

Madison Avenue Manslaughter: An Inside View of Fee-Cutting Clients, Profit-Hungry Owners and Declining Ad Agencies

Michael Farmer

LID Publishing (Sep 15, 2015)

Hardcover \$29.99 (199pp)

978-0-9860793-0-6

This impassioned indictment of the advertising-agency business offers a ten-point plan for reformation.

Strategy consultant Michael Farmer thinks advertising agencies are broken, and he believes he knows how to fix them. That is the subject of his insightful work.

Farmer divides *Madison Avenue Manslaughter* into two parts: "History" and "Consequences." The "History" section presents an accurate overview of the evolution of ad agencies from commission-based independent businesses to organizations largely owned by holding companies more concerned with the bottom line than with executing a unique creative product.

In section 2, Farmer eloquently addresses "Consequences," including diversification beyond ads, heavy-handed procurement policies on the part of clients, the advent of strategic planners in an effort to compete with management consultants, and a vastly different media environment. Here, he uses an example—the mythical headquarters office of an ad agency—to demonstrate the financial dilemma faced by most agencies. In considerable detail, the author shows how the combination of a workload increase and income decline over eight years must lead to ever-increasing creative productivity. "Unless this trend is halted by agency management," writes Farmer, "then future increases in creative productivity will be required at an accelerated rate. This is sure to be accompanied by a decline in creative quality."

While Farmer delineates the consequences, he also provides a tested way to turn the situation around—"the Scopemetric Unit," (SMU), created by the author's consulting firm. The SMU is a standardized unit of work that is used to accurately and uniformly measure what an agency delivers in a Statement of Work. Perhaps more important than the SMU itself, Farmer suggests ten specific steps an agency CEO should take to begin a much-needed business transformation. Farmer believes there is a "real need ... for focused CEO leadership" if agencies are to survive in the future.

Clearly intended for ad-agency senior executives, *Madison Avenue Manslaughter* is an informed analysis of a business segment that, despite its storied history, is in danger of "weakening and decay," if not extinction. Michael Farmer's bold and energetic book represents a wake-up call for all those who read it.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (Winter 2016)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.