

# Public Citizen



Buyers Up • Congress Watch • Critical Mass • Global Trade Watch • Health Research Group • Litigation Group  
Joan Claybrook, President

November 19, 1999

Rance Crain  
Editor-in Chief  
*Advertising Age*  
Crain Communications  
711 3rd Avenue  
New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr. Crain:

I was appalled to see the ad which ran opposite page 38 in this week's (November 15th) issue of the magazine portraying a dead body with a sign advertising the organs inside in a "liquidation sale." It is the most offensive and tasteless ad that I--a reader of *Advertising Age* for the past 20 years--have ever seen, anywhere. It is a statement that the standards for ad acceptance by *Advertising Age* have hit rock bottom.

The full text of the ad (see attached) is largely contained on a tag, dangling from the big toe of the corpse whose feet, sticking out from a sheet covering the corpse, are the centerpiece of the ad, sponsored by MarketingCentral.com:

"LIQUIDATION SALE....  
EVERYTHING MUST GO!\*

Kidneys! Lungs! Liver! Heart!....  
DON'T DELAY.

Sale ends at midnight tonight.  
\*Free cooler with purchase"

The only other copy on the ad, beyond the name of the advertiser, is the statement : "Now everyone will be a better marketer."

Ralph Nader, Founder

1600 20th Street NW • Washington, DC 20009-1001 • (202) 588-1000

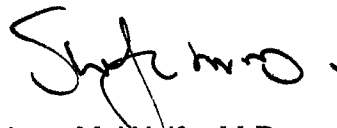
The ad could not come at a worse time. There is a critical shortage of organs for transplant which results in thousands of people dying each year who could benefit if there were not such a shortage. The government is currently trying to revise regulations for organ distribution which are more equitable in order to relieve this serious problem. Encouraging more people to be willing to have their organs donated after they die is a crucial step in relieving this shortage. This ad, by its gross commercialization of the process of obtaining organs--suggesting body parts for sale, illegal in this country---shows no respect for the dead and surely must raise concern in the minds of those AD AGE readers who might be considering organ donation.

In addition, this ad puts a black mark on commercial free speech, the livelihood of many of the readers and all of the advertisers in AD AGE. Such a breach of taste calls for serious remedies. First, I would like to know the names of the people responsible for signing off on this ad and deciding that it was within the standards for what your publication would print. They should, at the least, be put on some form of probation for this extraordinary lapse of judgment. Second, *Advertising Age* should print a full-page apology to its readers and advertisers explaining what went wrong and what process is being set up to avoid another mistake like this.

As the most influential publication in the world concerning advertising, you have a duty which transcends the rote acceptance of an ad in your publication just because it generates \$21,740 in revenue. What you are willing to print is looked upon by your readers as somewhat of a standard for the ads they are willing to design for other publications. The "creative" ad designers at MarketingCentral.com were willing to risk their reputation and yours by designing this ad and trying to get you to publish it, just so they could get more business by convincing everyone that "sick" ads such as this will make their customers "a better marketer." Your publication unfortunately became complicit in this scheme.

I look forward to a prompt response to this letter.

Sincerely,



Sidney M. Wolfe, M.D.  
Director  
Public Citizen's Health Research Group

cc: William Payne, MD  
President  
United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS)



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