

"The stories we tell" - The best course at lunch

By Hope Felton-Miller

Sal Randazzo, World Wide Planning Director at McCann Erickson, and Story Teller Extraordinaire, kept us laughing and wondering what would happen next throughout his speech "The Stories We Tell." Mr. Randazzo, who has been involved in advertising and advertising research since 1997, is the author of numerous articles on advertising and marketing and recently published a new book, *The Myth Makers*.

Mr. Randazzo looks at stories mostly from an advertising perspective, but stories are certainly relevant to any qualitative researcher because stories are a direct line to our inner thoughts and values. While we can't replicate Mr. Randazzo's Big Apple humor, here are his key points.

Stories are as old as humankind and are both natural and irresistible to us. The stories we tell reveal much about us and our cultures and have implications about what we consume. Moreover, stories are powerful because they engage us, are memorable to us, and touch us in our "heart zones." The "heart zone" is where people are persuaded. When we can touch the "heart zone," we cut through rational defenses and connect with people in a very powerful way.

We take comfort in the stories of others. We learn through their stories that their struggles are our struggles—their questions, issues, and joys are the same as ours. So we look for clues and insights about ourselves in the stories of others. According to Mr. Randazzo, psychoanalysis is, on some level, an attempt to piece together a coherent story that you can live with. (How that is, something to think out.)



Conference lunch speaker, Sal Randazzo.

Advertising is a storied form of communication, a narrative that uses fictitious characters, places, situations, etc. to engage the consumer in order to communicate information about products and services and/or create meaning for a brand. For example, in the currently popular milk campaign, the milk mustache on a famous or intriguing person immediately makes the consumer ask, "What's the story

here?" In a case history about nail polish, Mr. Randazzo described research using stories that uncovered long nails as a sex tool, and connected red nail color to the "blood stories" of femininity (childbirth, virginity, etc.)— sounds like some interesting focus groups!

When we do consumer research, Mr. Randazzo asserted, we are looking for information, insights, ideas that can help us piece together a coherent story that will resonate with consumers. For the consumer, what is his or her unfolding life story, and what is the story by which he or she will convince himself or herself to use the product or brand in question? For the brand, what is the product's story, the brand's evolving story? Does the brand story come out of the product story or somewhere else?

Mr. Randazzo ended his speech with a brief examination of the recent Marriott campaign that examines the stories of individuals staying in the hotel—in effect, a story in every room. By learning the stories of these people, and how Marriott is enhancing their stories, we learn how Marriott might enhance our own stories.

Mr. Randazzo, if you are reading this, we will be anxiously awaiting the commercial that tells the story of the harried focus group moderator, in the third Marriott this week. ■

Great write up
for a great guy.
Paul Wishes for '98.

The Advertising Educational Foundation, Inc.

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Mr. Sal Randazzo
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Dear Sal,

The reviews are in from your unusual day at Rutgers and they are raves! Students found your presentations informative as well as entertaining and also enjoyed the way in which you interacted with them. As I told you, I don't many speakers who would be able to wing it without a room and AV support, but you did a fine job! Enclosed are representative comments; three from the first session are noted below:

"...showed motives behind the thought processes involved in advertising that I'd never thought of. He made advertising seem very intriguing and fun."

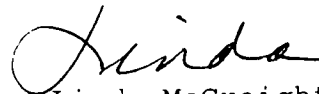
"I had never been aware of the underlying unconscious mythological realm of involvement in advertising...I find it very interesting."

"His gave me a new perspective on advertising. He gave me a more rounded and better opinion of the industry."

Most importantly, the majority of students not only reported increased knowledge of the business, but also improved attitudes toward advertising as a result of your remarks. Well done!

As always, it was fun working with you and we appreciate your consistent support of the AEF. This is definitely a show you should keep taking on the road! Enclosed is a token of thanks; look forward to seeing you soon.

Regards,



Linda McCreight
Vice President
Manager, Ambassador Program

cc: Paula Alex
Rebecca McNeil



May 1, 1999

Sal Randazzo
Director of Strategic Planning
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5/15 Sal
They sure did!
Joe
FYI.
I guess she liked me!
JS

Dear Sal,

For the students, the faculty and all the special guests attending our Glassboro State College Advertising Club Annual Awards Dinner, I want to thank you for being an absolutely outstanding guest speaker.

You were incredibly good.

It's rare that a speaker could talk for more than 40 minutes and keep audience attention. Your talk was well-over an hour. But you intrigued, amused and mesmerized the group. Many were even taking notes!

I was additionally impressed by your closing message. How you punched out the ethical responsibilities that an advertising position holds.

This past week, I quizzed many of the students about the function. Honest-to-goodness, you dominated the discussion. Your one-on-one interaction, your genuine interest in each individual and your keen sense of humor inspired just about everyone.

If I were to create a composite of an ideal Awards Dinner speaker, I would not have created as perfect a package as you.

If there is any way our Ad Club could return the favor, please don't hesitate to ask. They could help you with research, legwork or whatever. My direct college number is (609) 863-6382.

Again, thanks. Thanks for being so good, so warm and so you.

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