

Deadlines, a failed journalist, Rialto TVCs, regional newspapers and more

I started selling newspapers four years ago when I was offered the GM role at the NAB after a blissful period of sloth and indolence spending the kids inheritance. It was my first job in the media after aborted intentions to become a journalist years earlier. Long story short, I discovered I couldn't write to deadline, so became an agency suit instead – staying well away from any copywriting stuff. Why prolong the agony I reasoned; become a 'bag carrier' and hope the creative teams would dazzlingly polish my turd briefs.

In those agency days when I had to prepare a media brief that was intended to include newspapers; a national press campaign meant 'the 4 Mets' – NZ Herald, DomPost, The Press and ODT. Done and dusted –target audience reached, head to the beer fridge. Occasionally a media planner would patiently point out there were other papers to consider but often the 4 Mets won the day and we ignored a million or so people who lived outside those cities.

Move onto 2006 and I became a newspaper pitcher. Crikey – been a few changes around here! (*.... that 'few changes' line reminds me of a terrific Mitsubishi Lancer TVC Roy Meares did in his Rialto days featuring a check point Charlie scene where the spy who's been swapped for a Soviet one gets into a new Lancer and admires it Classic Ian Gibbons/Nigel Hutchinson Mopix ad, but I digress*) Gone are the old newspaper publishing groups – the INLs, Wilson & Hortons etc, now it's the Aussies (mostly) in charge – APN and Fairfax. But, despite ownership changes all the familiar papers are still going strong. Funny that – someone said newspapers were dying – seems they forgot to tell the publishers in this part of the world.

Which brings me in a very round about way to a series of breakfast and lunch presentations the NAB has been doing to agency media buyers in Auckland and Wellington. We've been hugely impressed with the turnout – surely not solely due to the fancy food we bring along? We've called the presentations "*Outside the Mets*".

The sessions review the 18 regional daily newspapers that reach the 1.135 million of us who don't live in the four main centres. We talk about 'consumption' – not the burps from the nice food we're serving – but the relative strength of regional newspaper readers across the week vs. other media. Impressive PowerPoint slides show the 'Purchasing Funnel' and how regional daily newspapers lead other media as the main source of buying decisions as a result of exposure to advertising. We close with our regional newspaper packages called RegionalMax which provide discounts when you buy three or more regional dailies. Yep, good old newspaper selling!

The great thing about these presentations is the fact media buyers really take the time to listen and absorb the information. And they are acting on it judging by the extra bookings we're seeing in our regional papers.

Obviously, we accept newspapers don't have the exclusive on reaching New Zealanders. But what is interesting is that when all's said and done our papers are influencing New Zealanders like never before. The latest Nielsen figures show readership growth. Our newspaper websites get more hits a second than a flurry of David Tua punches, and our journalists regularly scoop the newsbreaks ahead of other media. Now that's not a bad story at all for what some call '*old media*'

But what's even better news is I've managed to write this story to deadline! I wonder if *Vanity Fair* would be interested in me now that Dominic Dunne has passed awaybetter call Graydon right away.