

Thought leaders

HOW TO GET YOUR FIRST JOB IN ADVERTISING

Dave Trott



campaign

Marketing

Introduction

Last year, *Campaign* and *Marketing* set out to publish a series of key pieces about our industry that are worth preserving and celebrating.

Here's our latest gem. It's from the 70s, an era when the heady mixture of fresh advertising thinking that Colletts, BMP and Saatchi contributed along with a new wave of agencies was – with the help of the soon-to-expand media independents – to transform the face of British advertising.

Dave Trott's *How to get your first job in advertising* is part of the powerful advertising record of that decade. When he wrote it, Trott was a copywriter at BMP, though soon to immortalise his name at Gold Greenless Trott.

As well as a blindingly simple, logical and timeless guide to how to bash a portfolio into shape, this is a definitive explanation of what our industry is here to do: sell stuff, and build the value of brands by proving the long-term efficacy of the product.

This piece is topped by CST's managing director, Nick Simons. Part of the Cagney Group, the agency is staying true to Trott's authenticity.

It is introduced by Peter Souter, the deputy chairman of Abbott Mead Vickers BBDO, who regards Trott as a "brilliant, altruistic, munificent teacher".

Caroline Marshall
Consultant editor
Haymarket Brand Media



Foreword

Thirty years ago, *Grange Hill* made its first appearance on the BBC. *The Deer Hunter* won Best Picture at the Oscars, Steve Overt was the sporting man of the moment and the biggest single on the "hit parade" was The Bee Gees' *Stayin' Alive*.

And Dave Trott wrote *How to get your first job in advertising*.

Given the mind-boggling scale of change over the past 30 years, nobody would expect something written at the time to have relevance today. And yet some of the best young creative directors in the business got their start by reading it.

That's because, although trends and styles change, great thinking never goes out of fashion. Techniques come and go but great thinking is always great thinking. And, what I notice is that Dave's thinking always starts and finishes with selling.

Over the years that I've been in the business, I've worked with

some creatives who only want to win awards. Some who only want to do funny commercials, some who only want to do classy commercials. But I've never worked with a creative who only wants to do work that sells.

Selling is what we do. At least, it's supposed to be. So everything Dave does, or his creative department does and everything he teaches is based on logic. The logic of selling.

Not that it has to be boring or repetitive: ITV had a viewer's poll of the 100 greatest ads of all time recently, and four of Dave's ads were in it. Viewers don't vote for ads they're bored with, they vote for ads they love.

But for Dave it wouldn't be enough for the viewers just to love the ads unless the ads worked towards selling. He constantly reminds me and everyone we work with that selling is what we do. And, because it's selling based on logic, it can be questioned, improved and measured.

Of course, nobody will buy anything if they zone out of the ads. So the work needs to be intrusive, fun, engaging and memorable.

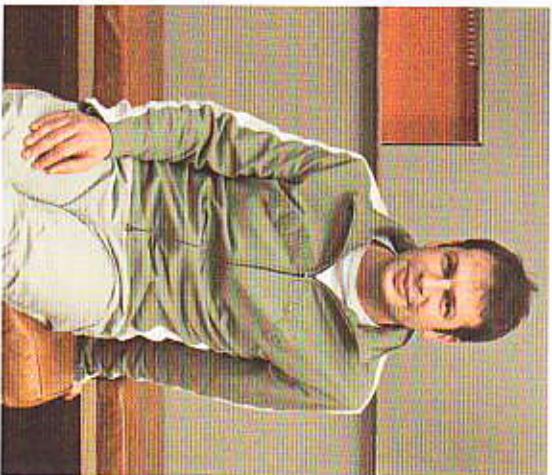
It's not just airy-fairy, arty-fairy "creativity". He doesn't expect advertisers to be patrons of the arts and run commercials purely for the entertainment and amusement of the viewing public. He expects them to work.

Which is perhaps why D&AD recently presented Dave with its President's Award.

If I was a client putting a pitchlist together, I'd always make sure I had at least one agency on it that I knew for sure was more interested in using my advertising budget to increase awareness and sales of my brand, and not just their agency. And I'd be interested in working with a man whose sole mission in life is to help my business. Who wrote down, for the benefit of others, the fundamental principles for doing this 30 years ago. And whose thinking will be just as relevant in another 30 years' time.

Hopefully, after reading this, you will too.

Nick Simons
Managing director
CST



Me and Dave

The truth is, I'm scared of Dave Trott. Common or garden, hide behind the sofa, run to my momma scared.

