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Accountable Advertising

By Sean K. Fay

Guest Columnist

"The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works—whether it helps families find jobs at a decent wage, care they can afford, a retirement that is dignified...Those of us who manage the public's dollars will be held to account—to spend wisely, reform bad habits, and do our business in the light of day—because only then can we restore the vital trust between a people and their government."

— President Barack Obama,
Inaugural Address,
January 20, 2009

Our newly elected president says, "Those of us who manage the public's dollars will be held to account..." It's about time. Accountability is how truth can enter the world of economics and commerce, politics and

social justice. For if we don't abide by the principle that *behavior equals consequence*, a lot of time is wasted without necessarily creating a better economy. Only with accountability does action result in evaluation, determination, and finally repercussion, which leads us closer to the truth of the matter—namely, are things working?

As marketers we ask for the public's dollars in exchange for the products and services we advertise—a responsibility no less important than our elected leaders, and with no less accountability. We need to give value for those dollars, make products that deliver on their promise, and be fair, respectful and transparent in our dealings with the people who keep us and our clients employed.

In our industry there is a movement to self-regulation

and I think it is a good one. It starts with a sense of accountability to the public that supports us.

The Electronic Retailing industry, aka Direct Response Marketing business, is the most accountable form of advertising simply because each ad placed is tracked by a unique 800 number and Web site. This means that after spending a small amount of media money, which is often the most expensive part of a campaign, you know right away whether or not your project is "working."

One of the side benefits of "accountable advertising" is that the focus is on product features and key benefits. This intense focus means that customers know why they are buying, so you end up with not only a more educated and qualified customer, but one who can turn around and pitch your

product to their neighbor, co-worker, friend or family member. This word of mouth is the ultimate in accountability—a community of people who vouch for a product or service because it works.

As a leading DRTV agency and a producer of many short-form and long-form infomercials, we love this. It means that so long as we continue to select high-quality products and services, and work with clients who are accountable to their customers, then we know that we're doing our best to contribute to a more accountable world. What are you accountable for?

Sean K. Fay is president of Seattle's Envision Response Inc. www.envisiontv.com.

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