

Ad Pitch Hire Ability

By David Carr

CAMPAIGNS DESIGNED to sell employers on the idea of employing people who are disabled have traditionally used emotional appeals to the heart - strings of potential employers. They haven't worked that well.

A recent campaign put together by the Fallon McElligot Rice ad agency tossed out some of those old notions about handicapped people and instead attempted to show business people what they might be missing by not hiring people who happen to be disabled. The Fallon firm landed the volunteer campaign by offering their services to AdFed, which is the Minnesota Advertising Federation. AdFed members often contribute their talents to create public service messages, and the campaign for Projects With Industries (PWI) was a typical example of that effort.

But there is nothing typical about the campaign that the Fallon agency came up with. One of the ads features a picture of President Franklin Roosevelt that's captioned, "Hire the disabled Your parents did." A TV commercial with the same theme reminds viewers that the American people "hired" the polio-stricken FDR to run the country three separate times.

Another poster depicts Ronald Reagan in the Oval Office hard at work, even though he happens to have a hearing loss. Some of us might quibble that the Great Communicator has a few more significant handicaps, but that's another story. The ads are a straightforward examination of the problems con-



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fronted by a significant minority of our community.

Other images in the ads are equally striking. A midget is shown in a clown outfit with arms outstretched. The copy suggests that "It's time people with disabilities got some new jobs to pick from."

The campaign, tagged Hire Ability, offers a toll-free number which business managers can call to find qualified disabled people to fill open jobs. Jarl Olsen, who did the creative work on the campaign along with art director John Morrison, thought it was time to look at the problem of employing disabled people a little differently.

"It's always been, 'Hire these people and you'll get a warm, fuzzy feeling.* We wanted to

ram this down their throats and tell them what they might be missing. Hiring these people is not an act of charity. They aren't any more or less productive than anyone else."

Getting employers to consider disabled people when hiring is still tight is a difficult task. The attention given the bottom line often prevents employers from taking a serious look at hiring disabled workers. The Fallon television and print campaign, which may be used nationally, is designed to wake people up.

"We're really telling them something that they already know," says Olsen, "but that they don't yet believe in their hearts."

Some have suggested that a few of the ads lacked the requisite sensitivity toward the plight of disabled people. A woman in a wheel-

chair sits above a caption that says "Hire her She's got great arms." Another shows it Charles and asks "What if you're disabled and you don't sing or play the piano?" Olsen was asked if he thought the ads were insensitive

"On the contrary, many disabled people have a sense of humor about their problem and don't want people to pretend that they're perfect. Disabled people are a lot less frail and self-conscious than people think they are."

Olsen said he "pimped on the chance" I work on the campaign after the Fallon agency accepted the project.

"These people are offering a viable service It's essentially a free employment service that businesses can use to find qualified people can fill their job needs. They spend thousands * dollars a year looking for the right people, and here is this vast, untapped resource."

Olsen predicated the campaign on the belief that businesses could not afford to hire people on the basis of sympathy.

"It goes without saying that they aren't going to just give anyone a job There's just so much you can do with emotional appeals. You have to make them feel that they can't get person that would be good for the job."

During the time that Olsen worked on the assignment, he had shoulder surgery; which forced him to work with his arm taped to his side It gave him some empathy for the task a hand, but didn't prevent him from throwing couple phone books on a chair so that he could type with the hand which was taped a waist-high level.

"Jarl was able to get the work done because he had the abilities," observed account exec Bill Donnelly. "He could have been a productive copywriter even if his shoulder wouldn't have gotten better."

Fallon's creative execution of what might have been a routine bit of public service Mori is hardly out of line with the history of the two-year-old company. In the lexicon of the ad agencies, Fallon is "hot." Their campaign for Gold n Plump (who could forget the fighting chickens?), Knox Lumber and others have

garnered national attention and some national accounts to boot.

Jarl Olsen is used to looking at old problems in new ways. He created the grinning orb that was Wheelock Whitney, "a governor who could have managed," and the memorable 7 South 8th Hair campaign which included a picture of Albert Einstein captioned, "A bad haircut can make anyone look dumb." Upcoming unruly hair spots will include Medusa, who admits that "a bad haircut is a real can of worms." Another features a guest appearance by the old San Clemente trickster himself, which is captioned, "You can't cover up a bad haircut." Olsen, who wore a weird haircut for the interview, is one of the more productive copywriters at Fallon, having worked on a number of award-winning campaigns.

The "Hire Ability" ads will run in any medium which offers space. Given the quality of the ads, they should stand out from the glut

of public service ads which every television station and newspaper receives daily. Olsen said that was part of the motivation for making the ads so distinctive, even though the budget for both the television and print ads was a relatively small \$9,000.

Jarl also suggested that "we wouldn't be being honest if we didn't admit that we were looking for some visibility with this campaign." Not that the agency is starved for recognition Fallon McElligot Rice is the moat talked about and written about agency in the Cities, and their people are constantly heading off to different parts of the country to accept awards. They succeed by consistently surprising, and the recent "Hire Ability" campaign is no exception.