

INTERFERENCE

A collection of cautionary tales for the design professional

INTERFERENCE

SECOND *in the* CURATIONS SERIES *from THE PEOPLE at*



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Introduction

We begin with years of preparation involving endless study, technical practice, reading, research, and finally, loads of practical experience. One might then imagine that success in running a project or even an agency would be a simple matter of applying the skills and knowledge acquired in that preparation. The reality, however, is that designers and agency owners continually spend valuable time and resources trying to manage the many things that interfere with success. Often, quite unsuccessfully.

Some interference comes from the outside; brought into our work and processes by clients and others we interact with professionally. These factors often come in the form of misconceptions or limited understanding. Therefore, we must be vigilant for opportunities to preempt difficulties,

perhaps by educating those involved in our projects or, more effectively, by deliberately proclaiming our uncompromising standards and values and finding accord before taking up with others. In this way we can sometimes eliminate or diminish the impact of distractions.

Most often, though, the significant issues that interfere with our success come from within our profession in the form of lazy habits, flawed ideas, and misguided industry traditions. What makes these factors so insidious is that we grow up with them during our professional preparation, so their otherwise questionable features seem to melt into the landscape of our practice. Instead of habitually questioning these ideas, traditions, and habits we tend to regard them as compulsory; to the detriment of our success and our clients' fortunes.

At Unit Interactive we regularly make a practice of applying qualitative discrimination in examining our industry's professional habits, as well as our own. This practice has allowed us to define a host of interfering issues that we mark for elimination from our work. We hold this practice as important, for as Aristotle said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." And excellence is, of course, what we all aspire toward.

Our genuine desire to improve the professionalism and success of others compels us to write about these issues on

a regular basis. *Interference* is a collection of cautionary tales from our own experience and observation. We share these essays in an effort to help designers and agency owners to recognize interference in its many forms and, hopefully, eliminate it from their work in order to achieve more consistent and more successful outcomes.

— *Andy Rutledge & Angela Conlon*
January, 2011

Fire Your Account Team

By Nathan Ford

I didn't want to be so blunt about it. Really. But the more I think about the current state of agencies and how they need to blend into the changing landscapes of creative product, the more I keep coming back to this point: Account Teams are toxic.

First, let me define an Account Team. These are consortiums of well-dressed, well-spoken, and genuinely likable individuals whose sole purpose is to address client needs, while managing work flows for the creative team. Sounds innocent enough, right?

If you, designers, think that being strategically negated, slaving under fantastical expectations, and being coddled like a simple-minded infant to the point of your own professional rot is innocent; if you, clients, think that paying out unquantifiable figures of your hard-earned revenues, being patronized and

sheltered from the real creative downpours, and generally barking orders in to a whirlwind is productive; if you, agency owners, think that paying a group of people exorbitant salaries to make your business run with less efficiency, less quality and an underlying fear of immediate apocalypse, then yes, sirs and madams, Account Teams can be quite beneficial.

A MODEST PROPOSAL

If instead you feel that your agency could use a swift posterior bruising toward progress in the early reaches of this third millennium, A.D., consider the following:

- ≠ **Owners:** exalt your designers. Let them deal directly with your clients. Let them run projects and set deadlines. Let them present ideas. These practices will streamline communications and will empower your clients in the process.
- ≠ **Designers:** sort out your social anxieties. Get used to talking to clients. Get used to the idea that they may have a bad idea sometimes and you may need to talk them out of it. This will make you a stronger designer and will coach your clients toward a better co-existence with your creative and strategic majesty. Your ideas, and therefore your responsibilities, extend beyond the pixels on screen or ink on paper.
- ≠ **Account People:** find a seat before the music stops. You are talented; that is why you are where you are. Find your

strengths in this industry and play to them. If you are a thinking account person you could be a valued, project-minded addition to any creative team. If you are a connector: there is always room for people working on new business.

I can think of no better way for an agency to define itself as a creative collective set apart than to shed the fetters of mad-men-era schmoozathons. Dissolve your account team and show your clients how you pass the savings of time and hard-earned cash to them. You needn't fire everyone; absorb the talented minds back into where they can do the most good. And as for those whose paycheck has thus far hung on how well they play telephone: well, there are higher-paying jobs with far more integrity out there... in other industries. Godspeed.

About Unit Interactive

Unit Interactive is a digital media design and development consultancy in Texas. They specialize in strategic design with an emphasis on user experience-to-brand relationships. Their core disciplines include logo, website, and application design and development. Learn more about them on the web at UnitInteractive.com.

Unit's staff is composed of smart, experienced people with strong opinions on matters of design professionalism. Their enthusiasm for sharing and their focus on sound principles has established the team as influential thought leaders in the industry. This collection of essays is merely a sampling of Unit's ideas and values. You can find more on their respective personal websites and Twitter feeds and on the [Unit Interactive blog](#).

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