Steps for Developing an Advertising Career

Introduction
Ross Career Services (RCS) created the Career Path series to assist students with the career search process. Each Career Path handout examines a common business functional area in which Stephen M. Ross School of Business graduates pursue jobs each year. The first four steps of RCS’s recommended career search process are detailed for each specific business field.

Advertising Overview
An advertising agency is a service company that earns its income from planning, creating, producing and placing advertisements for its clients. Generally, the purpose of advertising is to create an image for a product or service and communicate this message to targeted consumers. Audiences are exposed to advertising messages via traditional broadcast (television and radio), print (magazines, newspapers and outdoor boards) and electronic media. Newer forms of media such as in-store, interactive, online and cinema are continually emerging and have gained popularity and presence over the last decade.

While advertising agencies are often associated with creative/artistic staff, they also require business professionals, most often in the Account Management and Media departments. Most agencies recruit for is the Account Executive position from business schools. The Account Executive is the primary client contact responsible for developing and executing a client's advertising strategy. The Account Executive is often called upon to leverage the resources of an agency by working cross-functionally with the marketing research, creative and media departments. Some agencies may also recruit for positions in the Media department. These positions might involve creating a media plan, negotiating with media representatives, and measuring the costs and benefits of various media alternatives.

The Advertising Career Search

Step #1: Conduct a Self-Assessment
Like other careers in marketing-related fields, there are some common skills and interests advertising professionals should possess. Based upon the advertising profile outlined in the BBA CareerLeader or MBA CareerLeader program, individuals interested in advertising are managers who enjoy creative thinking, but enjoy the business side
of the advertising process as well. They enjoy working with others in cross-functional teams, and influencing team members in the process. There is an interest in managing a process from start to finish.

**Characteristics/Skills Required for Advertising Careers:**

- **Leadership/Management:** To manage client relationships and lead and motivate people from different departments.
- **Communication:** To support or defend a position or idea in a clear, concise, and persuasive manner. To clearly articulate the message or idea to the client.
- **Analytical and Strategic-thinking:** To sort through and identify critical data, to understand and correctly interpret it, and to apply it effectively to drive business growth.
- **Creativity/Innovation:** To approach a problem from a different angle, to find a better way of doing things, and to generate unique ideas.
- **Additional Skills:** Interpersonal, Enthusiasm, Persuasive, Team Player, Project Management, Drive and Determination.

In addition, at least one advertising agency (Leo Burnett) identified the ability to “have fun” as a key attribute they look for when recruiting.

Like other marketers, Advertising professionals can expect a diverse, dynamic work experience, with new challenges emerging each day. The work is fast-paced, offers intellectual challenge, and provides a good opportunity to meet and network with numerous business professionals across different industries. The advertising environment is often described as “fun”, and there can be many perks such as tickets to special events, on-location photo-shoots, etc. Advertising can also be stressful, particularly when working on demanding accounts, tight deadlines, or when sales results are not positively impacted by the advertising effort. Any client-service job requires a strong customer orientation, and travel can be frequent depending on client location.

**Step #2: Investigate Possible Career Opportunities**

The two most common business career paths in advertising are discussed below:

**Account Management:** The account management department in an advertising agency is typically staffed by Account Executives who serve as liaisons between client organizations and the other departments within the agency. Account Executives must function as business managers, marketing consultants and salespeople. They communicate the needs and objectives of a client to the agency staff,
collaborate with other agency teams on a campaign and then present the results of agency efforts to the client for approval.

An Account Executive maintains day-to-day contact with the Brand Manager at the client organization. The Brand Manager provides information regarding the product to be advertised, business and advertising objectives, and the proposed budget. The brand and agency team then work together to develop an overall strategy for the advertising campaign. The Account Executive conveys the resulting information and strategy to the various agency departments (creative, research, media and production). At this time, all departments within the agency function as a team to develop and execute a basic advertising strategy and campaign to be presented to the client for approval.

Typically, entry into account management is at the Assistant Account Executive level. This position generally requires a Bachelor’s Degree in Business or Liberal Arts; however, BAs are being hired for these positions in growing numbers. The primary advantage of a graduate business degree is that candidates have previous work experience and possess a managerial perspective which facilitates communication with client executives. A solid understanding of marketing and strategy concepts are particularly important, as the Account Executive is increasingly being viewed as an extension of the client’s brand group. As such, the Account Executive needs to be aware of the client’s sales volume goals in addition to developing an innovative and distinctive image for the brand.

Examples of job titles in account management include: Account Coordinator, Assistant Account Executive, Account Executive, Account Supervisor, and Management Supervisor. Progression to more senior levels depends on experience, performance and client reviews. Moving up in an advertising agency means responsibility for more client accounts, increased interaction with senior members of the client marketing team and increased focus on contracting new clients and account retention.

**Media:** The primary responsibility of the Media department is to determine which media channels are most effective in reaching the target audience and how often they should be used to support a particular campaign. Overall, Media makes recommendations on how to spend the client's budget most effectively, as the greatest creative message is useless if the right audience is not sufficiently exposed to it. Experience in media provides an excellent business training ground in the marketing/advertising field.
Media develops, executes and oversees media plans for the client. One main responsibility of a position in Media is the analysis of quantitative data to determine target audience behavior in order to make appropriate media, time and space recommendations.

A typical media plan includes objectives (target audience, geography, timing, budget/cost, reach & frequency), strategy (media selection) and a recommended implementation plan (when the ads are going to be run.) Media staff interacts with sales representatives from television, radio, and magazines, as well as the Account Executive, as part of the planning process.

