**VRP**

David Lubars

David Lubars is Chairman and Chief Creative Officer of BBDO North America.

Since David has been at the BBDO helm, the agency has become not only the dominant creative force in the city, but among the most awarded in the world – winning "Agency of the Year" honors at Cannes along with multiple other industry accolades, including 2011 Global Agency of the Year by both Adweek and Campaign magazines.

Under David’s leadership, BBDO is delivering the most creative and effective array of innovative ideas of any agency, big or small. In 2008, BBDO’s 'HBO Voyeur' project, a multimedia, multi-platform experience, swept virtually every category in Cannes Lions, including the Grands Prix in both Outdoor and Promo & Activation. Of course, BBDO continues to make great television ads:  the agency had the #1 commercial in the 2010 Super Bowl for Snickers and again in 2012 for M&M's.

David has won every major creative award in the world several times over. His BMW Films was made part of MoMA's permanent collection in New York City and won the first-ever awarded Titanium Lion at Cannes.

Before joining BBDO, David was President of Fallon Worldwide and Executive Creative Director of Fallon North America where he oversaw work for Citibank and BMW, among others.

Lubars’ Reel: <http://adsoftheworld.com/creative/david_lubars>

**IN THE MEDIA:**

***Advertising Age***

“Fallon’s David Lubars Leaps to BBDO”

June 10, 2004

NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- David Lubars, the president and chief creative officer of Publicis Groupe's [Fallon Worldwide](http://adage.com/directory/fallon-worldwide/167), is leaving to take the top creative job at Omnicom Group's [BBDO](http://adage.com/directory/bbdo/2) Worldwide, New York, where he will replace departed chairman and chief creative officer, Ted Sann.

**Big coup**  
The move is a big coup for BBDO. Mr. Lubars is seen by marketers and staff as a change agent, with a record for innovative, nontraditional marketing work. His recent credits include masterminding the celebrated BMW short-films project. One of his behind-the-scenes achievements for [Fallon](http://adage.com/directory/fallon/10) has been shifting compensation models to better reward the agency for its successful ideas.

Mr. Sann, the man Mr. Lubars replaces, has already left the agency, according to BBDO executives. He was a more traditional creative force, but nonetheless a stalwart at BBDO, which he joined in 1970 as a copywriter. Since then Mr. Sann has won 10 Gold Lions at Cannes.

"Ted has been responsible for some amazing work in his time at BBDO. We salute and thank him for this and wish him well," said Andrew Robertson, president-CEO of BBDO Worldwide.

Mr. Lubars has taken a strong global leadership role at Fallon, since joining in 1998 from BBDO, Los Angeles, and his departure is a blow for the Minneapolis-based agency.

**'The only job'**  
Mr. Lubars called the BBDO position "the only job I would leave Fallon for." He went on to say that part of the reason he is leaving is to return to a "company I really love and to go to New York and work" and "play on an international stage."

He wouldn't discuss his plans for BBDO. "The infrastructure is there and the people are there" to do great work.

Mr. Lubars is expected to stay through the summer. Agency Chairman Pat Fallon is expected to take a more active role in the agency until a replacement is found.

"This is not good news and this is not anything I wanted," Mr. Fallon said. "But we're very fortunate to be in great shape."

***New York Magazine***

“Little, Better, Yellow, Different In Gumbo America”

May 21, 2005

As advertising struggles in its latest crisis, David Lubars, BBDO’s new creative director, has a new, improved 99 44⁄100 percent pure strategy for saving it.

**T**he new creative director of the most prestigious big advertising agency in America is yelling into the telephone, making a case for one of his ads. No, not yelling. Keening is more like it, like a Beat poet who has somehow been trapped for years in button-downs and khakis, pretending to be an executive, and has suddenly been released. He didn’t plan this. He had called planning to talk about new media and old media and how half of America will have broadband by 2006 (“That’s a fact, not some futuristic bullshit”) and how the ad agencies that didn’t get it risked “getting flushed down the twentieth-century toilet.” But somehow, the big theory has fallen by the wayside and we have gotten to talking about a commercial by Fallon, the Minneapolis agency Lubars has just come from. It stars a guy wearing a sweat-stained undershirt under his torn, checkered Pendleton, sitting in a Barcalounger. The spot is supposed to promote Citibank’s identity-protection program; the guy in the Barcalounger has had his identity stolen. He is sprawled on the Barcalounger, holding a beer, but his voice is that of a Long Island teen queen who just spent $1,500 of his money on a leather bustier. But the commercial is not really about identity theft. It is about the guy on the Barcalounger. Advertising’s great comic characters—Wendy’s Clara Peller or FedEx’s fast-talking John Moschitta—are some of the great grotesques of the century. And the guy in the Barcalounger is one of the great grotesques of advertising, a big belch of a comic character. Like all great funny commercials, it’s counterintuitive. It shows a person who’s ugly, funny, and dumb, whose identity (like most of ours) is not really even worth stealing, and asks the viewer to identify with him.

