

'End of the brand manager'

Brandweek; New York; May 19, 2003; Sonia Reyes;

As Zyman helps transform ConAgra, the power structure is shifting.

IN A QUEST TO SHARPEN its marketing approach and move from an agri-business to "America's Favorite Food Company," ConAgra Foods is relying on Sergio Zyman to engineer what sources say is a complete overhaul of its brand operations.

A company document outlining the new structure effectively spells "the end of the brand manager as we know it' (to steal a line from Sergio)."

Zyman, the flashy former Coca-Cola marketer who was brought in to redirect efforts on such familiar trademarks as Healthy Choice, Hunt's, Armour meats, Bumble Bee Tuna and Orville Redenbacher snacks, is acting as a consultant for the widespread marketing review.

Together with chairman and CEO Bruce Rohde, he has created a "Marketing Manifesto" that touches on every aspect of the \$30 billion food giant's varied portfolio—from brand management to agency selection, to retailers, sales, metrics and training—under the new "ConAgra Foods Way," according to a memo obtained by Brandweek.

Roger Berdusco, senior evp of ConAgra's retail business who is acting as CMO during the search for a permanent one, said the company is trying to create a systematic approach to brand building. "Sergio has been terrific in helping us find that common language," he said. "But I want to make it clear that brand management and decision-making for brands is run by the brand group. Period."

Berdusco, who joined ConAgra three months ago from svp-marketing for North America at Tropicana, is one of several new faces among the new guard running operations.

"Our role at ConAgra Foods is primarily to work to consolidate the approach to marketing and the key processes across the business units, using best practices that deliver the best results," said Zyman via an e-mail exchange with Brandweek last Friday.

The "Manifesto" paints a company portrait where brand managers had previously operated in fiefdoms in an "inconsistent, informal, unorganized and unmeasured manner," where the "value and power of brands . . . was frosting on the cake, not the priority."

"No longer will upper management default to activity-based brand management without a clear intent to increase the value of our assets and brands."

Rohde, a lawyer who joined ConAgra as CEO in 1998 after working as its chief counsel for more than 20 years, was not available last week for comment.

While some sources say the changes have brought a "renewed energy" and "more benefits than not," others are bristling at what they say is Zyman's heavy-handed style and an environment laden with frustration and disempowerment. At least five senior marketing execs, including a corporate vp of communications, have left. Said one source: brand managers are "paralyzed to act for fear of losing their jobs."

Brand managers say they are being second guessed on such minute details as photography angles for products. Meanwhile, projects in the pipeline for months, even years, are being scrapped. "They say, 'Look it doesn't matter how much money has been spent. It's going to be done our way,'" said an exasperated source.

On the ad front, the "Z-Men," as Atlanta-based Z Marketing's consultants have been dubbed, apparently led to the reassignment of the \$18 million Healthy Choice brand account from Grey, New York, to Leo Burnett in Chicago. The latter shop's first effort involves the introduction of the Flavor Adventures frozen meals line (Brandweek, May 12).

"This is definitely the wave of the future," said Sam Hill, founder of Helios Consulting, Skokie, Ill. "It's happening at Ford, IBM and P&G. Increasingly, brand management strategy, agency selections, budget allocations, these decisions are more and more made at the top."

[Sidebar]

"Our role is to consolidate the approach to marketing and key processes."-Sergio Zyman

Disponível em: <<http://www.proquest.com>>. Acesso em: 30 maio 2003.