

*“...the secret  
to making  
a classic  
internet  
commercial...”*

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# PROJECT *Re: Brief*

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Ask anyone to name the greatest television commercial of all time and a list of contenders will likely spill out. Ask the same question about, say, banner ads and chances are you'll meet blank stares. So far, the secret to making a classic internet commercial has remained locked away. To get at it, Google took an approach straight out of a heist film, persuading a team of veteran safe crackers to come out of retirement for one last job. These legendary advertisers would work alongside a team of technical whizz-kids and creatives in an experiment to turn four iconic campaigns into cutting-edge online ads using the kind of technology they couldn't have dreamed of as younger men.

Bob Pasqualina was sanding an antique wooden skiff in his garage in Ashley Falls, MA, when his old

partner Howie Cohen called. The pair created the CLIO Hall of Fame television spot 'I can't believe I ate the whole thing' for Alka-Seltzer, and hadn't worked together for 30 years. Cohen explained that Google wanted them to re-imagine their 1972 ad. "I was far, far removed from the workings of Google and even the computer," Pasqualina says. But the ad was the biggest moment of their careers and he couldn't pass up returning to it. He agreed on the spot.

Three other legends from advertising's golden age were also on board: Amil Gargano, the man who launched Volvo in the US with the 1963 ad 'Drive it like you hate it,' Paula Green, who invented the 'challenger brand' concept with Avis' 'We Try Harder,' and Harvey Gabor, who dreamed up Coca-Cola's iconic 1971 television commercial 'Hilltop,' ➤

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What happens when legendary admen of yesteryear are given cutting-edge digital tools to revisit their greatest moments? If Google's Re: Brief is anything to go by, you unlock the creative potential of new media advertising.

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**Drive it like you hate it.**

When Volvo came to the U.S. from Sweden in 1966, Chevy was the "hot one." Ford was the "safe one" and Volkswagen was just coming on as the "funny one."  
 We'd like to say that Volvo immediately caught on as the "cool one." It didn't.  
 At the only "car race" bought in. They figured that if a Volvo couldn't beat up under Swedish driving conditions, it couldn't handle ours. (80% of imported, unaltered Swedish women, 15% below, that a Volvo would hold up under anything.  
 They figured right. Volvo were driven right out of business. Here's what our tracks where they proceeded to win more races if... no other compact ever made. Volvo are still... coming races. But that isn't why they're bought today. Volvo are now being used and owned as family cars. They're safe. And on the highway they're away from other popular personal computers.  
 In every speed range, you get over 25 miles to the gallon. The Volvo economy car.  
 The Volvo economy car.  
 You can drive a Volvo like you hate it for as little as \$22865.\* \*Cheaper than psychiatry.



Amil Gargano's 1963 Volvo ad, 'Drive it like you hate it'



Irv Gordon at the wheel of his Volvo P1800 as it closes in on three million miles

in which a global chorus sang, "I'd like to buy the world a Coke."

They had signed up for Project Re: Brief. "Our purpose was to take a medium that is ignored more than it is loved, and inspire a new generation of creative people to use it to make exceptionally engaging work," says Aman Govil, the Product Marketing Manager who led the experiment. "The message that we wanted to get across is that to create great online advertising, you first need to create great advertising." The Google team could make these new ads shimmer with technical know-how, but the legends would ensure they had heart.

**T**he challenges faced by internet advertising are surprisingly reminiscent of the 1960s. Back then, Paula Green's boss, Bill Bernbach, co-founder of Dane Doyle Bernbach, waved studies around showing that 85 percent of

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advertising went unnoticed. "They don't even hate us," Bernbach remarked, "they're just bored with us." To make people take notice, he put copywriters and art directors in the same room to work on concepts collaboratively. His idea was '1+1=3,' and it triggered a creative revolution. Project Re: Brief updates the concept for the digital age by adding technologists to that room.

Google came up with the idea after talking about adapting classic ads into banners with New York-based creative agency Johannes Leonardo. According to Govil, it evolved after he saw the documentary *Art & Copy*, about 1970s ad world mavericks. "If we can shift the way the industry approaches building digital advertising, we can come up with amazing work that people will love, remember, and share 50 years from now," he says.

Govil decided to capture this tech-driven creative process on film, almost like a lab book – a key part



Transforming a vending machine into a global communications tool for Coca-Cola



Paula Green invents the 'challenger brand' concept for Avis in 1963

of every experiment. That's when *Art & Copy* director Doug Pray stepped in. According to Deepak Ramanathan, Google's Head of Marketing, Display Ads, he's captured a transformation that could be every bit as profound as the shift to color from black and white, or to 3D from 2D: "This is the third dimension of advertising; it's immersive and emotive," he says.

Central to the project was how banner ads could interact with the real world; whether cars, telephones, or almost any other device. "An engineer can come into a room and give you a playground that you might not have understood existed before," says Drew Ungvarsky of Grow Interactive, the Norfolk, Virginia-based digital agency recruited to help shape and execute the campaigns.