So now David Lubars is trying to dissect how it is that a commercial can do that, and what comes out is, This is gumbo America. “It’s not just telling the truth about the product,” Lubars explains, “but showing an understanding of how things really are, not some glossed-up whatever.”

The reason that David Lubars found himself answering questions about truth and “the way things really are” is that in June, BBDO North America—an agency that Michael Patti, himself a former BBDOer and now creative director of Y&R, calls “the most American of ad agencies”—announced that at the end of the summer, Lubars would take over as BBDO’s creative director and chairman. Pepsi, General Electric, FedEx: BBDO’s client roster is a list of many of the great prestige accounts in the ad world, big advertisers with a history of high-profile, award-winning commercials.

Lubars is taking the job at a moment when advertising is in the midst of one of its periodic creative perturbations. Just as years ago advertisers realized that banging audiences over and over with a catchy tagline (“Ring Around the Collar”—the famous BBDO campaign for Wisk—never brought the detergent anywhere near its main competitor, Tide), ad agencies are currently overwhelmed with the suspicion that the language of contemporary ads—the catchy tagline, the celebrity put in a funny situation, the twist ending, even the TV commercial itself—doesn’t work like it used to. Ad-agency executives saw numbers that claimed to show that young beer-and-car-buying men were deserting television for the pleasures of PlayStation and online porn. They looked at Google, a company that became the star of the Internet while selling “ads” that consisted of nothing but three lines of text. They all got TiVo, and started talking about how they could TiVo the shows and TiVo past the commercials. And they sighed over the teenage kids, who just didn’t seem to care anymore about perfectly good, clever, glossy TV commercials. “How am I supposed to communicate with someone who is used to writing ‘I wnt2cu’?” asks noted adman Jerry Della Femina.

[READ MORE](http://nymag.com/print/?/nymetro/news/people/features/9946/)

***Ad Week***

“Q&A: BBDO’s David Lubars”

**NEW YORK** David Lubars, chairman and chief creative officer of BBDO North America, won his first Cannes Lion in the early 1990s for Polaroid while he was at Leonard/Monahan in Providence.  
  
Since then, the copywriter has won every major industry creative award including multiple Grand Prix Lions and four Emmy Awards. As president and executive creative director of Fallon Worldwide, Lubars was honored with Cannes' first Titanium Lion -- an award introduced in 2005 to celebrate groundbreaking work -- for the trailblazing online series BMW Films. Last year, BBDO's multimedia "HBO Voyeuer" was the big winner at Cannes, taking both the Outdoor and Promo Grand Prix Lions.   
  
Here, Lubars, who is president of this year's Cannes Film and Press juries, discusses the value of award shows in today's economy and what he expects from Cannes this year.  
  
**Adweek: Are awards even important considering the economic times we live in? Some people are saying that in this economy, Cannes and the other big shows are unnecessary "beauty contests."**  
   
Lubars: Well, there is a beauty contest element to it, sure, but that's a small part of what these shows are about in my view. Consider that in the past year, clients all over the world had to cut back massively. They had to accomplish more with way less. Logic follows that everything they created had to pop that much more and be that much more of a punch in the face. In this light, you could view Cannes and other big shows as a primer on how to take the power of creativity out for a ride, press the pedal down, and see what it can do on a bumpy economic road. These good shows are the closest thing we'll ever have to measuring this kind of "pop." It's not an exact science, it never can be. But if a bunch of creative people who rarely agree on anything believe one piece stands out from thousands, it probably is working hard to get noticed.  
   
**Will this year's economic environment return Cannes back to basics?**  
   
The whole thing about this is to recognize brilliant work that pops out. It should be about studying and recognizing the best work. And what it became was a Euro beach version of Vegas. That's all fine, but the original charter of this show is to recognize brilliance and work that distinguishes itself, that doesn't pollute the culture [that epitomizes] all the best aspects of the industry, tries new things -- all those idealized things that we all shoot for. I'm going to be spending 12 days there doing this thing.  
  
**BBDO was the most awarded agency network in the world last year. To what do you attribute this success?**  
   
Well, that's an area where we believe we should consistently be No.1 every year. The cool thing about BBDO is, it's not just a few offices that are creating excellent work around the world. Last year, we had 20-plus BBDO agencies winning Lions and another 20-plus short-listed. The network has sort of become a global boutique, if you will. You have these great -- and for the most part, not huge -- agencies doing brilliant individual things. But you also have groups of them working together on cross-border things. Recently, we had 10 offices doing an international project with Gillette. It was inspiring; it was all about the work, not ego -- a thing of beauty.  
  
