Through a review of data from the Campbell-Ewald Advertising Agency and its creative director, the Chevrolet car company, and a review of the award-winning television commercials, this paper explores the successful relationship between Chevrolet and that agency from 1955 to 1965. Following an introduction and a list the questions asked about both the nature of the business relationship between these two organizations and the television and advertising environment prevalent at the time, the paper presents a brief review of previous literature on television advertising and the automobile industry. The paper next describes the nature and sources of the data reviewed, which includes five videotapes of the award-winning commercials. It then discusses the following aspects of the relationship between Chevrolet and Campbell-Ewald, based on the materials examined: (1) the commitment of these two companies to excellence in advertising, (2) the creative environment at the advertising agency, (3) the advantages enjoyed by advertising in that era of television, (4) the size and use of Chevrolet's advertising budget, (5) conditions of the automobile market at that time, and (6) the award-winning television advertisements. The paper concludes with remarks on automobile advertising in general during this "golden age" of television. (HTH)
ON TOP OF THE WORLD
Chevrolet Television Advertising
1955 to 1965

By

Jan L. Wicks

College of Communication
Arts and Sciences
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824

Paper submitted to the Advertising Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Memphis State University, Memphis, Tennessee, August 1985

Jan L. Wicks is a doctoral candidate in the Mass Media program at Michigan State University.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of the Literature</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to Excellence</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Environment</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantages of the Era</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size and Utilization of Budget</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilization of Contemporary Conditions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Award-Winning Advertisements</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOTES</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

In 1962, at the International Broadcasting Awards Festival in Hollywood, Chevrolet received three top awards and a special citation:

To Chevrolet...for skilled application of the best principles in advertising:
First, as a marketing tool that has coupled the era of television with its own era of sales leadership. Second, as a creative tool that has consistently won viewer approval, industry awards and the envy of other craftsmen—along with sales success. Third, as a production tool that has demonstrated versatility in the many techniques of the commercial: Live action, animation, special effects and color, both with film and videotape.

Kensinger Jones was a driving force behind these accomplishments. Hired by Chevrolet's agency, Campbell-Ewald, as its first Television Creative Director in 1957, he directed the department that wrote and produced commercials now touted as "classics" from television's golden years. Later, as the agency's Executive Vice-President and overall Creative Director, Jones continued to supervise the creation and production of other international award winners.

This innovative period hallmarked by growth, change and experimentation continues to fascinate. Perhaps it's because television and advertising personnel were attempting at the time to realize the medium's full potential. As evidenced by the IBA citation, Chevrolet's television advertising came close to doing so. An examination of the development of this advertising and the environment in which it was created will provide a first-hand look at one highly successful agency-client relationship that resulted in outstanding work.

In addition, this detailed examination may provide insight into a midwestern agency's contributions to the golden age. New York, especially Madison Avenue, has traditionally been considered the center of advertising in America. Other regions of the country have been largely overlooked. This paper will provide a "midwestern" interpretation of that period.

This perspective will be provided by Mr. Kensinger Jones. In addition to his involvement in the development and supervision of the ads discussed, he also served as co-chairman of the Chevrolet Account Advancement Planning Board, (which developed future strategies), one of seven top managers responsible for the account, and supervisor of all creative personnel at the agency until 1968.
Research Questions

The agency-client relationship between Campbell-Ewald and Chevrolet from 1955 to 1965 culminated in the development of some of the most noted television advertising in the world. The following questions will be addressed to determine why:

1) How strong was Campbell-Ewald and Chevrolet’s commitment to advertising excellence?
2) What elements contributed to the positive creative environment at Campbell-Ewald?
3) How did the size and allocation of the TV production budget contribute?
4) How well were all of these elements utilized?

Review of the Literature

Publications concerning advertising and television were examined to determine if Chevrolet and Campbell-Ewald had been studied by researchers in the past. No study was found that evaluated Chevrolet’s television advertising exclusively and in-depth. Lincoln Diamant’s Television’s Classic Commercials includes four Chevrolet spots from 1956 to 1959, provides a short summary of each, and explains how each was produced, but goes into little detail. Max Wilk’s The Golden Age of Television examines programming and the commercial environment, but neglects advertising’s role. Other history books on television and advertising give a narrative explanation of the medium and the message, but do not specifically examine the development of Chevrolet’s award-winning advertising.
Historical literature regarding the automobile industry, such as *General Motors: The First 75 Years of Transportation Products*, discusses the development of the automobile but not the advertising to promote it. In addition, other General Motors publications from the period do not concern Chevrolet's advertising, although they do give a glimpse into contemporary policy of corporate management.

