

FULLY UPDATED FIFTH EDITION  
INCLUDES DIGITAL, SOCIAL, AND EMERGING MEDIA

# Hey Whipple, Squeeze This

THE CLASSIC GUIDE TO  
CREATING GREAT ADS

LUKE SULLIVAN  
EDWARD BOCHES

ADWEEK

WILEY

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Cover design: Emi Tulett

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey  
Published simultaneously in Canada

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***Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:***

Names: Sullivan, Luke, author. | Boches, Edward, author.  
Title: Hey, Whipple, squeeze this : the classic guide to creating great ads /  
Luke Sullivan and Edward Boches.  
Description: Fifth edition. | Hoboken : Wiley, 2016. | Revised edition of the  
author's *Hey Whipple squeeze this!*, 2012. | Includes index.  
Identifiers: LCCN 2015036806 (print) | LCCN 2015044517 (ebook) | ISBN  
978-1-119-16400-5 (paperback) | ISBN 978-1-119-16402-9 (ePDF) | ISBN 9781119164036  
(ePub) | ISBN 978-1-119-164029 (pdf) | ISBN 978-1-119-164036 (epub)  
Subjects: LCSH: Advertising copy. | BISAC: BUSINESS & ECONOMICS / Advertising  
& Promotion.  
Classification: LCC HF5825 .S88 2016 (print) | LCC HF5825 (ebook) | DDC  
659.13/2-dc22  
LC record available at <http://lccn.loc.gov/2015036806>

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# PREFACE

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## THIS IS MY FANTASY

We open on a tidy suburban kitchen. Actually, it's a room off to the side of the kitchen, one with a washer and dryer. On the floor is a basket full of laundry. The camera closes in.

Out of the laundry pops the cutest little stuffed bear you've ever seen. He's pink and fluffy, he has a happy little face, and there's one sock stuck adorably to his left ear.

"Hi, I'm Snuggles, the fabric-softening bear. And I . . ."

The first bullet rips into Snuggles's stomach, blows out of his back in a blizzard of cotton entrails, and punches a fist-sized hole in the dryer behind. Snuggles grabs the side of the Rubbermaid laundry basket and sinks down, his plastic eyes rolling as he looks for the source of the gunfire.

Taking cover behind 1/16 inch of flexible acrylic rubber, Snuggles looks out of the basket's plastic mesh and into the living room. He sees nothing. The dining room. Nothing.

Snuggles is easing over the backside of the basket when the second shot takes his head off at the neck. His body lands on top of the laundry, which is remarkably soft and fluffy. Fade to black.

---

We open on a woman in a bathroom, clad in an apron and wielding a brush, poised to clean her toilet bowl. She opens the lid.

But wait. What's this? It's a little man in a boat, floating above the sparkling waters of Lake Porcelain. Everything looks clean already!

With a tip of his teeny hat, he introduces himself. “I’m the Ty-D-Bowl Man, and I . . .”

Both hat and hand disappear in a red mist as the first bullet screams through and blows a hole in the curved toilet wall behind the Ty-D-Bowl Man. Water begins to pour out on the floor as the woman screams and dives for cover in the tub.

Ty-D-Bowl Man scrambles out of the bowl, but when he climbs onto the big silver lever, it gives way, dropping him back into the swirling waters of the flushing toilet. We get two more glimpses of his face as he orbits around, once, twice, then down to his final reward.

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We open on a grocery store, where we see the owner scolding a group of ladies for squeezing some toilet paper. The first shot is high and wide, shattering a jar of mayonnaise. . . .

# INTRODUCTION

## *On being the second-smartest person in the room.*

---

**I GOT MY FIRST JOB** in the business in 1979.

Some kid out there just went, “In 1979?? Dude, did they even *have* ads back then?”

Why, yes we did, thank you very much. My first agency job was at Bonetool, Thog & Neanderthal, and I worked on prestigious new products like Fire® and The Wheel.®

Actually, the kid *does* have a fair question. I mean, what can some 60-year-old know about digital advertising? Or animated GIFs, clickstreams, and superstitials?

As it turns out, a lot, actually, because to survive 33 years in the ad business, I *had* to stay completely up to the minute. And so will you.

You’ll have to know about optimizing search engine results. You’ll have to know what cool technology was just unveiled at SXSW Interactive. You’ll have to know about APIs and RFIDs. And you’ll have to keep learning new skills all the time.

Fortunately, you don’t have to be an expert at *everything*. As a copywriter, I don’t really have to know how to prototype an app. But if I want to be a valued member of my team, I basically have to be the second-smartest person in the room on that subject, and on every subject *except* copywriting. . . . Where I’d hope of course to be first-smartest.

