

one. a magazine



# INNOVATIVE ADVERTISING

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# Rethinking Advertising

77 years of age and still riding the wave.

By Todd Grant/Cole & Weber United

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To explain our agency's philosophy, I'll start with a brief history: Cole & Weber opened in Portland, OR in 1931, during the Depression and has somehow made it to the 21st century. Back in the 1950's, my dad used to date George Weber's daughter, but that's not really relevant to this story—I just think it's kind of funny.

The agency expanded to other locations and continued to thrive by being flexible and innovative. Cole & Weber found a way to always work with the economic drivers of the day. Early on we started out with a lot of agriculture accounts like The Washington Apple Commission. That was followed by the forestry and mining era with clients like Weyerhaeuser, Georgia Pacific, and Esco. Aerospace became the driver of the region in the '70s and Boeing became the agency's top client for over 25 years. Early '90s pop culture hit with Doc Martens, Aspen Mountain and Pyramid Brewery. Then technology kind of took off and

the place was able to develop some skills in on-line marketing and site development.

Ironically, the best thing that happened to the shop was losing Boeing in 1999. The place had to embrace the digital and innovative opportunities that most traditional shops were only really paying lip service to. And it forced the agency to find a radically different way to staff itself with nimble, multi-dimensional individuals who were smart, open-minded and unafraid of rain: weird frontier men and women who enjoyed coffee, liked computers and made puppets in their spare time.

We hired artists who didn't start with an "ad" and adapt it to other mediums, entrepreneurs who had started their own companies, producers who wanted to create original and engaging experiences and other talented people who had never read *Ogilvy on Advertising*. And these hires were effective. Beginning in 2004, we

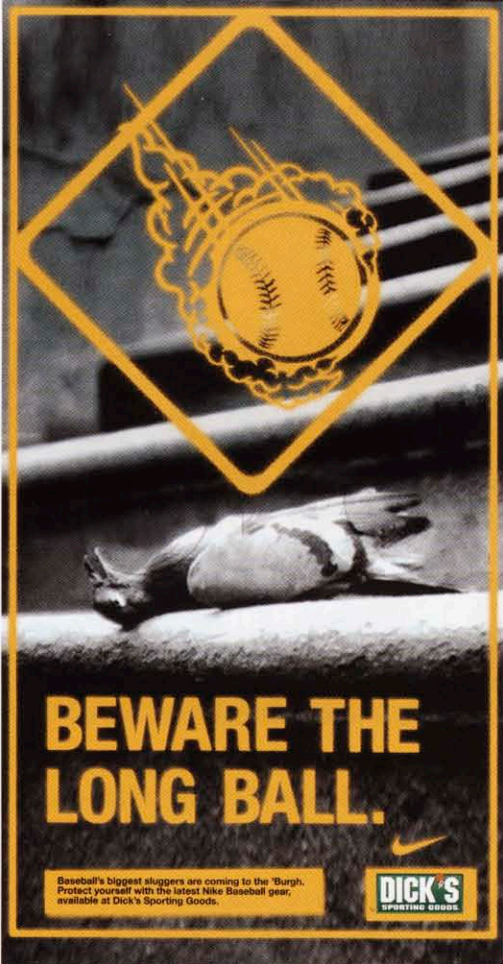
were among the first to start winning new categories of recognition such as Content & Contact, Guerilla Marketer of the Year and Exceptional Innovation in Media & Marketing.

And out of all this recent history has grown some observations that help to define the things we do and why we do them.

## **It's hard to have a closed mind in an open environment.**

Yes, I know that sounds like an excerpt from a new-age seminar in a redwood forest but it's arguably true. When I first arrived here I marveled at the breezy, low profile Herman Miller-looking cubicles and chairs, the green building honors, the recycled materials and concrete floor panels. I excitedly asked where my new office was and Sunshine Stevens (an absolutely perfect name for someone raised in a hippie commune outside of Reno) said, "This is it," as she pointed to a cube near the elevator.

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And I said, "No, really," and she said, "This is it," and I said, "No, really," and she said, "This is it," and it finally settled on me that I would be sitting in a cube near the elevator.

But oddly enough (and without sarcasm), the open space has turned out to be ideal for the clients we have, the projects we excel at and the way in which we work: I call it "creative slime mold." Which is a nice way of saying everyone here has to be an open-minded, trusting and transparent individual because we are creating, sharing and building ideas in each other's midst, versus behind closed doors and frosted glass.

**Just because something is online doesn't make it integrated.**

In fact, sometimes an integrated program is the weird stuff we end up doing out of necessity, timing and budget. "Beware the Long Ball" is one example created for Nike at the All-Star Game in 2006.