Trade journals, including *Advertising Age* and *Printers' Ink* contain articles about various aspects of Chevrolet's television advertising. Among the topics examined are reports of the awards won by Chevrolet television advertising, interview and feature articles concerning Kensinger Jones, and articles discussing the commercials themselves.

**Methodology**

Mr. Kensinger Jones was interviewed to obtain a first-hand evaluation of the advertising. Besides serving as a primary source, he provided supporting data. They included memos regarding the production of the commercials, scrapbooks containing articles about the awards, films and videotapes of some of the award-winning commercials, a few of the awards themselves, and booklets describing Campbell-Ewalt's management structure.

The Campbell-Ewalt agency in Warren, Michigan provided corroborative documentation by letter. The agency supplied information concerning the awards, programs sponsored by Chevrolet, and background for the business association between the agency and Chevrolet.
Contemporary automotive and advertising trade journals and books provided supporting evidence. Through a synthesis of these primary and secondary sources, the story of Chevrolet's "Golden Age" was developed.

Commitment to Excellence

Chevy became the first automobile company to buy TV time, on the DuMont Network in 1946. By 1955-56 it had become apparent to top management at both Campbell-Ewald and Chevrolet that television was destined to become the most important advertising medium. Henry "Ted" Little, Chairman of the Board of Campbell-Ewald, and Ed Cole, General Manager of Chevrolet, decided it was time to upgrade the quality of Chevrolet's television advertising. They decided they wanted the best commercials on the air and that the ads must project an image of unequalled quality and innovation.

To implement the agency's commitment to excellence in television advertising Little ran an ad in Advertising Age. It sought a candidate who might create commercials of outstanding caliber. Jones, a TV Creative Supervisor at Leo Burnett in Chicago at the time, answered the ad. In 1957, he was appointed Campbell-Ewald's first Television Creative Director. Within two year's time, Jones had become the agency's first Creative Director. By promoting someone with a television background to head creative responsibilities at the agency, Campbell-Ewald management demonstrated its belief in the importance of the medium.
Further evidence of commitment occurred when Campbell-Ewald became the first agency in Detroit to have a fully-equipped video center. The television control center, installed in 1962, included a video camera chain operating in conjunction with three projectors; a coaxial cable link with the studios of the local CBS outlet to permit playing videotapes from the station’s videotape machines directly into the system; a full sound system and tape machines to play quarter-inch magnetic tape and 16mm and 35mm magnetic film; and an "interlock" projection arrangement by which a live camera could televise a meeting or presentation and pipe it to any of the center’s monitors. It was state-of-the-art for its day.

**Creative Environment**

With support from Cole and Little, Jones encouraged creative personnel to try "just about anything--no idea will be rejected without being given a chance." The agency could go to the client with creative ideas rather than formal recommendations. Instead of providing storyboards, as is common advertising practice, creative personnel simply explained ideas to the client, who often accepted them and authorized further development. Many award-winning commercials began this way.

Creative people at the agency believed that outstanding creative work was required of them. Management correspondingly realized that there might be an occasional failure. This expectation of superiority coupled with the cushion of forgiveness provided a challenging, yet comfortable environment for Campbell-Ewald creatives.
Jones said that this environment attracted and kept a great deal of top creative talent. Among the many people he praised were: Don Miller, Production Department Head; Bob McTyre, Copywriter; Fred Lounsberry, Writer and Lyricist; Glenn Wilson, Copywriter; Don Frankmann, Copywriter and Producer; Bob Woodburn, Independent Copywriter and Producer; Pete Miranda; Willard Haines and Jim Morrison.

To retain this talent at the agency, Jones sought to challenge and support them. He believes his biggest contribution to the agency was the retention of creative talent, through recognition and reward. When he arrived at Campbell-Ewald, only one person in the creative department owned stock in the company. By the time Jones left in early 1968, seventeen people in that department were shareholders, and as such shared in company profits, and "that's a strong incentive."

