

Sensitizing Corporate America

"20/20" ADVERTISERS RESPOND TO LETTERS AND PHONE CALLS

Editorial Staff

When the "20/20" television news magazine decided to rerun their segment on chiropractic ("Are Parents Being Manipulated -- Is This the Best Way to Treat Your Children"), many in the profession were angered. The original airing was February 4, 1994; the second airing was August 25, 1995. The 1994 broadcast coincided with the congressional debates on health care reform; the 1995 rerun coincided with the congressional debate on Medicare reform.

"DC" asked the profession to contact the sponsors whose advertising dollars financed the "20/20" rerun. We're pleased to report that we received a large number of faxes and letters from DCs who took the time to write those corporations and send us responses from the companies. After examining those replies, we called the six corporations to hear what they had to say:

AT&T

"We make our advertising buys based on the various programs at the beginning of the season. We don't have any opportunity to review editorial content or any say on editorial content. We are purchasing advertising on programs that we feel reach the target markets we want to reach, and our advertising is not in any way an endorsement of a point of view expressed on a news show. It is simply an attempt to reach the viewers of that news show with our message. I don't know that we would even know in advance -- well, we wouldn't know in advance -- what the editorial content of any news show is that we're advertising on."

-- Diane Schwilling, media relations director

Acura

"We try to be as selective as we can, but the one thing we cannot control is the subject matter. Certainly we are not interested in being in a position of supporting something creating a problem within the community. If this is an issue and they are misreporting things, we would not want to be an advertiser in the future. We would not want to support something that is not correct."

-- Mike Spencer, spokesperson

Estee Lauder Inc.

"We became aware of some concern when there was a reaction to the program. If we knew in advance that a particular program was to carry information believed to be unfair or inaccurate, we would then make a judgment about having our name appear as an advertiser."

-- Phyllis Melhado, vice president, public relations

Kellogs

"20/20 isn't going to tell us what story they are going to run. Just because we are running an ad,

doesn't mean we are endorsing the content."

-- Anthony Hebron - spokesperson

Target Stores

"I don't know enough about the segment. The people in advertising would have to make that decision. I can certainly air the concern to the media buying department. I don't know if they are aware of it. It would be their decision."

-- Susan Eich, spokesperson

The Upjohn Company

"Although the Consumer Products Division of The Upjohn Company has a policy not to advertise on programs which shed a negative light on the medical profession (including chiropractic and all health care professions), we were not made aware of this particular program's content prior to its broadcast. We hope you understand that the appearance of our advertisement on '20/20' was in no way an endorsement of the program's content."

-- Jeff R. Palmer

We asked Liz Lareau, public relations specialist with Bawden & Associates, (the PR company for the Chiropractic Centennial Foundation) what effect an outpouring of letters and calls questioning advertising policies has on these companies.

"They have to take them seriously," she asserted. "These letters would certainly heighten the sensitivities of these companies to chiropractic."

John Pauley, Bawden's senior media buyer provided further insight: "My experience is that most of these companies have 'black lists' of television programs. They don't want to be seen as aligned with the content. I would imagine that this letter writing campaign will make them look seriously at where they are advertising. Responses like this is how they develop their black lists."

While the efforts of this profession cannot erase negative publicity, we can help shape how chiropractic is perceived. This profession has the ability and willingness to respond to unfair portrayals wherever they appear by letting those responsible hear from us en masse. We must continue to initiate the uninitiated to chiropractic, and let them know we're supported by millions of patients.

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