

Editor's Letter

How Does Earned Media Work in Advertising?

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THE FIRST ISSUE of the *Journal of Advertising Research* begins with an excerpt from *Through the Looking Glass*, Lewis Carroll's fable of imagination: "Now I'll give you something to believe [the Red Queen said]. I'm just one hundred and one, five months and a day." "I can't believe that," said Alice. "Can't you?" the Queen said in a pitying tone. "Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes." Alice laughed. "There's no use trying," she said: "One can't believe impossible things."

Charles K. Ramond, the *Journal's* founding editor, masterfully used the art of literature as a departure point for a discussion of the science of marketing research. "Nothing surprises," he wrote in Volume I, Issue I, nearly 55 years ago. "Somehow communication has become the game preserve of the griffin and the unicorn, beautiful from afar but indescribable at close range. Its commercial product—the business of advertising—remains (in Martin Mayer's analogy) the enchanted forest for which the facts and principles cannot be seen. Who knows the return on his advertising investment? His optimum media combination? His right themes?"

Dr. Ramond's 1960 queries, in fact, come right out of the Advertising Research Foundation's (ARF's) 2015 "What Makes Advertising Work" mission. And the 55-year gap between smart questions and unresolved answers demonstrates that even the brightest, shiniest toy—as a catch-all, let's call it "the Internet"—cannot provide all the answers.

Charles Ramond died in June at the age of 83. News of his passing reached us too late for inclusion in our September issue. We begin this latest number, however, with a salute to his vision, his intelligence, and his intuitive sense that the marketing-research profession needed one reliable spot where academics and practitioners could share their findings to the benefit of one another.

Dr. Ramond joined the ARF in 1959, from E. I. du Pont de Nemours, where he had been that company's first manager of marketing research. A year later, he settled in behind the JAR editor's

desk and brought honor, dignity, and credibility to the publication for the 20 years he edited it. He also taught at Columbia University's Graduate School of Business, New York University, and Rutgers University and, in 1976, was the author of *The Art of Using Science in Marketing* (Harper & Row).

Bill Cook, who served as the *Journal's* editor from 1985 to 1995, leaned on the founder for advice, counsel, and friendship: "Charlie brought to the *Journal* great passion for the contribution of good research to improving business results, and he also recognized the importance of having the articles readily understood by young researchers and by marketers lacking statistical or social science training," notes Dr. Cook, principal of the consultancy e-Strategic Advantage and a JAR Senior Advisory Board member. "His emphasis on readability and actionability of the articles he edited has remained a distinguishing feature of the *Journal* over the decades of its publication.

He also infused the *Journal* with his excitement over new insights into research practice and application. The pride that he took in the accomplishments of the burgeoning research industry encouraged those seeking to build research to push the boundaries even further, and to share their accomplishments in the *Journal*.

Charlie often reminded his readers that poor surveys, or sloppy respondent recruitment practices, jeopardized the good will of the people on whom we depended for research quality—our respondents. He urged researchers to show greater respect and appreciation for respondents for the time and effort they contribute to our projects. If we failed to do that, we would put their good will in jeopardy."

In one of any number of other prescient observations that Dr. Ramond offered in his first editorial, he noted, "The impossible takes a little longer, and yesterday's science fiction is today's fact. Yet science falters when it seeks to analyze the commonplace phenomenon of men talking to men."

It is an introduction crafted five-and-a-half decades ago for the package of papers that constitute the current issue's special "How Earned Media Works in Advertising" section. As complicated as marketing was in Dr. Ramond's early years at the *Journal*, however, he and his colleagues never had to deal with the ecosystem makeover driven by interactive media and, in particular, how social media gives new legs to old media.