Another factor that contributed to excellence was the development of the "outside group." This group, created by Ted Little, was composed of top creative and account people on the Chevrolet account, plus "outstanding thinkers" of the day who could help assess future social trends. It included "illustrators like Austin Briggs, people who worked for the Rand Corporation, and others who were at the top of their disciplines." Through the outside group, which met in locations away from Detroit, Little hoped to stimulate thinking and encourage original ideas to apply to Chevrolet's advertising.
Advantages of the Era

Part of the creative environment was the time itself. Jones said: "It was when television itself was the most exciting thing around." From 1950 to 1966, the number of homes with television sets jumped from 4.2 to 66.4 million. The number of commercial stations increased from 104 to 608. Advertisers spent $200 million on television in 1950, as compared with $2.7 billion in 1966. Considering the total spent on advertising, TV's annual expenditure increased from .35 percent in 1950 to 16.7 percent in 1966. The advent of color in the fifties also added new excitement to the medium.

This was also the era when network advertisers sponsored entire programs, a hold-over from radio. Agencies often produced the programs, and contracted with the television networks which carried them. As the medium gained acceptance, it became apparent that program sponsorship gave an advertiser prestige and recognition. The audience was grateful to a sponsor for providing a favorite program.

Show sponsorship allowed the client and the agency to determine spot length. Commercials ran from one minute to five and one-half minutes. This allowed more time to tell the sales story and involve the audience in the commercial. And since the spot was presented in a program chosen by the client, the environment was conducive to the image Chevrolet wanted to project.
The first program sponsored by Chevrolet was "Crossroads," which made its debut in October 1955 on the American Broadcasting Company. In 1956 Chevrolet introduced the "Dinah Shore Chevy Show" on the National Broadcasting Company, which ran until 1961. Other programs sponsored by Chevy included the "Pat Boone Showroom," which ran on ABC from 1958 to 1960; "My Three Sons," which began in 1959 on ABC; "Bonanza," which began in 1959 on NBC and was cancelled midway through the 1972-73 season; and "Route 66," which began in 1959 on the Columbia Broadcast System.

Other advantages of program sponsorship included utilizing some of the stars of the programs by integrating the commercials into the program. For example, it was common practice for Dinah Shore and Pat Boone to go directly into a commercial during their programs, as if the spot were another musical number.

The entire primary cast of "Bonanza" starred in a five and one-half minute production featuring Little Joe (Michael Landon) driving a Camaro, Hoss (Dan Blocker) endorsing Chevy trucks, and Ben Cartwright (Lorne Greene) describing the features of the Impala. Each star was paired with the model that seemed most appropriate. This same idea was used to develop a commercial for the cast of "My Three Sons."

For the "Route 66" show Campbell-Ewald created a series of commercials which showed Chevys in well-known sites along the actual highway. These commercials were set in California, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas; and each featured a different Chevy model.
Size and Utilization of Budget

The size of the budget for TV commercials and its flexibility was important. Chevrolet’s TV production budget was among the largest in the industry, but more important, there was no fixed-cost per commercial. Controls existed over the entire budget, but there was freedom within it. For example, if it cost $50,000 to produce one spot, subsequent spots were tailored to cost a more modest amount. Chevrolet’s management encouraged the agency to produce at least one blockbuster each year.

Top national and international talent and facilities were enjoyed. Rene Oulman of Arco Films produced remarkable technical achievements in France like creating the illusion of an invisible car in "Magic Ride." "Magic Ride" and "An American Visits Paris" utilized director Bernard LeMoine (a director of French feature films like The Red Balloon).

Top music composers, Henry Mancini and Nelson Riddle, were musical directors for a series of 12 commercials announcing the new 1960 models. The full studio facilities of Universal and Warner Brothers was devoted to Chevrolet production during the late fifties and early sixties.

Utilization of Contemporary Conditions

It is evident that Chevrolet and Campbell-Ewald created some of the most noteworthy advertising of those Golden Years. But did it sell cars?
Although it is impossible to directly attribute Chevy's sales success through the period to advertising, it may have played a role. Chevrolet's continuing hold on number one in sales closely paralleled the emergence of television as a sales medium. And Chevy's biggest gains in sales paralleled the years of the awards.

Jones said that Chevrolet was in first place almost every year from 1955-65, except one in which Chevy was second to Ford. He believed that Chevy probably set a few sales records during those years, and he doesn't think the company has since enjoyed the share of market it had in 1963-70. He believed the advertising could have contributed to this success.

Support comes from performance on recall scores. For example, "Magic Ride" attained a recall score of 68, as compared to the contemporary average of 40. In addition, it became the subject of a Kodak print advertisement; part of a campaign to show how "film does the unusual."