The client had exactly \$171,000 so we created a public service educational program, alerting the Pittsburgh populace that they were in danger of being struck by a barrage of baseballs that would inevitably pound the area during the Home Run Derby and All-Star Game.

We began with emergency broadcast radio, informative newspaper advertisements, public placards and cautionary direct mail. Citizens were instructed where to seek shelter, what to do in the event of a barrage and where to go to get a really nice T-shirt. A three-day street crew led by a doomsday preacher with beard and bullhorn pointed to the sky and reminded the downtown citizenry through informative hand-outs that the long ball was coming, so beware! The end is nigh! Thankfully, no one was hurt

and all the T-shirts were gone by early Sunday afternoon.

**Maybe a really effective advertising campaign isn't really an advertising campaign.**

For those who can remember, Carlo Rossi is a historic, value wine best known for its huge, iconic jug. And folks here began to wonder what people did with all those leftover jugs. The creative team determined that if you had enough empty jugs you could make furniture out of them with neon tubing placed in and around the jugs for illumination. You could then put all six furniture pieces on the road and take them to interesting events like Maker Faire, The Stitch Fashion Festival, The Boston Tattoo convention and Capitol Hill Block Party in Seattle. I know—duh, what else would you do?

But the really interesting thing was just how many people came to the Rossi Lounges, sipped a little wine, admired the 33 jug-count Chardonnay Chandelier above their heads and made something cool out of an empty jug to take home as a souvenir. Then they blogged about their experiences and it was conservatively estimated that \$12 million in media impressions were gained with a mere \$400,000 investment. It also didn't hurt that *Make Magazine*, *ReadyMade*, *DIY Network*, *The Seattle Times*, *USA Today* and many others took note in the press to help raise sales to their highest level in 23 years.

**Photography is overrated.**

For some reason, a huge supply of graphic novel, illustration and animation junkies reside here in the Northwest. Whether it's Gilbert Shelton, Chris Ware, Matt Groening or Miyazaki, our influences tend to range beyond the stylistic mirror of photography and we often dive into the loose freedom of drawn interpretation.

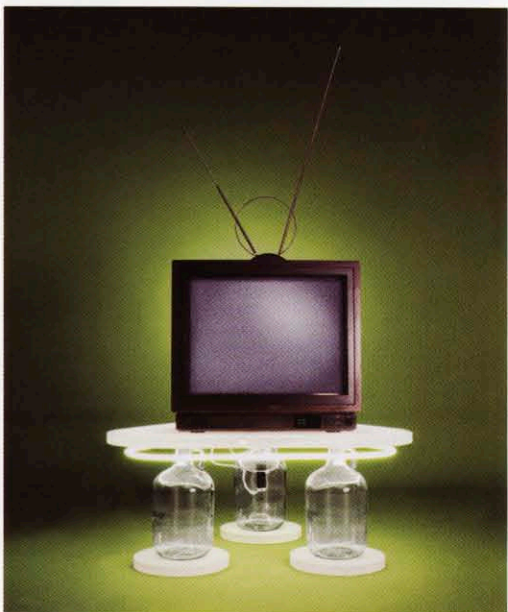


- 1. Client: Colt 45  
Agency: Cole & Weber  
United/Seattle
- 2. Client: Dick's Sporting Goods/Nike  
Agency: Cole & Weber  
United/Seattle

- 3. Client: Carlo Rossi  
Agency: Cole & Weber  
United/Seattle
- 4. Client: Carol Rossi  
Agency: Cole & Weber  
United/Seattle



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In regards to Colt 45, the brown bottle was faced with a rather awkward historical image and some well earned inner-city baggage. The folks at Pabst Breweries challenged us to reinvent the brand and drag it out of the gutter and back into a young, multi-cultural living room.

Paradigm shifts aside, the one thing you can say about an evening with Colt 45 is that it's still bound to be fast, cheap and a little bit out of control. And many of us have had a story or two to tell the following day.

Thus was born: *The Tales of Colt 45*, a graphic novel of fully integrated and illustrated adventures both created & interpreted by Jim Mahfood, a cult graphic novelist with 40 oz. Comics and other exemplary titles to his credit.

**Aren't consumers really just people? And if they're really just people, why do we call them consumers?**

The notable architecture and urban planning critic/maven James Howard Kunstler said a few year's ago that thinking of people as consumers was insulting, shallow and stupid—that maybe we should stop manufacturing such crappy spaces, places and plazas and remember that we are building for our fellow citizens and not some one-dimensional demographic target. I'm paraphrasing loosely, but the meaning is pretty clear in terms of remembering that free will is still the democracy of economics. It means designing projects and communications that encourage people to be happy, thoughtful and otherwise engaged as participants instead of objects or repositories.

