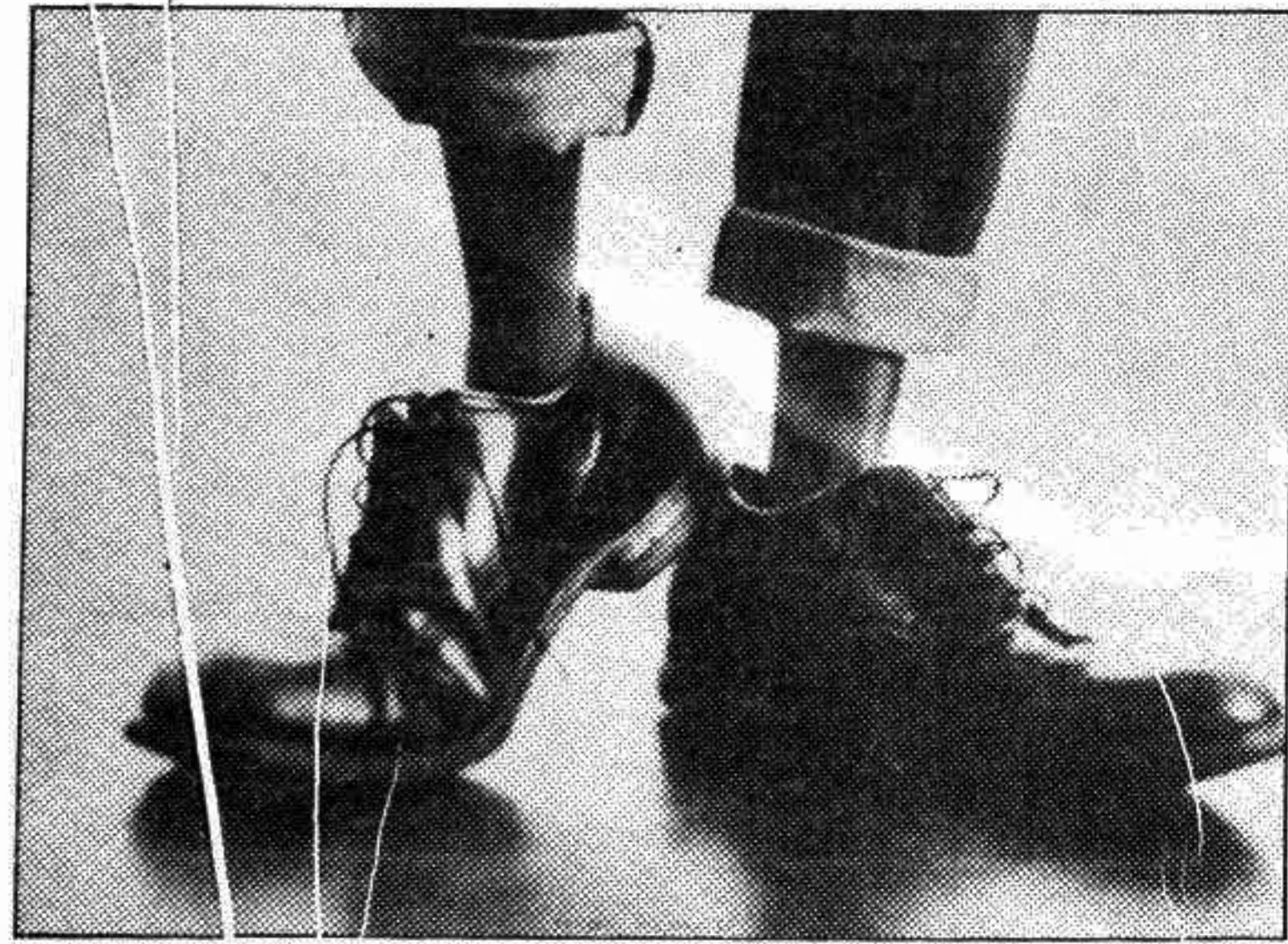


YEP TALK

Are We Creative?

Rahnuma Hassan



A smart looking middle-age man is sitting on a chair in an airport reading intently a magazine. Second later, a podgy man takes a seat beside him leaving a small space between them. Carelessly, he was munching cornflakes with eyes fleeting all over the airport. A television hanging in the air behind them is airing a programme on chamber music. Soon a saxophonist zooms across the monitor of the Television and whistles the saxophone. The unexpected clacking coming from nowhere confuses the reader. Looking across the other man he thinks perhaps that man is responsible for the unwanted act. He swings his position a bit then begins reading his magazine.

