

Putting The "Ad" In Adverse

Considering the baggage that comes with being a publisher



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BY MARTY DAVIS

Today we're going to be discussing *Just Out's* advertising policies. After you read the following letter I received on August 19 you'll see why.

"I'm a bit behind in my summer reading, so I've just gotten to the August 5th issue. I'm angered and disgusted by the Portland Luggage ad on page 7 - the one that opens with 'Nobody likes an OLD Bag!' accompanied by a photo of a scowling grey-haired woman wearing glasses (who appears to be anywhere from 55 to 95 years old).

For the store, there's no excuse - you folks obviously think your ad is funny and compelling. One result of your bad judgment, bad taste and bad attitude, however, is that I (a customer for almost 16 years who has bought a variety of excellent products at the downtown store and happily referred other shoppers) won't be buying luggage from you anymore + will be telling my friends about this - angrily. I'm guessing you don't care, given your use of this ageist/sexist ad copy, but I do want you to know.

For the paper, there may be an excuse - because PL is a regular advertiser/supporter, you may not check their ad content carefully, if at all. So I hope you will consider this a serious request from a regular reader who often goes out of her way to shop at JO advertisers: You have to do that checking - to help educate such advertisers as well as save your readers from sudden disgust as we turn the pages of the paper. JO should not be accepting ads that deliberately offend/insult any of us (eg, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change) - or anybody else, for that matter (except maybe well-known bad guys; it's probably ok to insult people who are vicious, violent queer-haters).

I know the paper needs money, but accepting ads without vetting them - simply printing whatever your advertisers choose - is, as this case illustrates, bad practice."

Now do you see why we're talking about this, the publisher asks wearily?

Just Out's advertising policy, as published, is basic and simple. *Just Out* reserves the right to reject or edit any advertisement. That's it, that's the entire policy. Historically any problems encountered with ads, from the perspective of the publisher, the advertiser or the reader has been due to sexual content. There is no written policy that ex-



PLICITLY states what will and what won't be accepted. That's my call. By and large, I will not accept nudity of a sexual nature and/or ads depicting real or simulated sex acts. This is not—not, I repeat—because I'm a bitter old fat man-hating lesbian who thinks no one should ever have sex, as generally spewed at me in the course of any disagreement. Of greatest importance to me is keeping distribution locations strong and viable. Having the paper kicked out of distribution locations because someone finds an ad offensive has no reward. I value our locations in libraries, schools and retail outlets. To lose this accessibility for a glimpse of pubic hair serves no one. This does not mean, however, that I whimper, whine and beg forgiveness each and every time a distributor objects to the content of the paper. In June the Jolly Roger Tavern in John's Landing said "no" to further distribution after they found a cover objectionable. My reaction to that decision was, pretty much, "Screw it."

The basic fact is that nowhere in America is anyone ever guaranteed the right to not be offended. From our national politics right on down to the smallest LGBTQ newspaper, people will spout, express, preach, talk, write, sell, advertise and opine endlessly. Not all of this information overload will land on a receptive audience.

Simply put, I am not going through the paper, page by page, ad by ad, word by word to clean up every possible circumstance that someone might find objectionable. I'm not distributing twice a month a shrink-wrapped lifeless publication that has been censored and parboiled to the point where it neither offends nor projects meaningful purpose for anyone. I'm a publisher, not a distributor of blank note pages. That said, we, I, will attempt to pay closer attention to having conversations with advertisers if/when we see content that might be overly troublesome to a segment of our community. This will not be for the express purpose of refusing ads but rather to give the advertiser the opportunity to make a more educated decision as to the possible impact of the ad.

The advertiser, the business owner is responsible for choices made in bringing people to—or driving them away from—his business. By not caving in to the demands of the above letter writer, I have likely alienated one, if not many more readers. I want to make it very clear, however, that this is not a situation where I am choosing ad dollars over reader sensibilities. I respect the letter writer for feeling strongly about the image in the ad. I appreciate the fact that she put action to her feelings. I get that she sees the ad as more than failed humor. I differ, though, with the approach to immediately be punitive toward the advertiser, and the paper publishing the ad. What if, what if, she and her group of older women had gone in with humor and jest to meet with the owner and bring the topic to the table with clarity and the supposed wisdom that comes with the age indicated in the letter? What if they'd baked some cookies and gone in to win an ally and make a friend? What if?

What if they hadn't set out to become the exact stereotype that they found objectionable in the ad in the first place?

What if? JO

just out

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ON THE COVER:

"Like a Virgin was Released in 1984" by Stephen Scott Smith

Smith, who considers Portland his creative home, uses a wide range of media including video, photography, painting, drawing, sculpture, performance and installation to explore the intersection of nature with narcissism and identity in modern America. Turn to p. 21 or visit stephenscottsmith.com for more on this artist.

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