The typical entry-level position in the media department is as an Assistant Media Planner. Agencies generally hire candidates with a Bachelor’s degree in Business or Liberal Arts. Examples of job titles within the media department include: Media Coordinator, Assistant Media Planner, Media Planner, Media Supervisor, and Assistant or Associate Media Director.

Most assistants are promoted to the Planner position after a year and then become fully responsible for developing media plans. Entry-level media staff often work very long hours under tight deadlines for relatively low pay. However, media perks (events such as free lunches, parties, movies, and sporting events) are often an added benefit.

**Step #3: Research and Conclude on Immediate Post-Graduate Employers**

Advertising agencies may receive hundreds of resumes on a daily basis and often do not actively recruit MBA candidates on campus. Those students interested in pursuing a career in advertising should be proactive in the job search by learning as much as possible about individual advertising agencies (style, expertise, etc.), their clients and their ad campaigns. Networking and developing personal contacts is often the most effective way to let an agency know you are interested in a position. Before contacting agency personnel, candidates must demonstrate knowledge of an agency's businesses as well as select a specific department (i.e., Account Management or Media) to pursue a job.

Additionally, one of the field’s top experts, Professor Rajeev Batra, is a member of the Ross School of Business faculty. He has published numerous articles and consulted for many well-known companies. If you are interested in discussing advertising or any related topics, Professor Batra should be your first point of contact.

BBAs interested in a career in advertising should also utilize the main University Career Center’s job resources, as most recruiters at the business school focus on pure marketing. In general, advertising jobs
offer a lower starting salary than marketing jobs and beginning responsibilities may not be as extensive due to the structure of the agency (positions are more siloed than in marketing.)

The following is a listing of top U.S. agencies. Please be advised that agency mergers/acquisitions are common, and changes to this list are likely.

**Top U.S. Advertising Agencies**

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<th>BBDO Worldwide</th>
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<td>JWT Company</td>
<td>Wpp Group USA Inc</td>
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<td>Leo Burnett Worldwide, Inc</td>
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**Step #4: Develop a Career Search Strategy**

RCS sponsors a number of workshops that will help you market yourself to target firms. Workshops include resume and cover letter preparation, interview skills and the off-campus job search. Student and staff Career Consultants are available for discuss all aspects of the career search and assist with the skills development process. Career consultants with marketing experience may also be available to provide specific functional perspective. Some advertising specific interview guidelines are listed at the end of this section.

The Marketing Club sponsors different events (e.g. the Marketing Symposium, seminars hosted by advertising executives) engaging marketing and advertising professionals; these events provide the opportunity to learn more about marketing careers from someone working in the field. While most events
focus on product management, this exposure will help in discussing marketing principles with perspective recruiters. You should also discuss internships with second year students and pursue contacts with alumni, to learn more about what is happening inside agency organizations. Kresge Library has a number of sources, including online databases, to aid in the search. The resource bibliography at the end of this document lists important research sources.

Securing an advertising position requires a focused strategy on the part of the candidate as most agencies do not come to campus to interview. You not only need to ensure that your skills and interests match those required by target companies, but you must communicate these strengths in an effective and proactive way. Utilizing the resources listed in this guide and provided by RCS will help you accomplish your goal.

**Commonly Asked Interview Questions**

*Career Goals*

Why do you want a career in advertising?  
What other industries/careers have you researched?  
When did you decide a career in advertising was right for you?

*Role of an Account Executive (or Account Manager/Supervisor)*  
How would you describe the responsibilities of an A.E.?  
If a client disagreed on a marketing strategy for a brand, how would you resolve this problem?  
How would you "sell" an idea to your client?  
What do you think would be the most challenging role of an AE?

*Awareness of Advertising*

Name an ad campaign that you think is particularly successful (or unsuccessful)? Why?  
* Tip:  
Name one that the ad agency you are interviewing for created.  
What do you think is the most effective way to reach consumers?  
How does marketing research or media play a role in a successful ad campaign?  
How do agencies contribute to the success of a brand?  
What do you think the current X ad campaign is trying to communicate?

*Specific Agency*

Why do you want to work at this agency?  
How would you describe this agency? What is our reputation in the industry?  
What clients would you be interested in working for?  
Do you think our client campaigns are effective? Distinctive?
Skills

How have you performed academically?
Which skills are most important for advertising or for an Account Executive?
Describe your strengths and developmental needs.
Describe a situation where you have been part of a successful team. What role did you play?
Have you taken the advertising class?
Describe a situation where you have been a motivator, a negotiator, a facilitator.
What are the 3 most important skills to have for a career in advertising and which one are you weakest in?

Advertising Specific Questions

What type of campaign would you develop for product X?
Look at this print ad and describe the target audience, if it is effective or ineffective and why.
Name a product you are brand loyal to and describe how you would change its ad campaign.
Name a product that is advertised well/poorly.

Bibliography of Information Resources

• “Careers in Advertising” Career packet in Kresge Library
• Periodicals including BrandWeek, AdWeek and Advertising Age
• CareerLeader™ profiles
• Wet Feet Press
• Standard Directory of Advertisers
• Worldwide Red Book

MBA Classes of Interest

Most MBA advertising classes are offered ad hoc so be sure to check for different offerings each term.
Historically there has been a seminar dealing with campaign creation or the overall advertising process (account management, creative design and media planning.)