An interesting statistic emerges from "U. S. New Passenger Car Registrations by Makes, 1951-59 and 1960-69," from both the Ward's 1960 Automotive Yearbook and the Ward's 1970 Automotive Yearbook. Chevrolet's highest percentages of new car registrations were in the years 1961, 1962 and 1963. It is of interest that this occurred in the midst of the award-winning years. Chevrolet led American Motors, Chrysler and all other General Motors makes for new car registrations; and remained in close competition with Ford's total new car registrations.
Other evidence of the advertising's noteworthiness can be inferred from articles about Jones and Chevrolet. An article in Advertising Age, "To Hell With Storyboards' Key to Chevy's TV Success," described why Chevrolet had done so well in the medium, and gave "much credit to Kensinger Jones." A feature on Jones ran in another issue of the same publication, and he was a speaker at the Fifth Annual Advertising Age Creative Workshop. Advertising contemporaries respected the advertisements and their creators, and were quite interested in them.

Award-Winning Advertisements

After examining Chevrolet's and Campbell-Ewald's commitment to excellence and the elements that supported that commitment, it appears that the advertising succeeded in doing what top management desired. But which ads won those international awards, and what did they have in common?

The commercials that won international awards were: "Family Shopping Tour," which depicted a family out on a shopping trip observing another buying a car. This spot featured many human interest shots, and won the Grand Prix du Cinema at the Cannes Film Festival in 1959.

"Corvair Olympics" won the Grand Prix du Cinema at the Cannes Film Festival in 1960. It showed a Corvair and a skier racing down an Aspen ski run.
"Magic Ride" featured a man and woman taking a ride in an 'invisible' car, and made the talent appear as if they were riding on air, while going through the normal motions of driving and riding in a car. It won the Grand Prix du Cinema at the Cannes Film Festival in 1961.

"Truck Egg Test" dramatized the smoothness of a Chevy's ride using a dozen eggs and some railroad ties. It won the Grand Prix du Television at the Cannes Film Festival in 1963.

"Pinnacle" dramatized the fact that Chevy stands alone above its competition by placing a car atop a natural stone "tower" in Utah and photographing the entire commercial by helicopter. This spot won Second Place at the Venice Film Festival in 1964.

Chevrolet and Campbell-Ewald also received a one-of-a-kind, unprecedented award, the special citation for "intelligent use of the broadcasting medium" from the judges of the 1961 International Broadcasting Awards Festival in Hollywood. The judges created the award after 10 of 14 Chevy commercials entered in the competition reached the finals, and were recognized for "good taste and consistently high quality." Many other spots won awards as well.

The international award winners all had one common factor: all addressed a specific advertising problem and solved it. For example, "Family Shopping Tour" was developed to tell the consumer: "Your car may be obsolete. Why don't you buy a new one?" The "Truck Egg Test" dramatized the improved ride in the Chevrolet trucks, and "Magic Ride" featured the 'jet smooth' ride of Chevrolet cars.
Conclusions

In its day, Chevrolet's television advertising was on top of the world. The personnel, the era and the positive creative environment jelled to produce outstanding ads. The IBA citation best expressed contemporary opinion: "For these 14 commercials--and for many others in its portfolio--the IBA salutes Chevrolet and its advertising agency, Campbell-Ewald. May its television advertising continue to set examples for others for the use of techniques, the values of creativity, and the judicious role of television as a marketing tool." If this was, indeed, the golden age of advertising, the extraordinary work produced by a midwestern agency added much to its glitter.

And glitter is not limited to any golden age. Commitment to excellence on the client's and agency's part, an ability to recognize and utilize contemporary media conditions, and creative support are not unique to the era. Jones said he believes a modern version of the Campbell-Ewald and Chevrolet relationship exists between Chiat/Day, Inc. and Apple Computers.

The ability to create noteworthy advertising then was not limited to Chevrolet and Campbell-Ewald. Jones mentioned a number of contemporaries he felt did superior work: Don Dolan and Bob Mack, who worked on Chrysler's advertising; Barney Clark, a "brilliant copywriter" for Ford; Artie Fields and Bill Walker, who composed music for all of the auto companies; and Austin Briggs and Stan Galley, who were both illustrators.
There were many individuals who seized the opportunities provided in that golden age and utilized them. Although the advertising and television industries have changed a great deal since then, it is believed that the period provided a foundation for modern advertisers and broadcasters. And, as Jones said, the ability to create outstanding advertising is obviously not limited to any era. It depends upon a commitment by the client, the agency and creative talent to do so, for "there is no such thing as a golden age, only golden people."
NOTES

1  Harry W. McMahan, "To Hell With Storyboards' Key To Chevy's TV Success," Advertising Age, May 21, 1962, pp. 91-2.


4  Diamant, Television's Classic Commercials.


6  Interview with Kensinger Jones, 29 January 1985.; and Pages from a binder loaned to the author by Jones containing the names and titles of Campbell-Ewald officers and directors, and corporate divisions. The pages appear to be memos and handouts given to management. Pages included in the binder are: "Chevrolet Account Advance Planning Board," 27 September 1966; "Campbell-Ewald...Chevrolet Creative--Cars & Trucks and Print & Broadcast," 4 May 1966; and "Creative Plans and Review Committees," 1 January 1966.