Digitally, I’ve managed to hold my own through four editions of this book. Just the same, I figure it’s time to bring in someone smarter than me on the subject.

Which brings me to our contributing author, Edward Boches. During his 31 years at agencies like Mullen and Hill Holiday, Edward went from being an early adopter and advocate of digital to a thought leader and recognized expert.

Edward wrote Chapters 10 through 15, but we passed the pen back and forth while writing this fifth edition, and so sometimes the word “I” means Edward, sometimes it’s me.

Throughout the text you will occasionally see little boxes, like [bit.ly/whipple5](http://bit.ly/whipple5)

It’s usually next to the description of a piece of work that our words (as transcendently perfect as they are) do not do justice. It’s work you really ought to see.

Bit.ly is a URL shortener. The main site for this fifth edition of *Whipple* is [bit.ly/whipple5](http://bit.ly/whipple5), and many of the pieces cited here reside there. Put that address in your bookmarks bar, after which you need only remember the suffix to get to any particular piece—like [whipple5skittles](#) or [whipple5redbull](#).

One last note before we begin. You have purchased what is known as a “book.” Touching the pictures will not make them “play.” Note also, the pages do not “swipe.” You must grip the corner at the top of the right page and then sort of roll it back and to the left.

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# A Brief History of Why Everybody Hates Advertising

*And why you should try to get a job there.*

---

**I GREW UP POINTING A FINGER GUN** at Mr. Whipple. You probably don't know him, but he was this irritating guy who kept interrupting my favorite television shows back in the day. The morning lineup was my favorite, with its back-to-back *Dick Van Dyke* and *Andy Griffith* shows. But Whipple kept butting in on Rob and Laura Petrie.

He'd appear uninvited on my TV, looking over the top of his glasses and pursing his lips at the ladies in his grocery store. Two middle-aged women, presumably with high school or college degrees, would be standing in the aisle squeezing rolls of toilet paper. Whipple would wag his finger and scold, "Please don't squeeze the Charmin." After the ladies scurried away, he'd give the rolls a few furtive squeezes himself.

Oh, they were such bad commercials.

The thing is, I'd wager that if the Whipple campaign aired today, there would be a hundred different parodies on YouTube tomorrow. But back then? All we had was a volume knob. ("We had to walk to the TV set!") Then VCRs came along and later DVRs, and the fast-forward button

became our defense. We can just tell Whipple to shut the hell up, turn him off, and go get our entertainment from any number of other platforms and devices.

To be fair, Procter & Gamble's Charmin commercials weren't the worst thing that ever aired on television. They had a concept, although contrived, and a brand image, although irritating—even to a ninth grader. **whipple5squeeze**

If it were just me who didn't like Whipple's commercials, well, I might shrug it off. But the more I read about the campaign, the more consensus I discovered. In Martin Mayer's book *Whatever Happened to Madison Avenue?* I found this:

[Charmin's Whipple was] one of the most disliked . . . television commercials of the 1970s. [E]verybody thought "Please don't squeeze the Charmin" was stupid and it ranked last in believability in all the commercials studied for a period of years. . . .<sup>1</sup>

In a book called *The New How to Advertise*, I found:

When asked which campaigns they most disliked, consumers convicted Mr. Whipple. . . . Charmin may have not been popular advertising, but it was number one in sales.<sup>2</sup>

And there is the crux of the problem. The mystery: How did Whipple's commercials sell so much toilet paper?

These shrill little interruptions that irritated nearly everyone, that were used as fodder for Johnny Carson on late-night TV, sold toilet paper by the ton. How? Even if you figure that part out, the question then becomes, why? Why would you irritate your buying public with a twittering, pursed-lipped grocer when cold, hard research told you everybody hated him? I don't get it.

Apparently, even the agency that created him didn't get it. John Lyons, author of *Guts: Advertising from the Inside Out*, worked at Charmin's agency when they were trying to figure out what to do with Whipple.

I was assigned to assassinate Mr. Whipple. Some of New York's best hit teams before me had tried and failed. "Killing Whipple" was an ongoing mission at Benton & Bowles. The agency that created him was determined to kill him. But the question was how to knock off a man with 15 lives, one for every year that the . . . campaign had been running at the time.<sup>3</sup>

No idea he came up with ever replaced Whipple, Lyons noted.

Next up to assassinate Whipple was a young writer: Atlanta's Joey Reiman. In a phone conversation, Reiman told me he tried to sell Procter & Gamble a concept called "Squeeze-Enders"—an Alcoholics Anonymous kind of group where troubled souls struggled to end their visits to Mr. Whipple's grocery store—and thereby perhaps end the Whipple dynasty. No sale. Procter & Gamble wasn't about to let go of a winner. Whipple remained for years as one of advertising's most bullet-proof personalities.

