

BEING REASONABLE

BY MARC BABEJ

A Few Things to Leave in '05

YOU KNOW THAT FRESH FEELING YOU GET IN THE FIRST FEW DAYS OF A NEW YEAR?

Resolutions not yet broken, hopes not yet dashed; everything seems somehow newer and better.

Of course, you might not notice the contrast if the end of the old year didn't give you that not-so-fresh feeling. For more than 300 days, debates have gone 'round and 'round without any conclusions; the blustering seems more transparent by year's end, and mediocre products and campaigns have overstayed their welcome. To start the New Year off on the right foot, here's my list of unreasonable things I wish would just *go away*.

>> Biggest under-estimation: DVRs won't become mainstream. Remember McKinsey's prediction from the 1980s — that by the year 2000, only 900,000 Americans would have mobile phones? The actual number was upward of 70 million. As for DVRs, SMG Next's Rishad Tobbacowala predicts 30 percent penetration within two years. Even that may prove to be a conservative estimate. Now that cable and satellite distributors have caught on to the revenue potential of own-branded DVRs, penetration will accelerate. In a few years, DVRs will no longer be thought of as a device but as a *feature*, like interactive programming guides or VOD.

>> Most desperate hope: Ad skipping will not become the norm. As if. All things being equal, people who can skip will skip, as long as every hour of programming contains 15 minutes of ads. Only a drastic reduction in the number of spots within programs and pods might counter this development. And that is bound to happen: As TV targeting becomes more sophisticated, advertisers will be less tolerant of waste, and will instead pay relatively more for fewer, better-targeted impressions.

>> Most wrong-headed generalization: The 30-second spot is dead. There's a world of difference between "declining" and "dead." Newspaper, magazine, and outdoor were the predominant media before the advent of radio. Last I checked, they are all still around. The 30-second linear spot has a bright future in pro-

gramming that is immune to time-shifting, such as live sports and news.

>> Sloppiest thinking: Branded entertainment can replace the 30-second spot. Fat chance. An average hour of TV programming now contains upward of 15 minutes of advertising. That's more than 30 of those 30-second spots. A programming hour with 30 meaningful product placements would be unwatchable. In an evolving media marketplace, branded entertainment is one tool in a marketer's arsenal, but by no means the silver bullet.

>> Most stale campaign: Citibank's "Live Richly" effort. We got it years ago: You believe there are more important things than money. Sweet, but you still get paid for that "less important" money part. Meanwhile, innovative players such as Washington Mutual and Commerce Bank are eating into your share of mind and market with relevant messages...about m-o-n-e-y.

>> Most wrongheaded rebranding effort: Court TV's "Seriously Entertaining." When this gem of a campaign launched, Court's ad agency, Trollbäck + Company, boasted that it had "transformed New York City into an individualized game of underlying possibilities, where the ordinary becomes riveting." Um...right. Since then, Court TV's primetime ratings dropped 12 percent.

>> Most inane campaign: Ameriprise Financial. With this late entry, "lifestyle advertising" has sunk to a new low. This campaign elevates brown-nosing into a communications strategy: "A generation as unique as this needs a new generation of personal financial planning." Huh? Ads with boomer imagery, from the VW minibus to "Saturday Night Fever," do not add up to a reason to choose your outfit over the competition.

>> Emptiest rhetoric: Ads need to be more "creative" again. I'll leave this one to David Ogilvy. He had some choice remarks on the subject in a 1991 interview with *The New York Times*: "I'm not afraid to tell creative phonies that their commercials are utter nonsense. When you write an ad, I don't want you to tell me that you find it 'creative.' I want you to find it so persuasive that you buy the product — or buy it more often."

2006 is just around the corner, and not a moment to soon. **M**

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'Creative' is such an over-used term in our industry, who even knows what it's supposed to mean anymore? That's just one of the stale ideas we should bury with 2005.