In "The Value of Earned Audiences — How Social Interactions Amplify TV Impact: What Programmers and Advertisers Can Gain from "Earned" Social Impressions" (please see page 448), authors Judit Nagy (FOX Broadcasting Co.) and Anjali Midha (Twitter) have opened the doors of digital conversations—the twenty-first-century version of "men talking to men"—providing detailed evidence that "Tweets about television programs and their sponsors earn a large audience and trigger a variety of actions—almost universally—both on and off Twitter and other platforms."

With the power and breadth of that social medium, moreover, the power of Twitter is not just reach. It is action. According to Nagy and Midha, "Television programs may benefit from marketing campaigns that are optimized for and cognizant of earned audiences." And, for brands with messages that appear as part of the programming mix, the authors suggest

- developing a Twitter strategy that treats Tweets as an extension of both your content and promotional efforts, and
- programming Twitter as you program your network: combine paid and owned tweets for maximum impact.

For marketers, the implications are clear: "As Tweet exposure drives actions across platforms including searching, engagement, and purchase, marketers should learn to integrate Tweet messages, #hashtags, and calls to action with campaigns on other media (television,

search, other social media, and other owned destinations).

More "men talking to men": In 1960, as Dr. Ramond was putting the finishing touches on the first issue of the *Journal of Advertising Research*, a grab bag of sports enthusiasts were pulling together a collection of football teams that eventually would lead to the United States' biggest media event. In just 9 years, that fledgling American Football League would become powerful enough to disrupt the sports-business-as-usual of the National Football League with an annual end-of-season event called the Super Bowl.

Not only was the game the largest television draw, it was the largest driver of earned media at a time when no one ever had heard of the term "earned media." And, as Harlan E. Spotts (Western New England University), Scott C. Purvis (G&R Cooperative, LLC), and Sandeep Patnaik (University of Maryland University College) demonstrate in "How Digital Conversations Reinforce Super Bowl Advertising: The Power of Earned Media Drives Television Engagement" (please see page 454), the biggest has become even bigger: Social media—pre- and post-game as well as during the in-progress coverage—have amplified the natural strength of paid media with enormous infusions of earned media exposures.

Further, Spotts, Putvis, and Patnaik contend, it's not a zero-sum game: "Overall, the study found evidence that the relationship between traditional television advertising and online social-media conversations was reciprocal, with both media platforms working in tandem to enhance brand engagement."

There is more good news for the smart marketer: "The current study's findings reinforce the thinking that brands are not at the mercy of social networks and uncontrolled on-line conversation. Developing strategies to stimulate positive conversation is possible and can extend a brand's

advertising spend through enhanced engagement with both the advertising and the brand.... Brands must ensure that they better synchronize their traditional and social-media campaigns, and this will require closer coordination than has been past practice."

In "Agency-Generated Research of Consumer-Generated Content: The Risks, Best Practices, and Ethics" (please see page 469), authors Sonia Dickinson-Delaporte (Curtin University School of Marketing) and Gayle Kerr (Queensland University of Technology) examine how agencies are using the rich lodes of earned media. And, they conclude, the digital data provide an enormously useful resource for "understanding consumers and igniting insight." The "less formal—and more honest" nature of online discussions, in fact, generates "new ways for brands to understand consumers more deeply.

"It is a need that persists as a primary driver in marketing research. As Dr. Ramond observed in Volume I, Issue I, "If as in missiles there is a gap in the race for knowledge, it is less among competitors than between them all and the man in the street. Now he has given notice that if advertising doesn't fill the gap, he will. His advertising preferences must be known as are his product preferences. Nothing would be more sadly ironic than if, by advertising's failure, the reverse were to occur."

Thanks to Dr. Ramond's vision to create a forum for the lively exchange of ideas among people who teach and practice marketing, we steadily move away from that sad irony with the energy provided by new findings by the likes of Drs. Dickinson-Delaporte and Kerr.

And, with every issue of the *Journal of Advertising Research*, we continue to narrow Dr. Ramond's gap by providing insights and lessons in how advertising works. As always, we welcome your comments. **JAR**