As well he should have. He was selling literally billions of rolls of toilet paper. *Billions*. In 1975, a survey listed Whipple's as the second-most-recognized face in America, right behind that of Richard Nixon. When Benton & Bowles's creative director, Al Hampel, took Whipple (actor Dick Wilson) to dinner one night in New York City, he said, "It was as if Robert Redford walked into the place. Even the waiters asked for autographs."

So on one hand, you had research telling you customers hated these repetitive, schmaltzy, cornball commercials. And on the other hand, you had Whipple signing autographs at the Four Seasons.

It was as if the whole scenario had come out of the 1940s. In Frederick Wakeman's 1946 novel *The Hucksters*, this was how advertising worked. In the middle of a meeting, the client spat on the conference room table and said: "You have just seen me do a disgusting thing. Ugly word, spit. But you'll always remember what I just did."<sup>4</sup>

The account executive in the novel took the lesson, later musing: "It was working like magic. The more you irritated them with repetitious commercials, the more soap they bought."<sup>5</sup>

With 504 different Charmin toilet tissue commercials airing from 1964 through 1990, Procter & Gamble certainly "irritated them with repetitious commercials." And it indeed "worked like magic." Procter & Gamble knew what it was doing.

Yet I lie awake some nights staring at the ceiling, troubled by Whipple. What vexes me so about this old grocer? This is the question that led me to write this book.

What troubles me about Whipple is that he isn't *good*. As an idea, Whipple isn't good.

He may have been an effective salesman. (Billions of rolls sold.) He may have been a strong brand image. (He knocked Scott tissues out of the number one spot.) But it all comes down to this: if I had created Mr. Whipple, I don't think I could tell my son with a straight face what I did at the office. "Well, son, you see, Whipple tells the lady shoppers not

to squeeze the Charmin, but then, then he squeezes it *himself*. . . . Hey, wait, come back.”

As an idea, Whipple isn’t good.

To those who defend the campaign based on sales, I ask, would you also spit on the table to get my attention? It would work, but would you? An eloquent gentleman named Norman Berry, once a creative director at Ogilvy & Mather, put it this way:

I’m appalled by those who [judge] advertising exclusively on the basis of sales. That isn’t enough. Of course, advertising must sell. By any definition it is lousy advertising if it doesn’t. But if sales are achieved with work which is in bad taste or is intellectual garbage, it shouldn’t be applauded no matter how much it sells. Offensive, dull, abrasive, stupid advertising is bad for the entire industry and bad for business as a whole. It is why the public perception of advertising is going down in this country.<sup>6</sup>

Berry may well have been thinking of Mr. Whipple when he made that comment in the early 1980s. With every year that’s passed since, newer and more virulent strains of vapidness have been created: The Two Bathtubs Cialis people. Carl’s Jr.’s wet T-shirt contest. The Vormax Splatter. Go Commando with Cottonelle. I’m Digger the Dermatophyte Nail Fungus. He went to Jared! Hail to the V.

Writer Fran Lebowitz may well have been watching TV when she observed: “No matter how cynical I get, it’s impossible to keep up.”

Certainly, the viewing public is cynical about our business, due almost entirely to this parade of idiots we’ve sent onto their televisions and desktop screens. Every year, as long as I’ve been in advertising, Gallup publishes its poll of most and least trusted professions. And every year, advertising practitioners trade last or second-to-last place with used car salesmen and members of Congress.

It reminds me of a paragraph I plucked from our office bulletin board, one of those e-mailed curiosities that makes its way around corporate America:

Dear Ann: I have a problem. I have two brothers. One brother is in advertising. The other was put to death in the electric chair for first-degree murder. My mother died from insanity when I was three. My two sisters are prostitutes and my father sells crack to handicapped elementary school students. Recently, I met a girl who was just released from a reformatory where she served time for killing her puppy with a ball-peen hammer, and I want to marry her. My problem is, should I tell her about my brother who is in advertising? Signed, Anonymous

---

## THE 1950S: WHEN EVEN X-ACTO BLADES WERE DULL.

My problem with Whipple (effective sales, grating execution) isn't a new one. Years ago, it occurred to a gentleman named William Bernbach that a commercial needn't sacrifice wit, grace, or intelligence in order to increase sales. And when he set out to prove it, something wonderful happened.

But we'll get to Mr. Bernbach in a minute. Before he showed up, a lot had already happened.

In the 1950s, the national audience was in the palm of the ad industry's hand. Anything that advertising said, people heard. TV was brand new, "clutter" didn't exist, and pretty much anything that showed up in the strange, foggy little window was kinda cool.