Sometimes that actually means failure as this shop has occasionally erred on the gentler side of intrusion and heavy-handedness. That kind of experience is something we can live with and learn from.

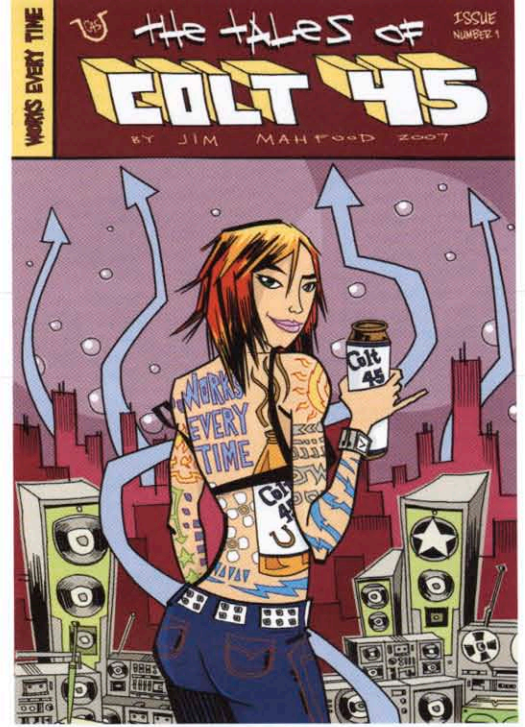
**We know you only wanted some point-of-sale to put up in your stadium stores but we just can't help ourselves.**

It's like having a bird and setting it free and then realizing the client can easily kill the thing you've just raised or help it grow instead.

The United Countries of Baseball started as a simple in-store poster campaign with a deeper truth behind it: that sports fans are really citizens of their respective team countries, which don't necessarily fall along the pre-ordained borders of American statehood. For example, Curt Schilling's bloody sock in the 2004 play-offs is remembered as much in Bangor, Maine as it is in downtown Boston. And Kurt Gibson's homerun shot back in '89 was felt as deeply in Yuma, Arizona as it was on Sunset Boulevard.

Both Nike and Major League Baseball allowed this idea to grow by initially making it the 2007 All-Star Game focus with citizenship drives at Niketown in San Francisco. Newly minted citizens could vote to help determine next year's borders and also welcome Heroes from Faraway Lands like Derek Jeter, the Yankees Country Ambassador to the Postseason.

And they agreed that it would be nice to create an online voting application during the postseason, where 32,000 visitors to mlb.com voted their affiliation towards creating new borders



for this year's season, and then purchase a newly designed United Countries of Baseball garment, if they were so inclined.

**And finally, enjoy the ride.**

Over the years, I remember hearing the old adage: work hard, then play hard.

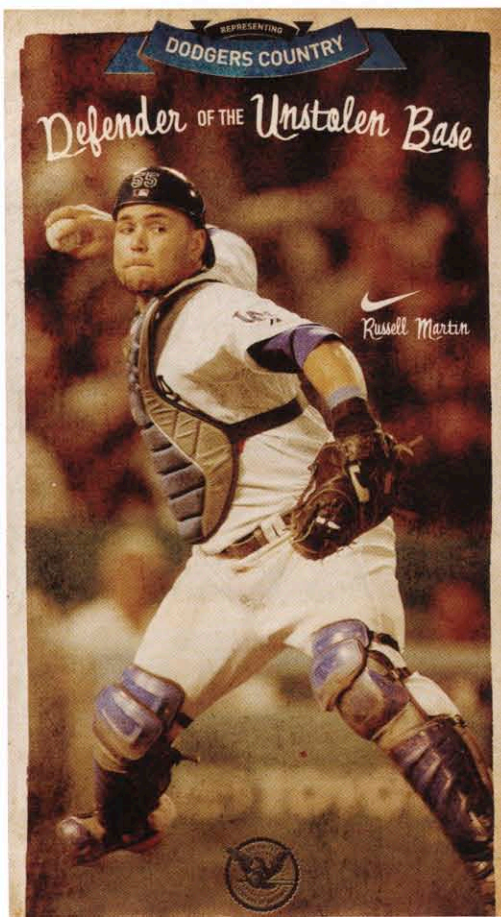
These days, I think it's more about finding joy and wonder in the process of work itself and relaxing when it's time to play.

We take these thoughts to heart and try to remember all the lessons and other nuggets that have allowed us to make it this far.

They're probably the same things that will take us forward as well.

77 years if we're lucky. 🍷

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