

A word of advice from Mr. Fix It

After completing a BA in Economics in 1976, Joe Ayache decided to join the world of advertising. Having fallen in love with the French capital during a road trip to Paris, Ayache decided to apply to the Ecole Supérieure de Publicité. The rest, as they say, is history.



“It was a two year program, but since I had a BA (from the American University of Beirut) they accepted me to the second year, so I had a great opportunity to enrol in something I wanted to do, and for an acceptable length of time. The school had an excellent reputation in terms of faculty – who were advertising professionals – and in terms of jobs offered after graduation,” Ayache said of his college days in Paris.

Can you describe your career path since then?

I worked for five years as a brand manager (marketing) with Obegi Consumer Products in the then newly formed cosmetics department. In 1986, I joined LEAD

Advertising in Beirut, only to leave Lebanon two years later to work in Dubai, Bahrain, and Egypt with Intermarkets Advertising. In 1991, I joined Saatchi & Saatchi as managing director of the Cairo agency. In 1995, I returned to Beirut where I headed the operation there, which also covered Syria and Jordan. In 2004, I joined Impact BBDO Beirut, where I still am today.

What was your first professional experience and your most memorable ad campaign?

Back in Lebanon, I started in a small agency called MEPR Advertising, which has since closed down. I was pretty relaxed about the first meeting with the client, which was LETOFFE, a clothing shop in Beirut.

As for my most memorable campaign, I would say that you are as good as your last ad, and in our business we never look back. So this makes the question a bit difficult to answer, but I will list some landmarks:

- In 1987, the Lifepon baby shampoo because we were the first to launch full colour visuals on new billboards (PIKASSO). Also in 1987, when we were the first to launch a teaser and a reveal campaign for Marabout chocolate in Lebanon.
- My first Ariel commercial in Egypt
- In 1993, when we revamped the image of Ariel with a new campaign called “Fashion Show.”
- In 1993/94, the “BEIRUT ancient city of the future” for rebuilding the Beirut city district.

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The key to success is in one's attitude

Each medium has its own mission and audience

- In 1994, the launch of LIBANCEL the newly established GSM in Lebanon.
- In 2000, the anti-corruption campaign “KOULLOUNA MASSOUL.”
- In 2005, the Libanpost “LIPOS” campaign.

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

My son. And the fact that I always succeeded in what I set my mind on doing, namely revamping Intermarkets Advertising in Cairo, then Saatchi & Saatchi, again in Cairo, and making it one of the major players in the marketplace – so much so that I earned a reputation as Mr. Fix it!

What do you believe is the key to success in advertising?

Attitude and aptitude. Attitude because you have to be a fighter day in day out. In our business we are challenged daily by our clients and by the market place, so it takes stamina, tenacity, and a great deal of psychology to end the day unscathed. Aptitude because this business requires that you know about diapers as much as about banking products; so it takes a great deal of amassing knowledge and storing it, as much as common sense and intelligence.

In which medium do you most believe?

Each medium has its own mission and audience; hence favouring one over the other, or believing in anyone of them in absolute terms, is dangerous. Each one has a pro and a con. However, for the sake of answering your question, I have to say of course Academix because you are reading it! I do believe in TV. This is where brands are done and undone; this is where the brands express themselves best and where brand image is built. Billboards come next because it is quite a challenge to make a

message that captures the audience while travelling and being able to sell them.

What about work ethics in advertising?

Ethics should be everywhere, not only in advertising. Unfortunately, like in any other business, there are trespassers and they should not get away with it.

Can anyone get into the advertising game?

Yes, they can. Will they succeed is another question. Success comes with hard work, creating opportunities even when it seems blocked, being proactive and forward-thinking, by making mistakes but learning from them, and a tremendously positive attitude.

What are the main qualities you look for in an advertising executive?

We look for people with a great deal of openness and curiosity who are hard-working and natural born leaders. Donny Deutsch, founder of Deutsch Inc. Agency, once said: “My philosophy is to always find the smartest people you can. Hire people smarter than you.” That’s what we try to do.

Do you believe recent graduates can be a valuable addition to an organization such as yours?

Well, you have to hire young graduates at the risk of becoming an aging agency; they are a lifeline to new and fresh ideas and cultures. Unfortunately, of those graduating today with diplomas under their arms, very few possess the character to succeed and become the leaders of tomorrow, the ones who will put their mark. I will not dwell on the various social reasons but, generally speaking, qualified people are getting harder to come by. 🍀