

Behind The Camera: Women In Film/Chicago Hosts Roundtable On Producing And Directing Ads

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It should come as no surprise that advertising is changing. From the way that viewers watch (or don't watch) 30-second television commercials to an explosion of media choices, the industry is in a state of flux.

But what do all of these changes mean for directors and producers who spend their days executing and even expanding on the creative concepts of advertising professionals?

At a June 6 luncheon and roundtable discussion hosted by Women in Film/Chicago, attendees engaged in a free-flowing dialogue with local producers and agency professionals regarding opportunities for local producers and directors.



Off the bat, the featured guests agreed that the production market in Chicago has changed significantly over the last decade. Citing events like the SAG strike and 9/11, as well as trends like international competition and shrinking production budgets, producers said the number of commercial spots being shot in Chicago has declined since its heyday.

"The industry has changed and is much more of a worldwide market," said Lisa Masseur, executive producer at RADAR. "That has made it more competitive."

Freelance producer Elise Kleinman agreed, saying she had been to six or seven countries to shoot in the two-and-a-half years she's been in Chicago. "I think a lot more stuff could have been shot here," she noted.

Despite the changes, some local directors and producers have learned to thrive, even if that means taking work to places as far-flung as Russia and Argentina. Those are two of the locations cited by Dan Zigulich of Z Group Films, which has shot internationally.

"I think the global marketplace is a good thing for Chicago; it's just going to take a while," he said. Zigulich noted that he learned quickly how to take advantage of foreign locations, especially since he started his company shortly before the SAG strike put the breaks on domestic commercial production.

When it comes time to choose a director, a number of criteria come into play. Masseur said today's market demands that a director demonstrate proficiency in one particular area in order to give clients a sense of security about their investment.

"I think now it's better for a director to be more of a specialist," she said. "If you're looking for beer pours, you're going to try to find the guy whose done beer pours ten different ways."

From an agency perspective, though, DDB/Chicago executive producer Marion Lange said that it was her job to sell the client on the creative idea. She said while some clients may want the comfort of seeing something close to their spot already on a director's reel, agencies would be better served by selling clients on fresh ideas.

From a creative standpoint, FCB SVP Creative Development Director Ron Lazzeretti said successful directors and producers are those who manage to gauge which way the industry is heading. "It's changing faster than anybody can figure out what it is," he said, noting the importance of trying to stay ahead of the curve.

For directors just starting out, Zigulich recommended taking time to develop their craft. "We try to encourage our directors not to do their entire career in the first five years" he said, noting that a lot of young directors are extremely ambitious and want to take on too much all at once.

Zigulich, whose company is known for working with young directors, said people starting out in the industry tend to put a lot of their own time and money into making their early films or spec spots. He said the best creative work tends to get noticed, though. "For young directors, sweat over your work," said Zigulich. "That's what's going to get you hired."