The podgy man is now confused too. His confused eyes try to invite the reader to share cornflakes. Moment later the saxophonist almost zooms out of the TV monitor and whistles just behind the two. This time the reader just gets. The proof that the other man is an unabashed fastster. He stands up, wraps his magazine and in vain tries to save himself from the poisoned air.

In early 1985, three young entrepreneurs with a business school background, decided to set up shop in Dhaka. They were marketing a set of beliefs that was founded on three principles: a) A point of view. b) A coherent understanding about advertising. And at the heart of these beliefs, lay a commitment that really effective advertising must be both relevant and outstandingly distinct.

With their eyes on the horizon, and their feet firmly on the ground, the three friends set to work.

Today the agency, Unitrend Limited has grown into a major advertising operation, with a team of over 60 full-time employees. Along the way, the Agency has had the good fortune of becoming affiliated with the McCann Erickson World Group. McCann Erickson is the world's largest advertising agency, with offices in 175 cities in 117 countries world wide. The group's annual billing for 1997 stood at over US\$ 10 billion. Unitrend Limited takes full advantage of its affiliation with McCann Erickson and every year their employees take turns at attending course workshops on various topics abroad. The directors of the company recognise that by investing in their human resources they are on the right track towards preparing their agency for the next millennium.

In early 1997, the company floated Public Relation branch of the Company, named Univision. Although still in its fledgling state, the PR Branch has an impressive portfolio to boast.

Unitrend McCann Erickson is primarily known as a creative agency and has an impressive portfolio to match. Among the agency's clients are major players like Berger Paints Bangladesh Limited, Coca Cola, Nestle Bangladesh Limited, Standard Chartered Bank, Reckitt & Colman, Philips, Social Marketing Company, Kodak, etc. Unitrend offers a complete range of communication services which include Event Marketing and PR apart from the usual services of Television /Cinema commercials, Direct Marketing, Radio advertising, etc. Further-

It's not a story. Not it is taken from the pages of any silly, gossip magazine. It's just an advert you have watched between the overs in a cricket match on TV screen. Indian TV gives the ad just to promote their name. But if advertisement is a unique tool for promoting a product or ensuring their left sale, then this Ad does not fit into the right definition of sale promotion. Nor does it try to hammer the heads of the viewers to buy Onida television. There is hardly any direct sales-promotion or brand-image-building in it and, moreover, to some specially to the conservative people this. Advertisement borders on bad taste. Still at the end of its time-slot it ends up telling a laughable story in so little a time that it easily imprints the Television's name in our imagination.

Perhaps that is the sole purpose of an advertisement, be it for sales promotion, brand introduction or plainly for spreading a message. And through doing so, it always gives its viewers the impression that, it is not an advertisement that you've just watched. It will tell you a story, show you some still pictures, read you some lines of verse, sing you some songs or just announce a statement, but in all these things it would never tell you that it is an advertisement that you've heard or watched.

A cynic may say that only, aim of an advertisement is to sell, sell, sell and sell. Perhaps that is in fact a true statement. By watching an advertisement you will never know that you have been sold so cheaply and so easily. The companies and organisations know that if you gazzle the ad you will unknowingly gazzle the hidden message they mixed with it. Despite all these accusations an. Ad these days is a form of entertainment and like other arts it has an aesthetic value which cannot be denied absolutely.

And the aesthetic value of an advertisement comes into evidence only when it tries to do something. Other than selling the name of the products. Some great products or great behemoth like companies whose names are attached with us like the umbilical cord that would never go for direct promotion of brand name. Actually they don't want to harm their reputation by doing so. Ever see an ad of Levi's jeans which have been in the market place since 1841? Sometimes the great American Jeans maker even skips to show its name or picture of a

Jeans-wearing person on its ad just to appear sane. They know that no matter how far you live or in the remotest of the globe. You are already acquainted. With the name of Levi's. So it's no point preaching Levi's name or its good qualities once again. Instead it gives you the impression that, Levi's is just like your next door neighbour whom you adore. It only wants to make its presence felt by giving advertisement.

So what about the Ads in our media. Sorry to say that despite. Living in the so-called information age when everybody is more or less informed about the products they want, our ads only, aim at informing the people. Though beginning of the nineties we saw a rapid change in our taste for advertisement, there are still people. Out there who think you have to act like a bazaar-man to promote your product. Look at the ads of soaps, cosmetics, salts or Jewellery products on BTV you will have the picture rightaway. Like a medicine man on the street they blare their way to reach their names and take so long a time in saying so little that you get bored easily.

