

Advertising that sells in Russia!

IF YOU, OR YOUR CLIENTS, ARE COMING TO RUSSIA to establish a presence, take part in an exhibition, make a presentation or just on a recce visit, you will be helped enormously by advertising & marketing adapted to this tricky market.

We, **Mekka Advertising**, can help you. Our agency is a fusion of Western advertising, PR & marketing expertise with local knowledge. We bridge the gap between Western and Russian markets. **Depend on it!**

Mekka, a pioneer in Russian advertising

We are a Russian *à la carte* agency set up by a man **with 30 years of experience** in advertising, PR & marketing. We are **unique in Moscow's advertising scene**. (See overleaf.)

Our philosophy

We hate dogmas, except for one – **analysis**. Our style is thorough marketing analysis of each segment, each company, each product. It enables us to produce for our clients **advertising that sells**. Well, with a wee bit of talent, of course!

Our approach is **cross-cultural**. We worked for the U.S. market, but we excell at **adapting advertising** to the



unique half-European—half-Asiatic culture of Russia. **Winston Churchill** described it as a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.

And “enigmatic” results is exactly what Westerners get when they **simply translate their marketing and advertising to Russia**. Many waste money, time, and effort.

For Russia
everything has to be
painstakingly reworked!

Our experience

We have **produced hundreds** of ads, brochures & fliers, profiles, press-releases, editorials, dealer & tender packages, exhibition materials, in Russian and English. (Some are attached.)

Among **our clients** have been: Xerox, Canon, Minolta,

Mirosoft, DEC, Motorola, Bull/Zenith, Barron America, NATO; on the consumer side – Mars, Interflora, Diplom-IS, Marcadet Mobilier.

And we're damn good at **business-to-business** and **consumer** advertising alike. Our forte is **ads and packages for wholesalers & dealers**, a class by itself.

Web-sites in Russian
Russian-language Web-business is quite tricky. We have an **excellent team** of copywriters, technicians, and Web-masters at your service.

We seek cooperation
with Western
agencies
advertisers
Web-houses
advertising media

A glimpse of advertising in Russia

By Alexander REPIEV

Russian advertising is right in the middle of its growing pains. At the moment it is dominated by designers who are more concerned with "self-expression," contests, and pageantry. Copywriting is a thing almost unheard of in Russia.

Overall, the quality of Russian advertising, including adaptations of Western materials, is bad.

But more and more Russian advertisers begin to be dissatisfied with their advertising dollars generating no sales. Agencies have already begun losing business. To survive, Russian advertising industry has to learn to produce professional selling advertising.

I am sure, it will!

Some history

In 1914 the growth rate of Russian economy was higher than that of the United States. Russian industrialists and merchants were a good match to their foreign counterparts. And Russian advertising was fairly advanced. Browsing through the yellowed pages of old Russian newspapers and magazines one comes across fantastic specimens, like the advertisement of the

rowan vodka (1913) in the picture below. Russian business journals of the period carried good editorials on various aspects of advertising.

After the Bolshevik revolution there was a short-lived renaissance of market economy in the 1920s, remembered by advertising historians for Vladimir Mayakovsky's poster doggerels in his rugged style unreadable by barely literate post-revolutionary public.

Some advertising lingered on for a while, then it vanished from Russian life for decades to be regarded as one of the "villainies" of the capitalist system. Even now the Russian readership, it seems, is still a bit suspicious of ads, viewing them as weeds.

The 1970s & 1980s

The only advertising agency of note in those days was Vneshtorgreklama (a Russian abbreviation for *foreign trade advertising*), a fancy and unwieldy institution under the Ministry of Foreign Trade that produced ads in foreign languages for the constellation of foreign-trade organizations.

In 1966, when I began freelancing there as English-language copywriter, there was no literature on advertising, no courses, no contacts with Western advertising industries, no nothing. Those were the days of the Iron Curtain.

Perestroika

Overnight Russia found itself in a new system, of which it had had absolutely no idea. The early private businesses were extremely primitive, largely involved in box-moving to feed the Russian market starving for Western goodies.

Early ad agencies were yet more primitive, mostly set up by a couple of guys with a computer, blithely unaware of things ad-

vertising. Their "advertising" was (and most of it still is) arty and unselling.

Quality

The quality of advertising in Russia is extremely bad for two reasons. For one thing, Russian advertisers don't have the slightest idea of what good advertising is about; for the other, Russian advertising agents (including those who man Moscow branches of Western chain agencies) have neither training nor experience in the trade.

Art-directoritis

Virtually all agencies view advertising as an exercise in design and graphic arts. Professionals call this disease *art-directoritis*. The disease worsened with the coming of fancy graphical computer packages, which enable a third-rate designer to get a motley background, reversed text or other tricks in a matter of seconds to make his product... absolutely unreadable. (Some examples are given on page 3.)

