

Tuesday 9 August 2016

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## Ad-lib: Adland message is one of fear Media and marketing...

Michael Cullen

PUBLISHED  
04/08/2016 | 02:30

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Katie Taylor, one of Ireland's major medal hopes, at this year's Olympics in Rio

"Be afraid, be very afraid". Geena Davis's words of warning as she was led by Jeff Goldblum back to his lair in David Cronenberg's horror movie, 'The Fly'. Whatever about putting the frighteners up Ireland's agencies, American Michael Farmer certainly has made ad execs sit up and think long and hard about where the industry is heading.

Speaking at an Institute of Advertising Practitioners in Ireland (IAPI) talk in Dublin, the author of the starkly-apocalyptic bestseller, 'Madison Avenue Manslaughter', says today's Mad Men celebrate new clients and creative awards just like the Mad Men of yesteryear, with high flying parties and glowing speeches - but the fun stops there.



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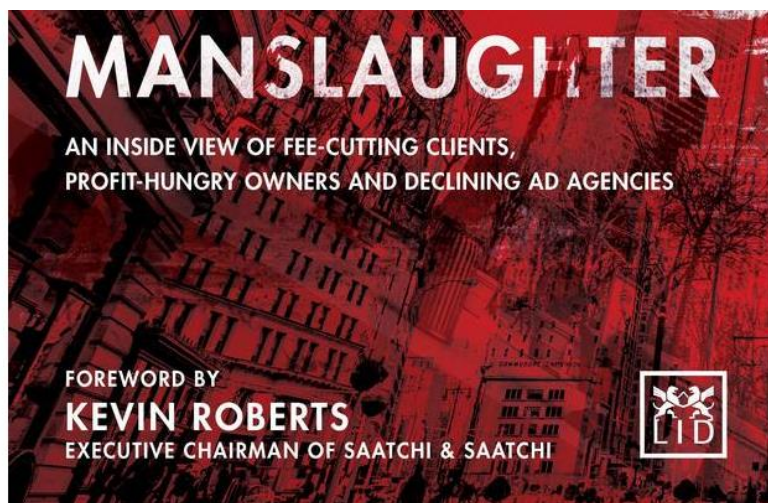


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Returning to their daily routines, ad agency people put on a brave face, struggle with increasing workloads and demanding clients and feel like players on a losing team, unable to break out, or at least pull even with their clients as respected, secure partners.

Farmer recalls the nostalgia. The days when adland was once one of the most fulfilling and glamorous of careers, a target for ambitious go-getters wishing to don Armani suits and create ad campaigns which friends spoke about at chic dinner parties. Adland, Farmer says, has become "a grim sweatshop" for the people who do the work.

What's happened over the past 30 years? How did pay, globalisation, new ownership, shareholder value and digital and social media cause a decline in agency fortunes?

Farmer, a business strategist with 25 years of adland experience, documents the heights of the original Mad Men days when Roger Sterling & Co enjoyed the high life through to the long, steady crash to reality - just like the hero's fall to earth in the 'Mad Men' opening credits.

Having graduated from Princeton University and Harvard Business School, Farmer worked for the Boston Consulting Group and Bain & Co around the world.

He lived and worked in Rio de Janeiro, Lausanne, Munich, Paris, Istanbul and London. He now resides in New York and his company advises agencies and advertisers.

Farmer's book outlines the process which led agencies into today's strategic trap, caught between fee-cutting clients and profit-hungry owners. He hopes to offer insights into how senior executives can restore their agencies to health and deliver better results for clients, helping them escape the gloom of Madison Avenue's manslaughter - as distinct from man's laughter.

Peter McPartlin, ceo, MediaCom Ireland, agrees with Farmer's grim analysis, saying marketing communications has been hit by "a tornado of disruption". While agencies seek to address the challenges thrown at them, they have been poor at matching and managing the talent pool to the work and pricing it accordingly.

"Farmer's book may make for a depressing read, but it couldn't be more timely," McPartlin said. "It serves as a wake-up call for agencies trying to get to grips with unsustainable fees." Not surprisingly, Farmer cultivated a crop of industry fans. In the book's foreword, Saatchi & Saatchi executive chairman Kevin Roberts says we live in a VUCA world - meaning it's volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous.

McCann Group global cfo Gary Lee says adland is now more like 'Madison Avenue Massacre' and the bullets are falling prices, incentives that don't work, mystery benchmarks and "scope theft" - which presumably is mumbo jumbo for gloomier prospects.

\* With the Olympics about to hit the starting blocks, RTE Media Sales hopes to coax advertisers with special slots if Ireland's athletes pull off major feats in Rio.

Should Team Ireland be among the honours, ad breaks will include a special 'Medal Moment' providing brands with a chance to get positive rub-off from sporting glory.

In the brochure sent to advertisers, the sales pitch includes a list of Ireland's main contenders for medals, with the men's golf final on August 14 offering a 'Medal Moment' for €6k. But that was before Ireland's medal chances were hit by Rory McIlroy and Shane Lowry choosing to withdraw from the Games.

Next up on the price list are boxers Katie Taylor, Paddy Barnes, Michael Conlan and Joe Ward. Sailors Annalise Murphy, Ryan Seaton and Matt McGovern and 50km walker Rob Heffernan also feature.



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\* As magazine publishers look at new ways of generating revenue amid the growing threat from digital media, there may be a danger readers could lose confidence in the independence of editorial content. With that in mind, Magazines Ireland will discuss issues around sponsored content, retaining readers' trust and the editor's changing role at a lunch on August 24. The Editors' Forum will be chaired by Laura Cunningham, 'Confetti' and Anna Shelswell-White, 'House and Home'.

\* The Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB) hosts its first Digital Upfronts gathering in the Convention Centre in October. Independent News & Media (INM), Facebook and YouTube will present to advertisers and agencies. Attendance is free but registration is required.

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