

If you're familiar with "Don't Leave Home Without It," the famed American Express ad campaign, or Volkswagen's "Drivers Wanted," then you know the work of Bruce Silverman '66 and Ron Lawner '70, respectively.

Bruce Silverman served as executive vice president/executive creative director at three of the largest U.S.-based ad agencies and president of two independently owned agencies. He created such campaigns as "Bullish on America" (Merrill Lynch), "Something Special in the Air" (American Airlines), and "The Shell Answer Man." He also used his advertising acumen to fight smoking, creating an effective and iconic anti-smoking campaign for the State of California.

When Ron Lawner stepped down from his role as chief creative officer and vice chairman of the Boston-based ad agency Arnold Worldwide in 2007, after 25 years there, the company had grown from a modest partnership into a global firm with around \$2 billion in revenue. In addition to his consulting for VW, Mr. Lawner won accolades for his work on the American Legacy Foundation's Truth anti-smoking campaign.

Both spoke to us about their careers, the advertising business, and the television show that has popularized it. Here are some excerpts.

# ADELPHI'S AD MEN

## Do You Watch *Mad Men*?

**BRUCE SILVERMAN** I do. I love it...I started in the ad business right in 1968 or so and...I see the guys who were my first set of bosses when they were 10 years younger.

**RON LAWNER** No, I don't. The reason I couldn't watch it is because I retired from Arnold just about the same time as it came out and there was no way I was watching any show about advertising.

## What makes a good ad or ad campaign?

**RON LAWNER** I tried to make things a part of the culture...I tried treating people as intelligent human beings, not talk down to them. I tried to be as artful as I could in the filming and the casting and the way the sell was presented. I tried to make you...want to hang out with that product.

## What drives an ad?

**BRUCE SILVERMAN** I still believe that people love stories. We've loved stories since we lived in caves, and we loved stories when we were children, and I think we love stories as adults, and advertising that tells stories—even if the stories are done in 15 seconds in a television commercial—it will get engaged, and engagement is crucial.

## How do you develop your ideas?

**RON LAWNER** You digest everything you can about your product. You digest all you can about the competition. You get as smart as you can before you put pen to paper. Then, only then, only when all that stuff has been input, do you sit around and start to bring the human being to bear, your thoughts to bear, what motivates you.

**BRUCE SILVERMAN** Ideas seem to materialize in strange ways. I agree with Ron. You really need to know your product, and you need to know the competition, and you need to know the consumer. There's a lot of real serious homework. And then you get into the bathtub, I guess.

## Why did you each go into advertising?

**RON LAWNER** I got the bug in college. I became a business major because I saw guys graduating with economics degrees and, you know, jobs. Advertising was part of the culture, and it was the most interesting thing I could think of. And I had one great professor, he's the reason I did it. He was the marketing guy...Greg Gutman... who really just motivated me.



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**BRUCE SILVERMAN** My English teacher at Adelphi [was] Phil Green.... Early on in the semester, we had to write papers, and he's handing out the papers, and he asked me to stay after class. And I went, "Oh sh\_\_\_, I'm in trouble." He said, "You can write, you should do something with that." He was the first person that ever said that to me. So I started thinking about writing. I signed up for the school newspaper, the *Delphian*, and I really thought a little about journalism. I actually got a job at the *Long Island Press*, as a sports rewrite guy. But, you know, I wasn't thinking about advertising, and then I got a job, a summer job, of all things, in the mailroom at Ogilvy & Mather when I was in law school.

**Of all the campaigns you have worked on, which were your favorite ones and why?**

**RON LAWNER** For me, it's really easy, because Volkswagen became so visible. I always wanted to do advertising my mother would see. I not only had the money, because car clients spent money, I also had a great client, who let me be as good as I could be and let me hire a group of people whom I surrounded myself with who were a joy to work with. That allowed our agency to grow exponentially from the time we got that business.

**BRUCE SILVERMAN** It's hard for me to pinpoint one campaign that was my favorite. As you go through your career, you have different kinds of opportunities. I was very


fortunate, because I was the junior guy, and I got put on the least important accounts at the beginning of my career, which was pretty typical. Except, frequently enough, the least important accounts became immensely important accounts just around the time I hit them...So, boom, I got to do American Express's first commercial, which made my career. And I loved working on American Express.

I could skip way over to the campaign that in many ways I'm proudest of, which was actually the California anti-smoking stuff... I actually looked at myself in the mirror, and I went, "Wow, I may be affecting people's lives in a meaningful way."

**RON LAWNER** Yeah, we all got a little taste of that.

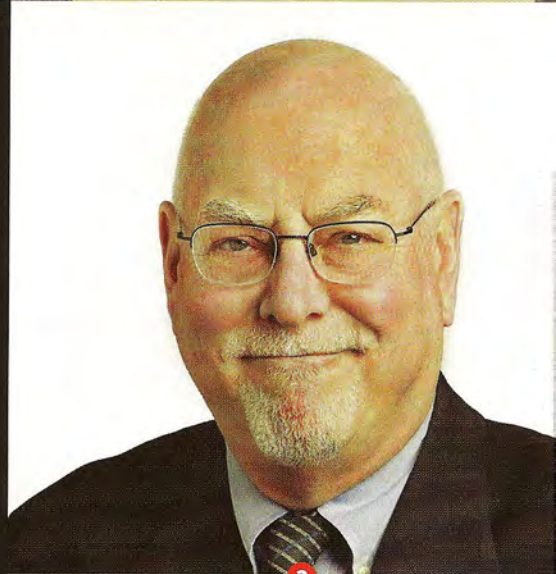
**What advice do you have for people who are interested in the business these days?**

**RON LAWNER** The most successful people I know had great passion for what they did, and had great tenacity.

**BRUCE SILVERMAN** Be an eclectic person. Use curiosity. Try to explore the world. 

By Bonnie Eissner

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**1 Ron Lawner '70**

Ron Lawner created the iconic "Drivers Wanted" campaign for Volkswagen.

**2 Bruce Silverman '66**

Bruce Silverman's "Nicotine Soundbites" ad used footage from the 1994 Congressional hearing at which tobacco company executives denied that nicotine was addictive. Attempts by RJ Reynolds to quash the ad made headlines nationwide.