Traditional ways of selling products are commonly used without any perfection. Some of the methods they use became so hackneyed and commonplace that the moment you see the ad instantly you get busy for other things or just mute the television for a while. However impression it creates on its viewers is simply bad and fleeting. If you say that you're good and you've these things which nobody has, how come you expect that the buyers will trust you or believe you or just feel compelled to buy you. There are always some other ways to tell the things that you want to tell.

And those are the ways we should know for our own good. Even watch the ad of a famous cigarette brand? A man is scuba-diving deep into the ocean bed. There beneath the rocks he becomes astonished to see the golden square shirring, like a true gold bar. The ad doesn't say what it is the diver just watched, it makes you think what it is the diver just saw. Only then you know it's the colour of the packet the Adman wants to sell and soon you know what the bearer of the golden coloured packet is Our ads should be like this. It just has to learn the way to tell things differently. Only then well see our ads mature and as precious as a piece of Da Vinci.

Meet the Young Creative Executives



From Business Studies to Creative Works — from numbers to television commercials ... this guy was on the road to be a Bunker, and suddenly changed his path to creative works.

Zeeshan Kingshuk Huq passed from IBA as a BBA, and now is working as the Creative Executive at Unitrend Ltd, the leading ad agency in the country, affiliated with McCann Erickson. What made him change his avenue?

"I actually didn't change my avenue. Let's say, I simply added a different dimension in applying my studies! My business studies have actually made me able to understand market and economic factors and gain a complete but different view on creative works."

Mr. Muneer Ahmed Khan, the Creative Chief of Unitrend Ltd., was desperately looking for a guy on his board who could take care of things he used to do. And he made no delay in taking Zeeshan when he first got the chance in the end of 1997. "In fact, he took me a month before I actually completed my classes at IBA."

Presently, Zeeshan's responsibilities are centered around writing copy and generating ideas, but he's very much involved in management and business development activities as well. And it's been only a year he has been working. "It actually doesn't matter how long you've been working, and this is the best part of Unitrend. Here, professional services are rewarded accordingly."

On elaborating what he likes at his agency and in this trade, the bearded young went: "Our organization's biggest asset is its people. I'm proud to be working with such a vibrant and receptive workforce; it's a rewarding experience. About the industry, well ... it's growing ... at a fascinating rate! If I'm not wrong, the industry grew more than double in the last 4 years. What it needs now is focused development in Creative and Media. We have to get out of the old-fashioned way of depending upon the layouts, and start developing ads where ideas are the catch, not the layout. We need to explore new media as well. Clients and agencies are yet to understand how far consumers have progressed, and that they are asking for new ways of communication."

Speaking on how he found his job, Zeeshan smiled and came back confidently. "One of my very respected elders in the agency tells me one thing: today, in India, business graduates consider HTA or McCann or Lintas at par with Birla or Reliance; those days are not far when the same will become the case in Bangladesh. I like to view myself, and other who have joined with me at Unitrend and elsewhere, as the beginners in the road to that age. Ad agencies are no more the small working houses, they are turning into communication partners in making and moving markets."

Meet Your Next Door Adman

Mamnoon Murshed Chowdhury



Mr Muneer Ahmed Khan managing Director & Creative Chief and Mr Zulfiqar Ahmed Partner, Chief Operating UNITREND

more, the Agency uses a unique McCann tool for consumer insight, namely PULSE. PULSE is used to gauge the consumer's mind set by determining what actually makes him or her 'tick'. The process makes use of an interesting methodology aimed at arriving at the exact choices that he or she is likely to make. PULSE has been successfully employed by the agency the world over and is proving to be an invaluable instrument of research.

Special Events is another area where Unitrend has made a considerable name for itself. Over the last few years, they have arranged numerous successful concerts for Coca-Cola with the most recent one being the Nescafe funded raising concert for the flood victims of 1998, at Hotel Sonargaon.

Mr. Zulfiqar Ahmed, the Chief Operating Officer of Unitrend one of the three partners, says that business growth depends on the vision, intensified and implemented with appropriate action. Unitrend has a set vision to achieve and contemplates on it with diligence and sincerity. This is the coherent strength of Unitrend. He often quotes to his people, remember the Eagles song Hotel California. "You can check out anytime you like, but you may never leave." Once you are at Unitrend, you belong to the family.

