

A protest from our sponsors

VANCOUVER - An "equal time ad", by Vancouver-based film company International Psychomedia, has forced the CBC to examine its advertising standards and pull a controversial forest industry ad. The ad may end up redefining TV advertising in Canada.

Psychomedia's "Mythical Forests" ad is aimed squarely at the B.C. Council of Forest Industry's "Forests Are Forever" ads. That multi-million dollar TV, radio and print campaign was the industry response to years of pressure by environmental groups attacking the industry's record of clearcut logging, irresponsible forestry and encroachment on old growth timber areas in B.C. like the Stein Valley and Morseby Island.

The "Mythical Forests" ad was supposed to run on December 5th this year. Kalle Lasn and Bill Schmalz, of Psychomedia - which has several NFB productions to its credit including *Autumn Rain*, a film about crime in Japan - the last of their six part *Nippon* series for the film board - bought a 30-second spot to run in B.C. after *The Journal*.

However, John Davis, the CBC's head of Advertising Standards, refused to run the Psychomedia ad saying, "the entire theme of the Psychomedia message is controversial and unacceptable. No advertiser may purchase time to directly or indirectly persuade the public about perceived industry mismanagement of B.C. forests. Discussion or comment on

controversial subjects such as this one is properly done on public affairs programming where the different points of view can be fairly presented."

A recent poll indicated that 65 per cent of B.C. residents side with the environmentalists. The B.C. Council of Forests Industry's ads were aimed at convincing the population the environmentalists are wrong, that B.C. needs its forest industry and people should trust the logging industry more.

The publicity surrounding the rejection of the Psychomedia ad resulted in hundreds of calls flooding the CBC public relations department in Vancouver, with the corporation's switchboards feeling the heat in Toronto and Ottawa as well.

Says Lasn: "Our next step was to say, if you dismiss our ad as controversial then don't you have to dismiss the 'Forests Are Forever' ads as controversial as well? They are about the same issue aren't they? At this point the whole scenario started to unfold. They started examining their advertising standards, they were in a state of crisis for about two weeks and eventually they had to admit that they couldn't have a double standard, one for us and one for the other ads. So eventually they pulled the ads."

Psychomedia did not want to see the "Forests Are Forever" ads pulled but to "neutralize" them, she says.

That was their intention 16 years ago when they first tried to put an anti-ad, about the effects of advertising, on the CBC.

"That was the time that the anti-smoking ads were running in the U.S. Those ads were very effective against the tobacco company's advertising. When people see the real ad,

instead of letting it work on them, they start thinking double and triple time and say hey that's the ad I saw criticized the other day. So it is very easy to neutralize even a very large advertising campaign with a few well placed anti-ads."

But the CBC didn't see it their way.

"At the time they just said, get out of here" says Lasn who adds that the idea has been "simmering" ever since.

"When you look at the history of TV advertising, it starts out as innocuous messages selling products and services. And then a few years ago they got into this slightly grey area of corporate image enhancing," says Lasn. "But then with this 'Forests Are Forever', it was the first time they blatantly moved into social issues on advertising time... you couldn't ask for a better candidate to do an anti-ad on."

Psychomedia is now attempting to place its ad on local station CKVU and CTV affiliate BCTV. The private station's ads are approved by The Telecaster Committee of Canada in Toronto. Lasn says initially the private broadcasters were in favor of running their ad and not pulling "Forests Are Forever", "but they hadn't seen the script yet."

If the commercial stations turn down Psychomedia, and do not pull "Forests Are Forever", Lasn and company will sue. If they pull both, Psychomedia will be asking them for equal time.

"They've run this thing for over a year and it's done its damage, (they will argue) you've spread the misinformation now how about giving us a chance to get back," says Lasn who has more anti-ads and bigger issues in mind.

"If the average person watches five hours of

TV per day then they are exposed to one hour of commercials during that time, commercials for promoting consumption. That's what they really boil down to," says Lasn, "and anyone who has anything meaningful to say is quickly eliminated from that process."

Psychomedia hopes to change that and believes that now that the business community is using the most effective tool of persuasion created by man for propaganda and social messages, the field should now be open to all.

"Our ultimate goal is to change the definition of advertising, change the way that the 10 to 12 minutes per hour is used," proclaims Lasn.

"In the past it has been the domain of business and corporations and their definition of controversial has effectively excluded people who have other kinds of messages. So what we want to do is force the CBC to review their whole policy on who gets on and to change their archaic definition of what is controversial and what isn't to open up that 10 to 12 minutes per hour."

To that end they are starting a newsletter as a forum for ideas and fundraising.

Imagine the TV ads of the future. "Apartheid is forever - but not if you stop buying DeBeers Diamonds." And what about ads informing viewers of which Canadian Business 1,000 companies are environmentally irresponsible? Of what multinational high-tech firms have connections to the military-industrial complex? Perhaps some spots questioning recreational drug laws in Canada? (This bud's for you?). Or maybe a public service announcement informing children of their right to vote under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

And now a protest from our sponsors.

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