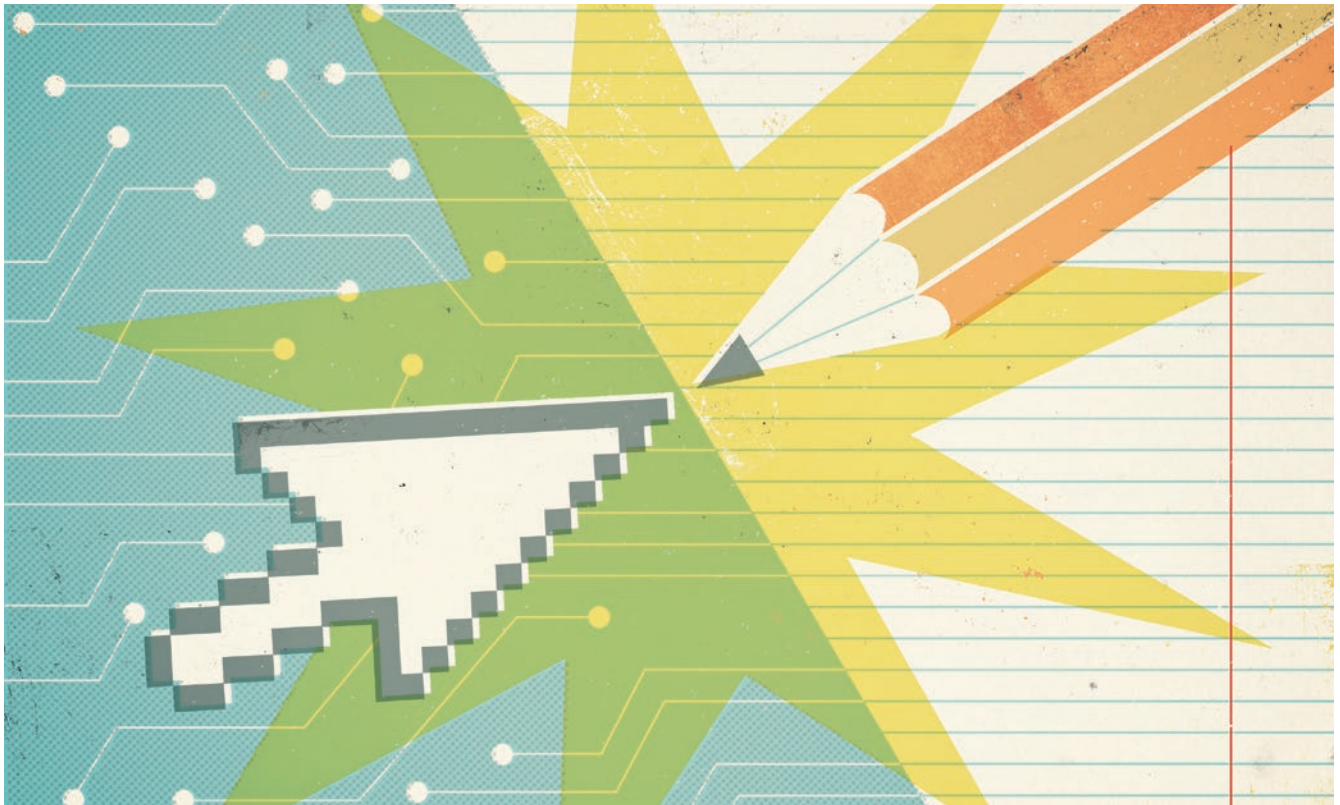
But the technology was balanced with timeless advertising wisdom. Amil Gargano could have walked straight off the set of *Mad Men* —

*"Digital advertising today is often long on engineering but short on passion. We need to change that. The good news is, any brand can make ads like these, and even better ones. You just need to open up to the possibilities."*

a Korean War veteran, he struck out on his own in 1962 to start an agency with only one client. But similarities to Don Draper end there; Gargano left the three-martini lunches to the account men because the creative work absorbed him completely.

"If you want to get people's attention, do something that is evocative, that excites their curiosity to get them into this thing called 'banner advertising,'" Gargano says. His advice for a new Volvo spot was to look for a human story that captured the car's durability. When the team found retired teacher Irv Gordon, who had clocked nearly 2.9 million miles in his 1966 auto, Gargano remembers thinking, 'You've just hit it out of the ballpark.'

The next step was to maximize the technology without overshadowing the story — indeed, the tech worked best when it was almost invisible. 'Magic' was how Gabor described



it in a pitch to Coca-Cola. Finally, one-by-one, the Re: Brief teams were ready to present their ideas to the brands.

**F**or Volvo, they pitched an interactive timeline telling the story of Irv Gordon's life through his car's journey. GPS technology and Google+ would allow people to follow his car as it closed in on the three-million-mile mark.

The Alka-Seltzer concept returned to the story of Ralph, who sat on his bed half a century ago and exclaimed, "I can't believe I ate the whole thing." Only this time, we pick up the action a little earlier in the day, finally discovering exactly what got poor Ralph into such a spot in the first place. Each piece of content is customized to the person viewing the ad at any given moment, from time, location, weather, music, and even

small details like specific newspapers or sports teams.

The Avis ad, meanwhile, allows customers to write stories about their experiences with the brand, and then uses language-processing algorithms, a seemingly limitless bank of audio clips, and images created by illustrators to instantly create a personalized animated 30-second video, which they can then share.

The concept for Coca-Cola literally allows you to connect with Coke lovers on the other side of the world. The banner lets the sender record a message that is beamed onto a screen on a vending machine. Forty years after the original campaign, it delivers on that promise to 'buy the world a Coke and keep it company.'

Coca-Cola is already discussing how it can roll out the concept globally. "It's the most innovative display ad, if you can

even call it that, I've ever seen," enthuses Coca-Cola Creative Director Jackie Jantos.

Google is presenting the campaigns to the advertising industry, along with Pray's documentary, to spur a discussion about the future. "Digital advertising today is often long on engineering but short on passion. We need to change that," Govil says. "The good news is, any brand can make ads like these, and even better ones. You just need to open up to the possibilities."

Job done and the getaway a success, Green says she feels exhilarated. "It rejuvenated me. It brought me into today," the 84-year-old says. The rest of the team thinks they pulled off the heist, too. And if retired legends, coming in cold, can embrace technology to create great advertising, what can today's industry leaders do? It's up to the rest of the advertising world to spawn a series of sequels 🍿