It's his eyes. Eye donor technology was obviously in its infancy in 1945 but I'm pretty sure that when they found Hitler in the bunker, someone had already harvested him. Trott has these unblinking, scary-ass, jet black, Nazi eyes. He looks like he can use them to scan you, see right through your skin to what's inside your heart. Those eyes just KNOW if you are a vacuous dull artist.

So I never tried to work at any of his agencies. I admired Dave Trott but I made damned sure I never went anywhere near him. Just in case he looked at me with those eyes and found me wanting.

Then a weird thing happened. Over the years I discovered that Trott was not, in fact, a cold-hearted monster. He was, more than anything else, a teacher. A brilliant, altruistic, magnificent teacher.

His ability as a teacher is based on simple generosity. This book is

an act of supreme generosity. It's a completely philanthropic helping hand that has been offered to thousands of British kids.

This book says: "You can do it." More important, it says: "Here's how you get started." Like all great teachers, Trott uses his vast intellect to make things simple. Any fool can make things complicated. But it takes real genius to say: "Look, this is just about working out why someone should go buy the thing you are selling."

I suspect Dave has never called himself a "creative". He's just a salesman, albeit one of the three greatest salesmen Britain has ever produced (the others being the posh Dave's, Abbott and Ogilvy).

Dave's natural generosity made him want to help the underdog. Unemployed people are often made to feel like scum by the employed. So, in the 70s, he set up the D&AD creative workshops. When it turned out there were more people applying than the classes could accommodate, he took charge of the failures. Everyone who failed to get on the night class got invited in to see Dave and he helped them understand how to be better. But the sheer numbers who crammed into his agency for these "rejects" nights made him realise there was a need for a basic instruction manual.

So he sat down and wrote one with the simplicity and clarity that he brought to his timeless ad campaigns.

I'm slightly embarrassed to have been asked to whet your appetite for this book. The danger as warm-up man, given there isn't a spare syllable in the booklet itself, is that you overcook it. I've got a feeling that all I'm doing here is serving as an illustration of how important it is to sell like Dave Trott. But I'd like to take one more leaf out of the book and offer you proof of the efficacy of the product.

Twenty years ago, I read *How To Get Your First Job In Advertising* as a penniless student and came to regard it as my bible. Ten years later, I was the creative director of the biggest and most-awarded agency in the country at the time. I firmly believe that without this book I'd still be writing photocopier brochures.

I hope it works as effectively for you.

Peter Souter

Deputy chairman

Abbott Mead Vickers BBDO

Dave Trott

1947

Born in Barking, East London

1965

O Levels, A Levels at
Barking Abbey School

1966

Foundation Art, East Ham Tech

1967-71

Rockerfeller Scholarship,
Pratt Institute, New York

1971-80

BMP

1980-90

GGT

1990-93

BST

1993-03

WTCS

2003-08

CST



How to get your first job in advertising

Ninety-nine per cent of people trying to get jobs in advertising believe they are whizz-kids.

The one per cent who know they are not (and are desperately trying to learn) are the ones who actually get the jobs. Unless you realise that you do not, at present, know any more about advertising than your mother, you are no use to a good agency.

In fact, your mother may be more useful because she at least buys most of the products that agencies are trying to sell.

The most common misconception is that good advertising is clever puns. Everyone trying to get a job in advertising has a portfolio full of puns about products. A pun is only a figure of speech and should be avoided as a rule.

Your scintillating personality will not get you a job either because many creative directors will not see you, just ask you to leave your portfolio, which will then be one of up to 100 pun collections they will be looking through to see who gets the job.

If you believe that your puns are so amazingly original, then there's no point in reading further.

As you are still reading, you obviously appreciate that the portfolio you have at present is not good enough to get you a job.

This is every applicant's first big lesson: start putting a new portfolio together.

You will be asking professionals for a job, so the obvious thing to do is to ask them what sort of portfolio they will be looking for. Arrange to see lots of people in the business, learn from them, pick their brains, use them.

Do not try to con them into hiring you, the way you would expect

a used-car salesman to behave, because they will just smile nicely and be polite.

Then the next time when you phone to make an appointment, they'll be out.

Don't try to tell them what you know: get them to tell you what they know.

Forget everything your teachers told you, unless of course you want to be a teacher.

The speed of your progress in the business will be directly related to your willingness to learn.

You are not doing everything right at present. Therefore, the quicker you learn what you are doing wrong, the sooner you can correct it.

The second big lesson is: if you want to be patted on the back all of the time and told how clever you are, then advertising is the wrong business for you.

If you think you are more intelligent than the people who are criticising your work, if you think "they just do not understand", then you should become a poet or a painter.

