders, programmers, developers and scientists to create tools and experiences for people to use and ultimately belong to (Art & Code).

With social media playing a bigger role in advertising, than even two months ago, an army of Twitter followers and ‘likes’ are honing in on the most demanding form of individualism within a place of acceptance, within the herd. Testimonials and online recommendations in video format is where this ‘art and code’ has dropped advertising off, possibly stranded for now. Delivering the message that the overused term ‘consumer engagement’ cannot compete with the truism that consumers are all different and unique.

Don Draper has a rather elementary comment about nostalgia that somehow reflects on the exact zeitgeist of where advertising is growing, not ‘undead’ any longer but stringing at your heart and that is definitely not unique as a concept, but unique for every single person. “The most important idea in advertising is that new creates an itch. You simply put your product in there as a kind of calamine lotion. A deeper bond with the product is nostalgia. It’s delicate, but potent. Nostalgia, in Greek, means the twinge in your heart, its device is not a space machine; it’s a time machine. Backwards, forwards, taking us to a place we ache to go again.”

But as pointed out in the New York Times (often) in trying times, which includes the recession, advertisers try dip to a great depth into how nostalgia can assist in selling products. Modalities of smell and taste are used to trigger memories or give you that itch and that might be the place where advertisers will find research budgets going to again, as long as the word ‘want’ remains in use.

So in this muck of past and future somewhere ‘Mad Men’ represents a golden time, the show almost romanticises the juncture although the inflammatory nature of constant analysis reveals a subterranean insecurity that consumers have always wanted to fill with more materialism and the fallacy of more. And so ultimately advertising will always just remain in the business of persuasion with or without ‘Mad Men’.

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Inamoto goes on to say that what is important today is an array of artists,

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