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## Career Shot: Advertising Account Management

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The advertising industry has two very distinct sides: a business side and a creative side. As a result, job opportunities in the industry come in two distinct "varieties":

- **Account Managers** (often called account executives) serve as the primary liaisons between an agency and its clients (the "accounts"). This job requires excellent organizational and interpersonal skills to manage the various relationships and personalities involved in the advertising-development process.
- **"Creatives"** dream up the ideas, with both words and images, for the advertising campaigns that companies use to market their products and services. This role requires a strong ability to create a vision out of nothing, while still addressing clients' needs.

Depending on your skills and interests, you'll want to spend some time considering which of the two varieties you're best suited for.

This profile focuses on the account management role. To fully appreciate that role, you need to understand the two major steps in the production of an advertising campaign-- because the account manager touches *all* aspects of that process:

- **Strategic Development:** During this step, the agency (under the leadership of the account manager) uses research and focus-group testing to clarify the client's need (e.g., to sell more gum to teenage kids? fight off new market competition? establish a foothold in a new market). The agency also figures out how to get the client's target audience (teenage kids?) to hear or read the finished advertisement (e.g., while watching TV? riding the subway? reading a particular magazine?). All of this information (along with the client's budget limitations) shapes the next step in the ad-campaign process: creative development.
- **Creative Development:** Once the agency and client agree on a strategic direction, the creatives develop concepts to present to the client with the account manager. The creative concepts support the media decisions the client has made (e.g., "We'll use radio and magazine ads, but not TV ads"). This might be layouts of two or three magazine ads, scripts and sample voices for radio advertising spots, or a visual storyboard for television commercials. After a client approves a concept, the account manager works with the entire team (artists, filmmakers, models, photographers, producers, and related professionals) to produce the finished advertisement. Throughout the entire process, the account manager ensures that the client's needs, questions, and concerns are addressed.

As you can imagine, this strategic and creative development process can be fraught with tension for several reasons:

- Creating an ad is hugely expensive.
- A single ad campaign can play a major role in a product's -- and an entire client company's -- success or failure.

Product/brand managers at the client company, and the agency itself, invest enormous energy and resources in the effort -- and thus have a lot at stake. One agency executive compared the client/agency advertising team to a group of people all roped together who jump out of an airplane -- and hope the parachute opens!

For an ad campaign to succeed, the account manager has to play several roles:

- As a kind of **group psychiatrist**, he or she smoothes relations between the creatives (who often bring both artistic sensibility and sensitivity) and the client's product managers (whose ownership of the product gives them both power and high anxiety).
- As a **translator**, he or she communicates the client's wishes to the creatives, helping them narrow their ideas down to one or two that they then present to the client.
- As a kind of **salesperson**, a senior-level account manager will also "pitch" advertising ideas to new firms whose business he or she hopes to gain for the ad agency.

Owing to the more creative and glamorous aspects of the industry, advertising attracts many college graduates. So, the demand for jobs often outpaces the supply. If you're interested in going into advertising after graduation, start doing your research now:

- Read magazines and watch television, paying attention to which ads you like and why. Then find out which agencies were responsible for the handiwork
- Think about what kinds of clients you'd like to work with, and find out which agencies serve them.
- Scour the *Red Book* -- the directory of advertising agencies and their clients. Read trade journals such as *AdWeek* and *Advertising Age* to find out what's hot in the industry.
- Start networking, to get your name out there in the advertising field. Call anyone you know in the industry (or anyone you can get the name of) and ask them if they could spend a few minutes talking with you about their work.
- If you're only one or two years into your college education, consider finding an internship for the summer. Ad agencies are typically leanly staffed, so many of them can use an extra pair of hands for a few months. The knowledge (and marketability) you'll gain through an internship will be worth its weight in gold.