Copywriting

When we were establishing our agency we went out looking for copywriters. And found none! MD of one prosperous agency volunteered that the market didn't need copywriting and selling advertising in general. It is simply happy with "pretty pictures." He could not tell, however, who was supposed to supply selling advertising when the market would want it.

And so copywriting is a craft practically unheard of at Russian agencies. They just don't understand that in the final analysis it is the copy that sells. They believe that their task is simply to "beautify" with often unnecessary graphical frills some text provided by clients.



A pot-pourri of Russian computer ads

This is how they advertise high technologies in Russia. Pretty specimens, aren't they? True, they are not meant for reading... and selling for that matter. But, who cares!



What little copywriting they have to do is generally relegated to underpaid ex-journalists absolutely innocent of marketing and advertising. Even then it is mostly about thinking up some slogans.

Their "ads" are often a waste of the client's money. Some are quite nice... even when looked at upside down. (See above.)

Another problem with copywriting is that language training at Russian schools

has traditionally concentrated on spelling and punctuation with no attention paid to style and composition. Therefore, if you train a Russian copywriter you have to start from scratch.

Russian language

A warning to foreign advertisers who come to Russia: It is only at your peril that you should try and have your adverts "russified" in a matter of hours. It may appear a formidable task even linguistically.

With its host of suffixes and prefixes, and idiomatic flourishes, Russian is extremely colorful in fiction. On the other hand: (a) its words are generally longer than, say, in English; (b) its word-forming power is fairly low; (c) many words, especially in high technologies, can only be translated into Russian using two lines or so. This all makes Russian difficult for advertising, especially "translated."

Slogans

Some international companies come to Russia with slogans untranslatable into Russian. Examples are galore.

Agencies

There are hundreds or even thousands of firms in Russia that call themselves advertising agencies. Most of these shops are in effect design bureaus or media independents. The former concentrate on logos, business cards, stationery, and other advertising marginalia. The latter assail companies promising to place anything anywhere. No wonder that the word "advertising" has become allergenic in Russia.

Western agencies

Some Western agencies have established shops in Russia. Most offices of these international grandees have **"all the signs of famous agencies which are moribund"** (D. Ogilvy), perfect "ministries of advertising" housed in posh offices.

They don't have to bother about recruiting advertisers in Russia: their worldwide clients who open operations in Russia simply fall into their laps.

They dutifully produce routine and expensive adaptations of opuses created in Alabama, Bavaria, Yorkshire or elsewhere - it is supposed that advertising "gurus" there know better how to sell to a Russian housewife or a Russian shopkeeper.

Most Western agencies are busy simply dubbing Western commercials. With funny results sometimes.

Some Western ad offices in Moscow are run by expats. Most of those creatures seem to be exiled by their managements to a far-off Moscow outpost. Admittedly, not all of them are idiots, but virtually all of them have no idea of the Russian markets, language, psychology, buying habits, and business practices.

Those outfits put you in mind of infamous Soviet-style bureaucracy. Inefficient, expensive, and... "moribund."

Financial schemes

Russian advertising industry has "invented" a funny system of billings, with space buyers passing on the discounts to their customers and one another, sometimes with a markup of 2-3%. Most payments are done in cash.

Those who dub and run Western commercials may boast phony turnovers of millions of dollars.

Advertising associations

There are several still-born bodies called associations that are said to be concerned with advertising. But don't ask them for informational, educational and other services one commonly expects from associations. Even don't ask them for brochures. They have none.

Often they represent just their chairmen and a dozen of their pals. With nobody minding.

People

Since its renaissance several years ago, Russian advertising seems to have been attracting a wild assortment of designers concerned with self-expression in graphic arts (at the customer's expense); printers who think that producing ads is just an easy and lucrative addition to their pre-print operations; and psychologists who are busy littering articles on advertising (gosh, how they like writing them!) with their gobble-dygook. Unfortunately, it attracts all too few marketeers and sales experts.

I often show to members of the Russian advertising community the AAAA's brochure *U.S. Advertising Agencies*, which talks about marketing, analysis, selling points, testing, etc. Oh God! How they are amazed! The staple of their talk is "originality," "visual effects," and so on.

Trends

In the early days of new Russian capitalism, the days of unsaturated markets and huge markups, operators were not concerned with the quality of their ads.

Now that Russian markets show signs of being saturated, business begins to require more sophisticated methods, and more sophisticated advertising. Russian advertisers seem to have noticed at last that most of their advertising dollars generate no business. Even some agents begin to talk about "more scientific approach to advertising."

And it is only a matter of time when Russian advertising industry will meet the higher demands of the market. Russia is bound to have its Ogilvies and Rubicams. After all, the intellectual potential of the nation is very high.



When you come to Russia, that uncharted land, come to us.

We won't object to Mekka Advertising becoming a mecca for international clients.