

# Marketing

## **Redecorating Quebec's creative bedrooms: To replace the twin-bed theory of advertising, agencies must prove they can compete globally**

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Don't you just hate it when this happens? You've got a stockpile of bed linens for your twin beds (your marriage is holding together, but it's obviously on the shaky side). Then the wife or hubbie decides it's high time to chuck the beds and linens and buy a king-size bed with matching duvet. The marriage hasn't improved, but the mattresses are pretty darn lumpy and it's time to redecorate the bedroom. After all, other areas of the house are in much better condition.

This is the situation now faced by Quebec's advertising industry. Many in the industry-or at least those on the creative side-are professing that the twin-bed theory that is central to Quebec advertising is dead. The theory, which gave root to modern Quebec advertising, goes that Quebec lives in the same bedroom as English Canada, but needs different advertising to reflect its linguistic and cultural differences.

The idea may have worked from the 1960s well into the 1990s, but in the present world of globalization, global brands and global ad campaigns, Quebec has a lot more to worry about than how much it supposedly differs from the rest of Canada.

But saying that Jacques Bouchard's twin-bed theory is dead-a common refrain heard at last fall's Grand Virage event on the future of Quebec advertising-and reality are two different things. It reminds one of the famous ad campaign for the Yes side for the 1995 referendum on Quebec sovereignty. A simple Yes vote, the campaign went, "and it becomes possible." If one were to believe the campaign, a separate Quebec would have flowers, a Canadian dollar, peace signs and happy people (features it apparently didn't have before).

Talk and action are two separate things, as Grand Virage participants readily acknowledged. Yet, there will be much more talk before the promised action occurs. A task force comprised of senior industry people (including names like Yves Gougoux of Publicis, Jacques Labelle of Cossette, Robert Trempe of Groupe Radio Astral, Nicole Dube of the milk producers federation and Rene Carrier of Labatt) has been given the task of coming up with an action plan for the industry in June. And talk sessions are planned on advertisers, careers, the media and product quality between now and May.

The current situation is one in which Quebec advertising is decried by Quebec creatives as not being up to international snuff. Heck, it's not even up to national snuff. Many creatives openly acknowledge that the quality of Quebec's creative output lags far behind that of English Canada's. (Ironically, the Grand Virage was officially opened by Culture and Communication Minister Diane Lemieux. She's the foot-in-mouth Landry government minister who, when named to her post, came out with the remark that "Ontario has no culture." It's this same cultureless Ontario lot that has been whupping Quebec creative at Cannes, and has Quebec creatives in such a tizzy.)

Only by competing internationally can the industry survive in the long term, goes the talk. That's the Catch-22 situation: Not until Quebec agencies actually win a lot more international and national accounts can the twin-bed theory actually be put to rest. Before those glorious days arrive, agencies will have to continue to earn their bread and butter on creative that is specific for Quebecers. The alternative for Quebec agencies would be collective suicide-or at least the hope there's a spare sofa bed somewhere in the house.

Meanwhile, if the Grand Virage served as an indication, the time is also nigh for women in Quebec's ad industry to make a grand virage (or, loosely translated, a big turnaround).

During the three-day event, five round-table discussions were organized, generally featuring eight to 10 speakers each. A few of the round tables-including one on creative-did not feature a single woman. In only two round tables-one on the future of training for the industry and the other on the clients' point of view of marketing-communication in Quebec-did women and men come close to having a 50:50 split. The latter round table featured high-powered marketers such as Barbara Ann Thompson of McDonald's of Canada, Diane Boivin of the SAQ (Quebec's liquor board), Marielle Seguin of the Quebec government and Isabelle Deslandes of Groupe Lavo.

In a letter to the Info Presse Web site about the absence of women at the round tables and in a pre-Grand Virage event featuring creatives, freelance copywriter Marie Gaudreau wrote: ``I've been in the business for 20 years and I have the impression that women have lost ground. It may just be a perception, but in our field, we know that perception is reality."

When a similar argument was raised at the Grand Virage's final round-table event, one of the male speakers replied that all manner of talented women are waiting in the wings to take over the top positions. They're just not there yet, but it's only a matter of time before women occupy top spots in Quebec agencies. ``Yeah, right," grumbled one woman in the audience. ``In about 300 years."