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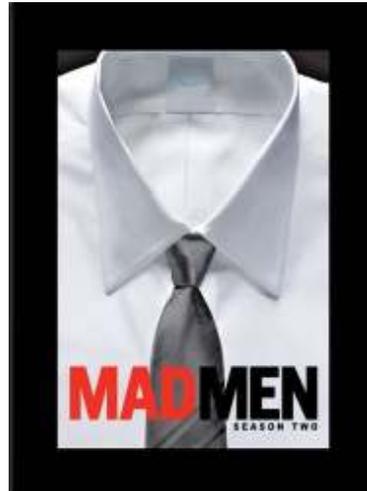
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## The workplace communication of the ad men on 'Mad Men'



"Mad Men", which ends its fourth season this weekend, is an entertaining look at the glamour of 1960s [advertising](#). But is it a realistic portrayal of what the industry was back then? According to ad men who [worked](#) during that era, the [show](#) does in many ways paint an accurate picture of the business.

Michael Grossman, who began his advertising career around 1966, remembers the industry being a hotbed of [creativity](#) and off-the-wall ideas—many of which he likens to the highly-creative television advertisements that you would find during the [Super Bowl](#) in the 1990s.

"The sixties and seventies were a period of some pretty wild advertising—some of it was creative and excellent, and some of it was off the wall and not very intelligent," he said. "You had companies just spending all of their [money](#) on goofy ads nobody could understand. The sixties and early seventies paralleled that period where creative departments really broke lose and an awful lot of nonsense was shoved down the [client's](#) throat."

The ad men of the sixties may have shoved ideas down their clients' throats, but the same certainly did not hold true of alcohol. As "Mad Men" depicts, the three-martini lunch was far from uncommon and people in the industry took wining and dining quite seriously.

"I was shocked, as a young account executive and a young [copywriter](#) in the very early days of my advertising career, to see clients drink three or four strong martinis and then go back to work at two or three in the afternoon," said Grossman. "I was wondering how in [God's](#) name they could function knowing there was no way I could if I drank like that."

Equally prevalent in the advertising industry was the laissez-faire attitude about [smoking](#) in the office —although according to one industry veteran, tobacco may not have been the substance of choice.

"The only difference for me is when I got into advertising in 1964, we were smoking something a bit more potent than Lucky Strikes," said Hank Wasiak of [The Concept Farm](#). "I bet as the show progresses, that will probably come up in some of those episodes."

## Employee Communications

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Unlike the episodes of "Mad Men", what you usually did not find in the advertising agencies of the sixties was the courage to stand up to [clients](#). Rarely did you find a Don Draper type of employee who was willing to tell a client anything other than what they wanted to hear.

"The name of the game was to keep the client [happy](#). That was more important than anything else," said Grossman. "It was a competitive environment. It was hard enough to get clients, so you did whatever you could to keep the client happy."

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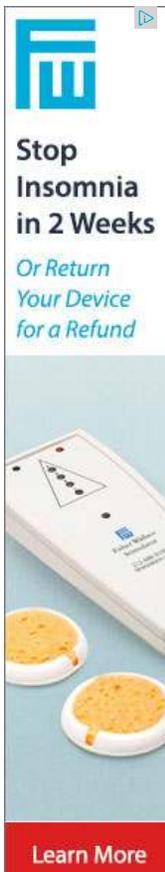
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Despite all of the chances that 1960s advertising professionals may have taken with their campaigns, they were not as risky when it came to embracing diversity. Much like "Mad Men", the advertising industry was a white man's world—and people in that world were not anxious to let others into their clubhouse.

"It was a man's business. It was guys in suits telling America what they should be and what they should buy," said Wasiak. "Madison Avenue at that time was really the arbiter of what American values were."

Back then, it was very unusual to find a Peggy Olson in the advertising business and women were not likely to rise up the ranks to anything outside of the secretarial pool. Likewise, the social mores of the time did not support racial diversity or acceptance of all sexual orientations.

"It was not an environment that would risk having an African American in a commercial, hiring a woman as an account executive, or allowing a gay person to be open if they were an account executive," said Grossman. "It was very different from today's times, which are obviously much more enlightened."

The environment did, however, support office trysts. Much like "Mad Men", it was common to find young men and women in the office engaging in behaviors that would result in sexual harassment lawsuits and firings today.

"I don't mind telling you that, I've been married twice and in my first marriage—when I was pretty immature and didn't know what I was doing—I certainly had affairs at the agency," said Grossman. "And I had many friends who also had affairs at the ad agency."

*This article originally appeared on my [Workplace Communication Examiner](#) page on November 8, 2009.*

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