Abstract for: *Hewerdine & Squire-Smith* Billboard series

Award Category: Advertising Campaign

**Purpose of project**

There are over 2000 realtors in and around London, Ontario. We (Johnny Hewerdine and Tristan Squire-Smith) realized we had to distinguish ourselves through creative, memorable and intelligent marketing in order to effectively promote our excellent real estate knowledge and meticulous customer service. The anticipated outcomes of our marketing include: increased brand recognition and engagement, a growing following of loyal clientele and a shift in the common perceptions of the industry.

For almost two years we have continuously run a billboard in the same location along a major artery in the city, changing the print every three to four months. This uniquely innovative approach has resulted in the branding of the location [of the billboard], not just the content posted. This is in contrast to traditional industry practice whereby others will typically circulate between locations. We believe that our consistency is the fundamental cornerstone of establishing a highly successful long-term advertising campaign; we have facilitated our followers’ ability to anticipate where and when we will post next. In fact, many people admit to looking forward to the next billboard as if it were the following chapter in our ‘story’.

Our submission includes the following three consecutive and most recently published billboards:

“Zero Awards Won (No fine print required)”

“You Could Do Worse”

“This is not a real estate ad” & “… Nor is this”

**Effectiveness/meeting objectives**

Our target outcome was to increase recognition of our brand and grow a portfolio of clients who wish to work with us. The national and online viral attention generated from the *You Could Do Worse* billboard has crystallized our branding. Consequently, in order to provide consistent messaging, we have published dozens of short video clips on our social media showcasing people from all walks of life saying to camera: *Johnny and Tristan: You could do worse!* Multiple people with whom we previously had no contact have asked us to represent them as realtors as a direct result of our billboards.

**Challenges & Changes made**

First, with respect to the “Zero Awards Won Billboard”, we sought to build trust with the consumer through self-effacing honesty. The real estate industry is rife with examples of salespeople showcasing their accomplishments (either by sales’ volumes or awards won, both of which are often meaningless to the general public) – so did the opposite. We had the courage to make fun of ourselves and satirize the self-aggrandizing nature of the industry; at a time when people are starving for authenticity, this billboard’s honest approach hit home.

Second, we previously used the tagline “*You Could Do Worse”* on a prior billboard. However, the second time, we teamed it with pictures of ourselves from “the most awkward periods of our lives” (Johnny in his Grade 8 graduation robes, Tristan in his Grade 10 yearbook photo). This synergistic pairing of tagline and photo demonstrates our self-deprecating humour – an uncommon approach within the real estate industry. This has resonated strongly with the public as it demonstrates our willingness to be vulnerable (thereby humanizing us and our approach within the industry). The public feel that they can identify more easily and build trusting professional relationships with two such ‘normal’ guys.

Third, our most recent double-billboard (displayed side-by-side) is our latest ‘non-ad ad’. We have capitalized on the innovation that by branding the location from uninterrupted coverage over the past two years, we can say very little and it still be highly effective. Given that we do not list our names as registered with the governing body, our credentials or our brokerage’s name, it cannot be considered a real estate ad compliant with all required components; however, its effectiveness is not diminished. We recognize that very few people ever take note of a phone number from a billboard; rather, its sole purpose is to keep us top-of-mind and this accomplishes that objective.

**Target Audience (demographics)**

Recognizing the overwhelming choice faced by potential clients when selecting a realtor, we have designed our billboards to provide value to the consumer, rather than simply following the established industry trends of boasting or portraying glamour and/or massive success.

If a prospective client understands and enjoys our advertisements (a reflection of our down-to-earth personalities), they will appreciate working with us. By running such a non-conventional advertisement campaign, we provide the consumer insight they need in order to make an informed decision; they can self-select and thereby help us identify our niche clientele most efficiently – a win for them and us.

**Any specifics as detailed in the particular Awards Categories**

We discovered through the consumer feedback that there is a tremendous public appetite for authenticity and change with respect to traditional real estate advertising. We are proud to have galvanized public opinion and started the conversation of what it means to be relatable and trustworthy. Our brand recognition created from this series of billboards has successfully met our stated purpose of raising awareness of our unique approach to offering real estate services.

In our opinion, the industry as a whole might better serve the consumer by advertising in a manner that is less self-centered, more humble and helpful in tone and design. We believe the sustainable and cumulative impact of our advertising campaign to have created a meaningful precedent to influence change so other, ‘non-conventional’ real estate advertisements may focus on providing similar benefit to the consumer.

**Budget Category:** < $200k