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**BODY:**

It was a familiar scene to Sean Fitzpatrick, pacemaker for Chevrolet's "Heartbeat" advertising, and his cohorts from Campbell-Ewald, Lou Schultz and Bob Weekes. The presentation had been made and the team was fielding tough questions about strategy, creative recommendations and media choices for a new Chevy Cavalier campaign. Except this time Sean and friends were the questioners. The questionees were five advertising students from St. John's, one of 16 finalist teams in the American Advertising Federation's annual national student advertising competition.

For nine months, 4,400 students in 155 AAF college chapters around the country thought about the problem posed by this year's sponsor: Given a \$12 million advertising budget, how would you make the Cavalier more appealing to 18-to-24-year-olds?

Working nights and weekends (see, it *was* like real life), each team prepared a complete 40-page plans book and a 25-minute presentation.

Teams then competed at the district level for the right to go to the AAF annual conference in Orlando, where the finals were staged.

In a marathon 7 a.m.-to-7 p.m. session, the folks from Campbell-Ewald -- joined by David Hirsbrunner from the client side and fellow judges Ian Latham (Ogilvy & Mather) and David Basch (Saatchi & Saatchi) -- listened to and questioned 16 district winning teams.

When the white smoke cleared, the team from Brigham Young University emerged as the winner, followed by the University of Washington, Virginia Commonwealth University and St. John's.

BYU's first-rate campaign used the theme "Body language: Makin' the competition sweat," to play to young adults' interest in physical fitness and position the Cavalier as a winner. The rules require that all of the work -- from print layouts and television storyboards to audiovisual production -- be done by the students themselves. The BYU team even composed, arranged, performed and recorded original music for their TV and radio spots.

Some readers would be sure to roll their eyes and sneer "Puh-leez" if I called the winners' work "professional," but let me put it this way: If this had been a real agency shoot-out, *they* would certainly have "made the competition sweat."

The BYU team was coached by Professors Dennis Martin and Peggy Fugal. Perhaps not coincidentally, Martin is co-author of a widely used text on campaign planning: "Strategic Advertising Campaigns."

Next year's sponsor is Nestle. Want to bet they see a sales surge in college towns in

September, as the students start their research?

Three suggestions for advertisers, agency people, and my academic colleagues from this first-time participant (our brand new Chapel Hill club finished second in the district to the team that finished third in the nation):

1. If you'd like to be a sponsor, contact AAF President Howard Bell in Washington. It's more than "paying your dues" or "putting something back into the business." Wouldn't you like to have 5,000 of the best and brightest advertising majors in the country researching and thinking about your product for nearly a year?

Past sponsors include such premier marketers as Coors, Nabisco and Levi's. A reminder: College students themselves have about \$45 billion a year in disposable income -- they're an interesting market in their own right.

2. If you'd like to be a judge, call Ann Bowman, also at the AAF in Washington. Yes, it's hard work -- you have to read all those 40-page books -- and you don't have the topless beaches or other compensations of Cannes. But you will have your faith in the future of this business reconfirmed. And by the way, don't professional scouts look for winners at bowl games?

3. If your university doesn't have an AAF chapter, or that chapter doesn't compete, get with the program. Students tell us that this competition is more valuable than any class. And it may well be.

Meanwhile, imagine all those budding young adpeople marching around chanting "We're No. 1!" Who says the business isn't fun any more?