Advertising is all about communication and if one person does not understand what you are saying, then you have failed.

It is no good arguing them into it, because if the ad went into the papers you couldn't run around to everyone who bought a copy and argue them into it.

Now you have wiped the slate clean, there are just three things to remember at all times: always tell the truth, always use logic and always be eager to learn.

There are certain products (colas, soap-powders, chocolate bars and so on) which are all more or less the same.

This makes them very difficult to advertise, so they are best left alone until much later.

At present you are trying to put a portfolio together that will make you look good, so pick products that have something different about them.

The thing that makes one product different from any other product is called its USP. That's short for Unique Selling Proposition.

When you pick a product to advertise look at its competition, then find what makes yours different.

It does not matter if it's small, or even if it seems like a negative, just as long as it has something different. Something you can turn into an advantage.

The first thing to find out is the price of your product compared to the competition.

Is it bigger, or smaller?

Can it save your life, is it safer than its competitors?

Do you get more of it? Does it last longer?

If it does not have any of these (or similar) advantages, then forget it and find a product that has.

You are going to have enough difficulty making up a good portfolio from products with advantages.

If a product does not have at least one advantage, leave it alone.

Now comes the moment of truth.

When a lawyer takes a case he may be trying to make a man appear innocent (if he appears for the defence) or guilty (if he appears for the prosecution). Either way he will only mention the facts that say what he wants to prove.

For example, if you are selling a cheap, inferior product, you say: 'Why pay more?' Whereas, if you are selling an over-priced, expensive product, you say: 'Buy the best.'

This is just rhetoric. Similarly, if you are selling a glass of water that is half-empty, you say it is half-full.

A product which is "common" becomes "popular".

As with all rules there are times to break them, but not until you have learnt to use them properly first.

For example, Volkswagen had nothing to make it different except that it was a small ugly car.

The ads then focused on how much petrol and money you saved (because it was small), and about how all the company's effort went

into making it better not prettier (because it was ugly).

Like any good argument it only works because you can believe it. You can only believe it because it makes sense.

You can work your way up to this sort of stuff but until you know what you are doing keep it simple.

Do not pick anything as difficult as Volkswagen yet.

The best and simplest way of selling a product is to say: 'It is better than what you are about to buy.'

So you are not actually talking people into buying something they do not want, you are talking to someone about to buy one thing and converting them into spending their money on your product instead.

The most obvious (and obvious is usually also the best) way to do this is to compare both products in the ad on the page.

If you are selling cheap shirts at, say, £1 each, then you find a similar shirt for about £5.

Put them side-by-side and write the price under each.

This is the simplest way of selling.

People looking at this do not think, "what a clever advert", they think, "what a great product".

And this is why the man who makes the shirts is paying you to do his advertising.

Now take that a step further.

Put five of those £1 shirts (in different patterns) on the left and the single £5 shirt on the right.

The headline then reads:

"The shirts on the left cost the same as the shirt on the right."

Or place a £1 shirt on the left, along with a £1 tie, £1 cufflinks, £1 belt and £1 aftershave. And place the £5 shirt on the right.

The headline then reads:

"The outfit on the left costs the same as the shirt on the right."

Or put the £1 shirt on the right (with the price tag still on) and the £5 shirt on the left (with the price tag still on).

The headline then reads:
"We give you something they don't: £4 change."

If you are advertising the expensive shirt, put the two side by side with the price tag still on and use the headline:

"If you can't find the difference, buy the cheap shirt (and that's just what you get)."

You will never sell a £1 shirt to someone who wants a £5 shirt, and vice versa, so don't worry about trying. Just get out of the way of the product. Express the product's benefits as simply as possible and let it sell itself.

Do not write "clever" little puns like:

"We're not asking for the shirt off your back",

"You won't get shirty about the price" or

"Great patterns, off the cuff".

You can see they're not selling any shirts, they are certainly not funny, and they are not particularly clever either.

All they are is wasted effort on your part.

If you stop trying to be clever and just be logical, the product will end up selling itself.

Now let's turn to the mechanics of a campaign.

As well as a portfolio of puns, the other thing everyone else who applies for a job is going to have is lots and lots of unrelated ads.

They may have a dozen different ads on the same product but that does not make it a campaign.

What does make a campaign is unity of thinking throughout.

So, before you even think about writing any ads, think about what you want to say.

As you have already seen, nearly every product has some benefit. Your first job is to find this. See why people are buying it at present. When you have found its benefit, this will become your campaign thought.

This thought when written into a catchy memorable phrase will

become the strapline.

It is called the strapline because it is always the last thought that you leave your audience with.

Whether on TV or in the press.