7  Diamant, Television's Classic Commercials.

8  Wilk, The Golden Age of Television.

11


12


13


14


15

Interview with Kensinger Jones, 29 January 1985.

16

Ibid.

17

18 Interview with Kensinger Jones, 29 January 1985.


21 Interview with Kensinger Jones, 29 January 1985.

22 Interview with Kensinger Jones, 29 January 1985.; and Pages from a binder loaned to the author by Jones containing the names and titles of Campbell-Ewald employees.

23 Interview with Kensinger Jones, 29 January 1985.


26 Interview with Kensinger Jones, 29 January 1985.

27 Ibid.


29 Interview with Kensinger Jones, 29 January 1985.

30 Interview with Kensinger Jones, 29 January 1985.; and "California Route 66," a commercial taking place on the actual Route 66 featuring a well-known California site.; and "Missouri Route 66."; and "Oklahoma Route 66."; and "Texas Route 66."

31 Interview with Kensinger Jones, 29 January 1985.

McMahan, "To Hell With Storyboards," pp. 90-1.

Interview with Kensinger Jones, 29 January 1985.


McMahan, "To Hell With Storyboards," p. 91.

"Versatile Adman," p. 56.


Stepek to Guggenheim, "Chevrolet TV Advertising," 6 March 1985.; and McMahan, "To Hell With Storyboards," p. 91.; and Kensinger Jones to Victor G. Bloede, 28 January 1964, Campbell-Ewald Company, Detroit, Michigan. This letter to the Executive Vice-President of Benton & Bowles in New York was apparently enclosed with a copy of the commercial "Truck Egg Test," which Bloede planned to use in a speech entitled: "The Best Advertising of 1963." The author was unable to preview this commercial first-hand.


"Chevrolet Commercials Win Honors At Awards Festival," New Center News, 26 February 1962. Published in Detroit, Michigan, and includes the "GM Center" and "Fisher Center" on its masthead. It appears to be a General Motors newspaper or house organ. Article is included in a scrapbook loaned to the author by Jones. The page number was inadvertently trimmed off when pasted to the scrapbook.

Bill Walker to Kensinger Jones, "Nostalgia: A Belated Christmas Gift," 28 December 1983, Advertiser's Music, Inc., Chicago, Illinois. This letter accompanied a videotape given to Jones for Christmas. The letter noted the commercial titles and the awards they won including: "Corvair Oasis," CLIO, Best of Product and IBA, Best of Product, 1961; "Corvair Stone Mountain," Runner-Up at IBA Awards in Hollywood, Cal.; "Corvair Swamp," CLIO, Best of Product and IBA, Best of Product; "Chevy Drive," CLIO, Special Citation for Music and Lyrics; and "Chevy Rides Better Because," Gold Medal, Detroit Art Director's Show.; and Diamant, Television's Classic Commercials, which noted Chevy commercials awarded the Commercial Classics Award, including "Boy Meets Impala" or "Going to the Dance," "Family Shopping Tour" or "Brand New Door," "Somewhat Subliminal," and "Alcan Champs."; and Jones, "Importance of Being Interesting." It is noted in the speech that "An American In Paris" won Best Cinema Commercial at the Cannes Film Festival in 1959. The author was unable to confirm this with another source. This text also noted that "Going to the Dance" won a Special Recognition Merit Award from the Chicago Art Directors in 1958, "Family Shopping Tour" was selected as Best in Product Category at the American TV Commercials Festival in 1960, and that "An American In Paris" was selected as the outstanding advertising exhibit of any kind by the Detroit Art Directors in 1960.
Interview with Kensinger Jones, 29 January 1985.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Kensinger Jones, "Golden Age," 2 March 1985. Speech made by Jones to Michigan State University graduate students in the Communication Arts building, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. Jones was asked to talk about his experiences as an advertising professional to visiting students from the Advertising Master's Program in Birmingham, Michigan. Jones provided a rough draft of the speech to the author.