About the Author

Mary Georgene Berg was born in Youngstown, Ohio in 1928. At a young age she attended dance, drama and elocution classes in hopes of one day becoming an actress. She was one step closer in fulfilling that dream when her mom brought her to the New York Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre. She attended the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburg for two years before returning to Youngstown. Her first job was as an advertising writer for McKelvey’s department store.

In 1952 she was back in New York to work as a fashion advertising manager at Macy’s. From there she took a job with the advertising firm of McCann-Erickson as a writer and copy group head. From there she moved to the firm Lennen and Newell to fill the position as a “brain trust”.

Her next big step was in 1957 when she landed a job with the firm Doyle Dane Bernbach. During her seven years there she worked on advertising campaigns such as
Volkswagen and Avis. She was known for her flair and brilliance and was eventually promoted all the way to vice president and associate copy chief.

She went on to other various companies and worked on ads such as Alka-Seltzer and Braniff Airways before starting her own firm. It was called Wells, Rich, Greene Inc. and was made up of many employees who Wells worked with at her previous jobs. She took the company public in 1968 but within a decade made it private again because she did not like the scrutiny and pressure from the shareholders. She became the highest paid woman in the United States and was the most recognizable woman in American business.

She was named Advertising Executive of the year in 1969 and was inducted into the Copywriter’s Hall of Fame.

Abstract

Mary Wells helped shape her profession and left her mark on the advertising world forever. She was a revolutionary creative thinker who helped create ads with slogans and jingles that can still be remembered today.

She starts the book by looking at her childhood and what led her into the advertising business. She started small and slowly and patiently worked her way up through the business world improving her position with regards to both her position of power and salary.

She started in a department store in her hometown and moved into an advertising agency which was the beginning of her long career in New York City. One of her greatest steps in her young career was at Doyle Dane Bernbach. She referred to many
instances where she would learn from others and was on a team that created ad campaigns for Alka-Seltzer and Braniff Airways.

Soon after this she talks about her quest in opening her own firm. She learned everything she knew from her experience at other firms and brought many of her previous co-workers with her when she was outfitting her new company.

The greatest achievements of Mary Wells came from her thinking outside the box and being creative. She seemed to always have a way to connect to consumers and could create a catchy phrase that could be recognized by almost everyone.

**Summary**

Mary Wells Lawrence starts this book at one of the key time periods in her career as an advertising mogul. She was a young copywriter in the 1960’s working at Doyle Dane Bernbach in New York. She looked up to Bill Bernbach as an almost father figure in the business of advertising and he was the person who seemed to launch her into her career. He can be credited as managing one of the greatest ad campaigns with the Avis account. He could never compete with the giant car rental company Hertz so he advertised the company as the second best. He also used this second best mentality to tell the consumer that they would work harder for their business. It instantly made Avis a credible company.

Wells was also in the company and helped work on the Volkswagen campaign. They used a “think small” idea to change Americans minds about cars. Current users were obsessed with a bigger is better mentality and the company, with Bernbach and
Wells knee deep in the assignment, played off this idea to make people fall in love with there smaller quant cars. For how little the ads said it was revolutionary with the regards to the effect it had on the public’s opinion.

Through these campaigns and many others she learned what it meant to be creative and how to see into the consumer’s thoughts and needs. She sums up what she learned about advertising from Bernbach by saying “It was as if he had cordoned off Madison Avenue and set up a stage where he called for advertising to be honest and candid, smarter and more interesting (4).” It was more than just showing a product. It was connecting with the consumer on some level to persuade them that the product fit somewhere in their lives.

DDB was just a stepping stone in her career and she writes about how sad she was when she finally was ready to pack her bags and leave. She said that her seven years with the company was magical and speaks of Bernbach in the highest light. She left for a new ad company. This change could have been the most challenging of her career because she finally was stepping out of any kind of shadow and she was ready to make the work her own. It was finally going to be on her shoulders to produce at the top level.

She did not skip a beat. The “pop pop fizz fizz” ads for Alka-Seltzer were in her near future and she began to prove herself. She writes about how the ad got back to the basics and communicated clearly with the customer. It only involved two tablets getting dropped into a glass of water and went along with an easy to remember jingle that can still be recognized today. The point of this ad in her career was bigger then just a small success out of many. She proved that simplicity and just being creative can out perform
some lavish expensive commercial. She found a way to communicate to the customer by simply telling them exactly how to use the product and what benefits it would give them.