Let's go back to the shirts, and suppose we are selling the cheaper one.

Our benefit is our price, all our advertising is directed towards telling people how much sense it makes to buy a cheaper shirt.

It is the thought we want to leave them with.

The strapline might become:

"An attractive shirt at an attractive price."

Every headline we write must then fit in with this thought, because all we are actually doing is expressing the same thought in lots of different ways.

So, if the headline is:

"It's hard to decide which looks better. The shirt or the price",

this will be the strapline on the bottom:

"An attractive shirt at an attractive price."

Or if the headline becomes:

"At £5 it looks good. At £1 it looks beautiful", then the strapline at the bottom will still be:

"An attractive shirt at an attractive price."

However, if we changed the strategy and decided to talk about how well our shirt fits, with a headline that said:

"Not everyone with a 15.5-inch neck has the same length arms"

(showing that we come in different arm lengths), then the strapline:

"an attractive shirt at an attractive price" would not be appropriate.

If we decide to say you are different in some way, then that is your campaign "thought".

Each headline is then an expression of the different benefits of this campaign thought (strapline).

If you are selling a Mini and you decide the benefit of a Mini is the size, then

the strategy becomes: 'We're better because we're smaller.'

Then a series of different ads with different headlines:

"Smaller cars use less petrol."

"Smaller cars are easier to park", or

"A single person doesn't need a six-seater car"

could all use the same strapline:

"Mini: we're better because we're smaller."

Getting back to portfolios, this is what it should consist of: four to five campaigns, allowing about three to five press ads each.

Forget TV at this point, it is a completely different discipline, and you should not need it to get your first job.

The best products to choose for your ads are those with consumer literature available.

If there is something you already know a great deal about, this is an ideal product to choose. The reason for this is that you need all the information you can get.

Before you even think about writing ads, you should find out everything you can about the product. Then the benefit will make itself known to you and save you having to invent something that no-one will believe anyway.

Motorcars are always good subjects because you can go to the showrooms and get pamphlets or read the road-tests in the motor-ing magazines.

Wallpapers and paints are also a good choice as you can get leaflets from a decorator's shop.

Make-up, skincare and shampoos also usually have a product benefit (ask someone you know who uses them).

And medicines usually have leaflets included in the package telling you why they are better.

If you are a writer you might want to put in a bit of body copy, so it is a good idea to learn the best way of writing either from copies of the *New York Art Directors Annual* or the *New York One Show Annual*.

The *Design and Art Director's Annual* is also good and has a copy section. And you can probably order all of these books at any library.

However, you must remember to write the way people talk, not the way you think advertising people write – it is greasy, slick and old-fashioned.

If you are an art director, your portfolio will look similar but you will need roughs.

Roughs are a good idea for an art director and writers wherever possible. Pictures always make things easier to look at.

But remember roughs should be just that, quick and simple.

You are not being hired for an ability to draw (the agency hires artists for that), you are hired for an ability to think – beautiful drawings are no evidence of that.

People who draw earn a lot less money than people who think.

The best kind of portfolio to use is about two feet by three feet in black zip-up plastic with a spiral binder for acetate pages, which costs about £10.

That way your work is kept clean, it can't fall out, it always looks neat and simple and not messy.

Put campaign ads together.

The rule for positioning work in a portfolio is the same as for body copy: the best work goes at the front and the back. That way, you get people interested as soon as they start and leave them on a high note at the end.

When you have learned all this, it is as much as anyone can teach you and if you have done it all properly you should have a good job in a good agency.

After that you have to learn yourself by watching other people.

Keep questioning what they are doing, why does it work, why doesn't it?

When you go to an interview ask them what is wrong with your portfolio. Use every interview to improve your portfolio.

Not only will it give you a better portfolio but you will find that people want to hire a junior who is willing to learn, not someone who thinks he already knows it all.

A person like that is only going to cause a lot of problems later.

The only way to learn how to do good work is to continually expose yourself to it – read the annuals and go to the awards.

There is another very good book to read called *From those wonderful people who gave you Pearl Harbour* by Jerry Della Femina.

When people tell you what their favourite ad is, ask them if they can remember the name of the product.

No-one is going to pay you to do an ad that just entertains.

Your work should also shock people where possible.

Watch people reading a paper or magazine, just flipping pages.

You have to stop them turning the page, then make them read it.

Of course, unless your shock is relevant to the product it is pointless.

Finally, if you do not want to go to the effort of putting a new portfolio together now, then you may still be able to get a job in a "big, bad" agency on your present portfolio.

However, you will find it a lot harder to get into a good agency later than it is now.