



Effies lead the way in marketing standards



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It sometimes looks as if the marketing and advertising industries run an awards night every other evening. In a typical seven-day period it's not unusual to encounter the digital marketing awards making way for the automotive marketing excellence dinner with Programmatic Marketer of the Year on the Wednesday night and the release of "100 Marketers under 100" the following evening.

We love a gong in this industry. But the Effies and their annual awards night, which took place last Thursday in Sydney, are special. Among all the tinsel, tension and short-lived triumph of a hundred other award events, the rigour and heft of the Effies shines through.

That's apparent from the first Effie submission you ever see. Each is almost always more than 10 pages long and full of data and the kind of advanced analysis that your average marketing professor struggles to decode.

And then there is the heritage thing. The Effies have been running since 1968. It's the 50th anniversary this year. And while Australia has had the awards for just over a decade, that half century of history means an Effie win carries genuine weight on your CV for the rest of your career. Unlike typical awards nights that throw out the gold medals with abandon, its relatively rare for any category to receive a Gold Effie.

To win the Grand Effie, the best of the best, is a career-making moment, for both the agency and client involved.

Not surprisingly, given its prominence and heft, there was much to learn about the state of marketing and media in 2019 from this year's awards. Sitting on table 5 last week gave your humble columnist not only a bird's eye view of the stage but also a rare vantage point on where things sit in our industry.

Let's start with agencies. There are clearly four big agencies in Australia. And they were all in fine form at the Effies last week. There

is the grand old lady of the scene, Clemenger BBDO, who along with their smarter younger brother, CHE Proximity, straddle the top of most agency wish lists.

Clems kept a relatively low profile last week but snuck in, stole the Grand Effie for its work on Great Northern, and snuck out again, laughing all the way back to Melbourne. The Monkeys have conclusively shown that being part of Accenture has not only failed to blunt their creative edge and industry appeal, but might well have sharpened it.

Then there is DDB, which is one of the best-performing country teams in what is a rightfully feted global agency group.

Finally, there is BMF, which won most of the prizes last week and easily claimed "Effective Agency of the Year".

Ironically, of the big four BMF is probably the least salient when the big work is being handed out. They just don't come up in the same conversations as the other three, which is a shame because other than firing their internal PR team, all the evidence from the work from George Weston, Government and Aldi suggest BMF are very much as good as it gets.

Which takes us to Aldi, one of the big winners of the night with two golds and three silvers. It is clear why both Woolworths and Coles should fear the German discount giant. Its quietly effective marketing is laying long-term seeds for its eventual elevation to become the duopoly-breaking third force in Australian retail.

That coronation might be a few years away but, in a month when our domestic supermarkets embarked on a tactical battle in which the green one used its miniature plastic figurines to take on the red one's miniature plastic figurines, Aldi was about 20 years ahead of both.

Aldi is joined by a select few other big brands that aren't just large spenders in this country, but smart spenders too. Along with P&G and Unilever, you'd add Volvo, McDonald's, CUB, Officeworks and NRMA to that list. Pockets of marketing excellence that are as good as anything on display anywhere on the planet.

The more interesting question is why some of Australia's biggest advertising spenders don't even submit their campaigns for Effie consideration. By my count, 14 of the country's top 20 advertisers, who each

spend a minimum of \$40 million or more on advertising each year, did not even have work they deemed effective enough to submit for marketing's biggest prize.

Perhaps they are too busy? Or perhaps the rigour of the submission process and lack of effectiveness evident in their marketing efforts and subsequent results makes submission impossible?

I can't tell you that CUB's Grand Effie-winning work for their Great Northern beer was better than Aldi's silver-winning Christmas campaign. But I can tell you both companies have outstanding teams, effective marketing strategy and are led by world-class marketing leaders in Brian Phan and Mark Richardson respectively.

There are plenty of CMO emperors in Australia who are big on editorial coverage about themselves and their new tactical wardrobes but who actually operate in the nude. The Effies is not the kind of place you want to find yourself if you're unsure whether those new clothes really exist.

But the biggest insight comes from looking at the way this short-list of brands has become more effective than the rest of the Australian competition. Reading the titles of the submissions and the winners' case studies makes it apparent there are four names that drive most successful marketing thinking these days and you cannot be effective without knowing them and what they say about marketing.

Byron Sharp might not make things interesting but his work with the Ehrenberg Bass Institute has changed the face of modern marketing forever.

His criticisms of loyalty, differentiation and segmentation aren't just valid, they are driving large companies to significantly improved marketing outcomes.

And then there are the names Les Binet and Peter Field. The British advertising experts and their data on long and short-term effectiveness are having a demonstrable impact for the smarter marketers in Australia.

And the last of the names is Effie. It has marked the time for half a century of marketing effectiveness and last week, once again, it showed us just who does and does not have the marketing chops.