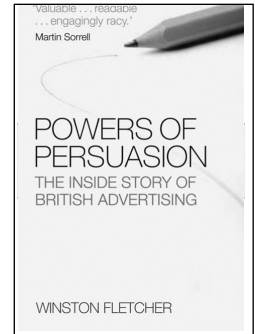


FLETCHER, W. T. *Powers of Persuasion. The Inside Story of British Advertising*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 288 pages.

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A history for professional and academic reflection

Winston Fletcher is one of the great researchers of advertising in the United Kingdom and has been president of the prestigious Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) and Advertising Association. He now teaches at the University of Westminster. A prolific author in addition to a successful professional, Fletcher has written 12 books, of particular note being *A Glittering Haze* (1992), the excellent *How to Capture the Advertising High Ground* (1994) and *Tantrums and Talent* (1999), a key book to understanding creative personalities in advertising. Professionalism, effectiveness and a suitable understanding of advertising creativity are constants in his work.

On this occasion, Fletcher has given us a delicious history of British advertising and its leading lights. During most of the second half of the 20th century, British advertising led the world. Its narrative focuses on the period 1950-2000. In a way these are the glory years of advertising, when it went to make up its highest proportion of gross domestic product.

Although some reference works are missing for the area of Spain, some international books have once again awoken interest in the genre. Of note are *Adland. A Global History of Advertising*, by Mark Tungate (already reviewed by us) and *The King of Madison Avenue*, which has just been published, by Kenneth Roman, an extensive biography of David Ogilvy, one of the stars of modern advertising. *Powers of Persuasion* is born to be another reference work. This book by Fletcher shares with the ones by Roman and Tungate the desire to learn lessons that can help professionals to improve their work. These books are not mere exercises in erudition but form part of a craving to explore the history of the best professional practices and extract applicable lessons of interest. Historical texts on advertising that appear in Spain talk to us of the past but are of little help to professionals wondering about the present and thinking about the future. Fletcher has published a book that is very well written and methodologically solid. The book's bibliography is also comprehensive.

Fletcher stresses the relevance of the seventies, when British creative work was at its most brilliant and its reputation had reached its peak. In a selection of the 100 best British ads of the 20th century that *Campaign* (a well-known trade magazine) published in 1999, more than 20% were from the seventies. This was when account planning was born at the agencies Boase Massimi Pollitt (BMP) and J. Walter Thompson (JWT). This British invention has two leading lights: the exceptional advertising strategist Stanley Pollitt, at BMP, and Stephen King, at JWT. The paradigm of account planning has something of notable interest: it is a fertile integration of market research with the creative process and is now used by agencies the world over. Between 1974 and 1975, the advertising industry was capable of giving finance and prestige to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), a self-regulating body that is still in operation 30 years later. The ASA is a fair, fast and free channel for consumers that attends complaints, on average, within a month. For their part, advertisers realise that good self-regulation increases the public's trust and consequently improves the effectiveness of their campaigns.

At the end of the seventies, the advertising effectiveness awards arrived from the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA), created to complement the simply "creative" awards and show the effects of advertising on sales and, in general, their effectiveness. In this way, solid evaluation methods were provided for agencies and advertisers. The IPA awards were elevated to industry level and are a benchmark internationally. Moreover, they have given rise to 1,000 cases available in the IPA database and in the form of a book. Rewarding effectiveness is another British contribution to worldwide advertising that has been widely imitated.

At the beginning of the seventies, the agency of the brothers Charles and Maurice Saatchi started operating. By the end of the decade, these two singular advertisers of the City in London were the owners of one of the largest agencies in the world. Their memorable work for the British Conservative Party and British Airways ("Labour Isn't Working" and "The World's Favourite Airline" were the advertising themes of these great

campaigns) form part of world advertising history. Fletcher provides a fascinating description of the mix of ambition, opportunism, optimism and luck that took the Saatchi brothers to the top of their profession. He also explains how their talents complemented each other: Charles was passionate about achieving media coverage; for his part, Maurice was an exceptional salesman. Saatchi & Saatchi hired an incredibly important figure in business development: Martin Sorrell, a Brit who now directs WPP, currently the largest advertising group on the planet.

The advances in the eighties were related to three names and especially to two large firms. The names correspond to David Abbott, Frank Lowe and John Hegarty, leading creatives in the decade's advertising. David Abbott worked at Abbott Mead Vickers (AMV); Frank Lowe left CDP and launched Lowe Howard-Spink in May 1981 and John Hegarty founded Bartle Bogle Hegarty (BBH), after being one of the most brilliant collaborators at Saatchi. AMV, CDP and BBH are agencies with a privileged place in the history of advertising.

On the business front, after numerous take-overs Saatchi & Saatchi became the leading agency in the world. For his part, Martin Sorrell, who had been their financial director, turned a small engineering firm called Wire & Plastic Products into one of the great holdings of advertising. In that decade, the British went from being famous for their creativity to being famous for the size of their largest advertising firms. As pointed out by the cover of the Sunday supplement of *The New York Times* in 1989, the British were "Buying Up the Ad Business".

The nineties saw a drop in the percentage of advertising in the gross domestic product, which had reached its peak in 1989, and also a reduction both in the number of agencies and in the number of employees in these agencies. Between 1989 and 1993, the number of employees went from 15,400 to 11,100 and the number of agencies from 257 to 225. The golden age of British advertising was therefore coming to an end.

Fletcher portrays, with agile aplomb and accuracy, the most outstanding figures of some prodigious decades as can only be done by a peer: he himself is a leader in the industry. On the other hand, neither the creativity nor the history of advertising can be understood without the great contributions made by the United Kingdom. That's why this fascinating history will interest those who wish to find out more about the role of advertising in business, the media and society. Solid knowledge of the profession's past in the United Kingdom is a source of ideas for professionals and vital information for academics.

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