Another ad which marked this part of her career was for Braniff Airways. They were struggling in a growing market because they were dull and didn’t show the customer why they should fly with them. Aviation is always an interesting business to advertise because safety comes first and then after that all the airlines seem to be the same and seem to go to the same places. She talks about how the airline was functioning well as a business and had good potential because of things like the quality of the planes and the routes they were running. “Braniff has a great route structure, you’ll be amazed at the routes it’s got, but the airline is virtually unknown, we have to become hot news from coast to coast (33).”

Wells gave them instant visibility when she convinced the company to paint their airplanes. Fresh vivid colors would get the consumers attention and interest and probably worked well because next time someone was booking a ticket they probably saw no disadvantage to trying out another carrier. This was such a success again because it connected to the consumer and picked the business up exactly where it was underperforming. It gave them visibility and that was all they seemed to need.

Her next key campaign was for the French tourist bureau. She used a simple idea and one symbol to encompass so much of French culture. Her man on a bicycle is still the symbol of France’s rural life today and it can still be found in countless magazines and brochures.
These ad campaigns are what propelled her to turn down a much deserved raise and start her own company. It was called Wells Rich Greene and she started it with partners that she worked with on her recent ad campaign successes.

Her first big ad campaign running her company was for the Love cosmetic brands. She talks about how she took a conservative drug company and made it one of the most successful launches of a cosmetic brand in history. Instead of taking a failing company or campaign and trying to turn it around she was able to launch a product with no previous strings attached. She was able to use her full creative ability and resources.

One campaign that had circled this earth countless times for decades now is the “I Love New York” campaign. It can still be found in the form of t-shirts across the country and seems to be a phrase that will never go away. It helped New York show that it is the place to be regarding all aspects of life and can be linked to the cities great gains and constant popularity today.

One of her biggest steps that she would soon regret was taking Wells Rich Greene public. She made an extraordinary amount of money and she became the first woman CEO on the New York Stock Exchange. This gave her instant publicity in the advertising industry and on Madison Avenue, but more importantly gave her recognition and fame throughout the business world. The reason that she regretted the decision and decided to make the company private again within the decade was because she did not like the pressure and scrutiny from the shareholders. She liked working unchecked and felt that the shareholders looking over her shoulder all the time inhibited her ability to run a successful business and continue being at the forefront of creativity in the ad world. Along the same line she writes about her refusal to globalize her company. She had
taken her company as far as she wanted and was fearful of getting too big and collapsing. She knew that if she took it global she would not have control over the entire company and it would go unchecked. This was a risk she saw no reason to take.

Another challenge she writes about was her battle with cancer. In the same way she faced challenges in business and creating ads she faced her disease. Throughout the book she ties together her life with the ads that she has worked on. She keeps it very simple and real so that anyone who reads this book can go into the experience with not knowledge of the subject matter.

**Review**

I thought this book was extremely well written. The format was the biggest reason why I liked this book. You learn about her private life and her business career all at the same time. The way she sets it up is to pull you through the book with examples of her ad campaigns. There are many campaigns with can still be recalled today which make it quite amusing to remember and compare them to current ads and ideas. Many of the companies that she did ads for are still successful today.

The reason that a book like this can be written and found interesting is because of the material involved. The first thing is that working in the advertising industry is a constantly changing business. You never do the same thing twice and you are constantly working on a new problem. As consumers change and the world around us changes advertising firms have to find a way to communicate with the people. Their needs are constantly changing and the same ad won’t work twice when trying to persuade someone.
The second reason why this book is so interesting is because of the position the reader is in. The reader is in fact the consumer and in turn the one that Wells and any other advertising person are trying to persuade. The reader can constantly be a critic which makes it instantly interesting. When reading about the Alka-Seltzer campaign I was able to still see how Alka-Seltzer uses a simple idea in their ads and I can recall hearing the jingle of the ad.

In addition to the book being interesting because of the subject matter the fact that it was written by an incredible successful person makes it instantly credible. She was the first woman CEO on the New York Stock Exchange and her salary and earnings over the years have been jaw dropping. The writing of this book is another success in a long line of successes in advertising throughout the years. I would say that it is an easy and fast read and can apply to anyone in the advertising industry or anyone who wants to know how to be successful.