Author Ted Bell wrote: "There was a time in the not too distant past when the whole country sat down and watched *The Ed Sullivan Show* all the way through. To sell something, you could go on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and count on everybody seeing your message."<sup>7</sup>

World War II was over, people had money, and America's manufacturers had retooled to market the luxuries of life in Levittown. But as the economy boomed, so too did the country's business landscape. Soon there was more than one big brand of aspirin, more than two soft drinks, more than three brands of cars to choose from. And advertising agencies had to do more than just get film in the can and cab it over to Rockefeller Center before Milton Berle went on live.

They had to convince the audience their product was the best in its category, and modern advertising as we know it was born.

On its heels came the concept of the *unique selling proposition*, a term coined by writer Rosser Reeves in the 1950s, and one that still has some merit. It was a simple, if ham-handed, notion: "Buy this product, and you will get this specific benefit." The benefit had to be one the competition either could not or did not offer, hence the unique part.

This notion was perhaps best exemplified by Reeves's aspirin commercials, in which a headful of pounding hammers could be relieved "fast, fast, fast" only by Anacin. Reeves also let us know that because of the unique candy coating, M&M's were the candy that "melts in your mouth, not in your hand."

Had the TV and business landscape remained the same, perhaps simply delineating the differences between one brand and another would suffice today. But then came "the clutter": a brand explosion that lined the nation's grocery shelves with tens of thousands of logos and packed

every episode of *I Dream of Jeannie* wall to wall with commercials for me-too products.

Then, in response to the clutter came “the wall.” The wall was the perceptual filter we put up to protect ourselves from this tsunami of product information. Many products were at parity. Try as agencies might to find some unique angle, in the end, most soap was soap and most beer was beer.

Enter the Creative Revolution and a guy named Bill Bernbach, who said: “It’s not just what you say that stirs people. It’s the way you say it.”

---

### **“WHAT?! WE DON’T HAVE TO SUCK?!”**

Bernbach founded his New York agency, Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB), on the then-radical notion that customers aren’t nitwits who need to be fooled or lectured or hammered into listening to a client’s sales message:

The truth isn’t the truth until people believe you, and they can’t believe you if they don’t know what you’re saying, and they can’t know what you’re saying if they don’t listen to you, and they won’t listen to you if you’re not interesting, and you won’t be interesting unless you say things imaginatively, originally, freshly.<sup>8</sup>

This was the classic Bernbach paradigm.

From all the advertising texts, articles, speeches, and awards annuals I’ve read over my years in advertising, everything that’s any good about this business seems to trace its heritage back to this man, William Bernbach. And when his agency landed a couple of highly visible national accounts, including Volkswagen and Alka-Seltzer, he brought advertising into a new era.

Smart agencies and clients everywhere saw for themselves that advertising didn’t have to embarrass itself in order to make a cash register ring. The national TV audience was eating it up. Viewers couldn’t wait for the next airing of VW’s “Funeral” or Alka-Seltzer’s “Spicy meatball.” The first shots of the Creative Revolution of the 1960s had been fired.\*

---

\*You can study these two seminal commercials and many other great ads from this era in Larry Dubrow’s *The Creative Revolution, When Advertising Tried Harder* (New York: Friendly Press, 1984). How, or even whether, VW will survive the 2015 emissions-duping crime remains to be seen.





## Lemon.

This Volkswagen missed the boat. The chrome strip on the glove compartment is blemished and must be replaced. Chances are you wouldn't have noticed it; Inspector Kurt Krüner did.

There are 3,389 men at our Wolfsburg factory with only one job: to inspect Volkswagens at each stage of production. 3300 Volkswagens are produced daily; there are more inspectors

(than cars.)

Every shock absorber is tested (spot checking won't do), every windshield is scanned. VWs have been rejected for surface scratches barely visible to the eye.

Final inspection is really something! VW inspectors run each car off the line onto the Funktionsprüfstand (car test stand), tote up 189 check points, gun ahead to the automatic

brake stand, and say "no" to one VW out of fifty.

This preoccupation with detail means the VW lasts longer and requires less maintenance, by and large, than other cars. (It also means a used VW depreciates less than any other car.)



We pluck the lemons; you get the plums.

Figure 1.2 In the beginning, there was the word. And it was Lemon.

How marvelous to have actually been there when DDB art director Helmut Krone laid out one of the very first Volkswagen ads (Figure 1.2): a black-and-white picture of that simple car, no women draped over the fender, no mansion in the background, and a one-word headline: "Lemon." This was paired with the simple, self-effacing copy that began: "This Volkswagen missed the boat. The chrome strip on the glove