



## McLUHAN, GOSSAGE, MEDIA & ADVERTISING

It's been about 50 years since Marshall McLuhan famously asserted "the medium is the message."

McLuhan's hypothesis was that the *effect* of media was more significant than the *content* of media.

This can be observed today on any morning commute. Get on a public transit system and you will see that everyone's attention is focused on their cell phone – reading, mailing, gaming, talking, listening. What they are doing on their device may be interesting, but the fact that they are transfixed by the device is perhaps, more significant.

Also about 50 years ago advertising great Howard Gossage said, "People don't read ads. They read what interests them and sometimes that's an ad."

McLuhan and Gossage's assertions seem to be at odds. McLuhan thought the medium was more significant. Gossage seemed to think content was more important.

Right now, the media and advertising industries are headed in opposite directions on this question.

The advertising industry is in the McLuhan camp. It is de-emphasizing the creative content of its business and is focused heavily on media strategy. Martin Sorrell, CEO of WPP, the world's largest advertising agency holding company, gave a talk in London a while back. According to press reports he told the attendees...

*"The medium, or media, has become 'more important' than the message..."*

Conversely, the media industry is following the wisdom of Gossage. They believe that without attractive, stimulating content they are dead. The leakage of audiences from broadcast networks to cable and web-based programming like *Mad Men* and *Game of Thrones* has made that clear.

The irony of all this is that McLuhan was an obscure college professor in Canada until he was discovered and launched by - you can't make this up - Howard Gossage.

After reading one of McLuhan's books, Gossage called McLuhan one night and said, "Dr. McLuhan, how would you like to be famous?" He then proceeded to make McLuhan famous.

Gossage thought of McLuhan as a genius whose insights were uniquely attuned to the era in which they were developed.

Today, at least to this writer, when it comes to advertising and marketing, Gossage's insight has more practical relevance.

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## Maybe I'm Just This Guy

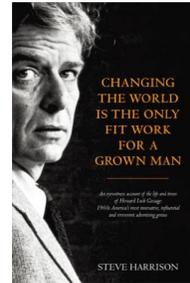
Of course, maybe I'm just the clueless guy in *Annie Hall* who had no idea what the hell McLuhan was talking about. Watch it [here](#).



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## If You're Interested In Gossage...

[\*Changing The World Is The Only Fit Work For A Grown Man\*](#) about Howard Gossage by Steve Harrison is a wonderful book about a fascinating guy.



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## Shameless Self-Promotion

Here's my speaking schedule for the spring:

April 1: Comcast SportsNet, San Francisco  
April 5: Cox Media, Atlanta  
May 10: Screenforce, Vienna  
May 11: Screenforce, Dusseldorf  
May 12: Screenforce, Zurich  
June 8: 1000watt, Portland  
June 14: Private Event, LA

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