Mr. Muneer A. Khan CEO, emphasized that it is indeed, the people who are instrumental in driving Unitrend to success. Hence recruitment is a vital factor. The influx of business graduates from home and abroad into Bangladesh has now broadened the choice for employers and made inducting able talent into the advertising trade, a reality. Unitrend is perhaps the only company that recognized the need for young professionals in the field and enhanced the compensation structure of the advertising industry by paying better than their competing partners.

Unitrend McCann Agency is the advertising agency of the future, and one foresees a bright future for the agency in the next millennium.

Afzal Hossain Talks to YEP Talk

Afzal Hossain is undisputedly one of the trend setters of modern advertisement in Bangladesh. He can be called the architect of modern architecture. There is no way we can deny his contribution in making 'Ads' popular as well as give a glamorous touch to it. Undoubtedly Afzal's creative ad-shows have brought the profession to a respectable position in the country. YEP Talk came face-to-face with this show maker.

YEP: How did you come into this profession?

Afzal Hossain: When I graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts I was already in the acting career. I felt the need to go for an alternative profession as acting could not ensure a sustainable life in the future. Otherwise I would definitely take up acting as my career and not go for the second best choice. Anyway, several of my friends got together and started an Ad-agency. We only had about ten thousand taka in capital when we started off. Well, that's been almost a decade now.

YEP: What was the situation of advertisements in Bangladesh at that time?

AF: Not very satisfactory, as far as I can recall. There were several who put in their efforts to bring out standard advertisements.

There was Mr. Rashid Ahmed who has Ad firm called 'Karukrit'. They were mostly into newspaper ads, which as a student, I found very appealing. Then there was Mr. Azizur Rahman who used to make television ads. I wonder why he doesn't make them anymore. One of his advertisement on Jibon Bima featured two old man and woman which really stirred me.

I must mention Sajidul Anam 'Tutul' who has been making ad films all through his professional life. He has definitely been the source of great encouragement for me. I was motivated to venture into this profession following his bold foot steps.

The initial years were not so hopeful. We could only shoot using 35mm cameras and even half of what was

shot would be lost in laboratory processing. We often had to go to Bombay for quality processing and editing.

YEP: What about the later years? How is it at present?

AF: Actually this medium has climbed uphill like a parent-less child and without any external support, whether it be from the government or from the private sector. When this was the scenario some private enterprises took initiatives and brought their own video editing machines and cameras. Later these were being used as an alternative to going to Bombay. We have come to this position without much technical know-how or background knowledge.

When our ads are compared to those of other countries we forget that we are talking about countries which are incomparable in size, in available opportunities, in their exposure to the rest of the world. One must keep all these in mind when comparing the standard of advertisements of any other country with that of Bangladesh. Nevertheless, at present we have reached a position from where I can vouch that, given enough technological support we can attain international standards.

YEP: Is it a creative sector?

AF: Definitely! Then again there is very little scope in our country to show creativity and those with a lot of creativity face a lot of problems. For example, the BTV Sensor Board could not care less about the creativity of your show. The less creative you are the better and the less are the bureaucratic obstructions. We must always

keep in mind about the bureaucratic procedures of BTV while making an ad-film. To give you an example of it - one of my advertisements was made in the format of jatra where the heroine screams to the villain - "Leave me alone you 'shoytan'." (Chhore de shoytan). The sensor board wouldn't approve it until I edited the word 'shoytan'. Sensor board is still stuck with rules from the Pakistan period where as in Pakistan the rules have been transformed according to time. Actually those jatra costumes should be put on the sensor board policy makers. They are still living in the pre-histories period.

YEP: You have created many stars who are now leading the world of modelling. However, there aren't many talented makers. Why is that so?

AF: It's true that there are many models who can today even compete internationally. On the other hand there are not many talented ad film makers. Then again, given the technical support and the right opportunities I am confident that there are many who can shine in this profession of ad making. Already there are many bright entrepreneurs who have come into this profession.

YEP: What are the opportunities/ threats of this profession? Can it now be taken as a full fledged profession?

AF: Advertising can certainly be chosen as a profession now. Anybody who has talents and knows how to use his/her talent can very well fit into this profession. Every profession has its problems and beginner in the line must struggle to be established. We had to struggle our way to this point. There weren't many to extend helping hands for us.

YEP: Thank you Afzal Hossain for your time.

AF: Thank you.

Interviewed by Rafi Hossain