   
**You've enjoyed success at Fallon. Now BBDO. How do you shape an agency's culture?**  
   
It's not complicated. You meet [agency leaders] Andrew Robertson or Pat Fallon and you immediately connect: You believe an agency culture has to remain liquid, that you have to keep stirring it to prevent it from hardening into immoveable cement; you believe in constant improvement; you embrace and utilize the chaos that is an agency culture rather than try to tame it. You fail together sometimes, but you're fortunate to succeed much more. It's difficult. You're tired at the end of the day, but you're constantly refueled by the fact that you're creating things that contribute to the clients' success in important ways.  
   
I've only worked with a few agencies, and the decision to join them came down to the same question: Whether we all agreed that big ideas are economic multipliers for clients. It's not award-winning work so much as giving them big ideas. Yes, big ideas do win awards. But they don't always, which doesn't mean they're less big. You may remember the first year of BMW Films, it didn't win at Cannes, it was considered too "out there."  
   
**What about the fact that you were the most awarded creative director last year? Did it go to your head or change you in any way?**  
   
It didn't. Some years are good and some not as good. The permanence lies in keeping your head down and putting all your focus and concentration on giving clients the work they need. Everything else is artifice; there is nothing else.  
   
**You talk about the philosophy of keeping an agency culture out in front doing new things. You mentioned BMW. Other "new things" associated with you are HBO Voyeur and the Dodge Ram Challenge. How did you convince your clients to get those made?**  
   
All three happened exactly the same way. You had clients who wanted something new to crack the "cement" we talked about. And you had creative people, production people, account people, planners and everyone else who believed in a big idea and killed themselves to make it happen. By the way, Ram Challenge isn't winning as many awards as the other two did. I can't say why, but in my view that doesn't make it any less of a big idea.  
   
**How did last year's award run benefit BBDO and the network? What was, as they say, the ROI?**  
  
We believe in awards because it distinguishes us from our competitors. If you win a sports championship, forever you are the champ. Even if you do nothing else, it cannot be denied that you won the World Series. That's not the way it works in our industry. You are only as good as what you do now, that's why I don't get too worked up.   
   
**How do you follow up a year like that?**  
  
I don't think I'll be the dominant figure this year; I'll do fine, but that's not what it's about for me. However long the career is, it's about giving clients big ideas. It's not about award-winning work, but giving them big ideas that move their business. That's how you feel you are contributing to the economy.  
  
   
**How do you feel about presiding over the judging of the two oldest categories in the festival?**  
   
In 2006, I did the Titanium. That's about the new breakthrough -- and then there's the old stuff. Now it's getting so blurred. Film isn't necessarily 30 seconds. It's all overlapping. We're looking for the freshest things as well. Film is new again because you can do so many things with it.  
   
**How has Film changed?**  
  
In Titanium, films appeared in different ways and the Film category was about commercials. Now those things have blurred. It'll be interesting to see what happens in the Titanium; maybe it'll go into a whole new direction. It'll be interesting to see what kind of films we'll see and where it goes. I don't know what we'll see, but I have a feeling we'll see a lot of weird applications that we've never had before.  
   
**There was preliminary judging this year in Film?**  
  
There are so many entries, even though they are down. They sent them to the judges online to do a first weeding so when you get to Cannes it won't be the shortlist but a lot of the weaker material will have been weeded out.  
   
**How will you approach your role as jury president?**  
  
It's this simple and this difficult: We have one job, which is to recognize the most incredible, mind-blowing, beautiful, funny, provocative, moving, gripping work -- the stuff you look at and feel hate and envy. All I can be is my humblest, firmest, most honest, sincerest and best to make sure we focus on the right thing.  
   
**Everything is about 'engagement' these days. How will it play a part in judging Film and Print?**  
  
I've been singing this song for the last eight years. The polarity of what we do has shifted, from us sending the electricity out to them to them coming to us. It's got to be creative that people seek out since they can avoid it. If it's not seek-out creative, then it's probably not awesome. You know immediately if it's that, I want to send it to my friends. There's an element to it, you get vacuumed into it and you want to be part of that world.  
  
   
**HBO was honored across multiple categories last year. What does that say about the ways award shows are structured?**  
  
A campaign is the sum of all these different parts, which is what it used to be, a script surrounded by all these other things. Now they are so linked and one leads you to the other. It has to be this integrated overlapping thing.   
   
**What advice would you give young talent aspire to create award-winning work?**  
  
Especially this year, there will be lower attendance and the people who will be there will seriously be about that work. I would seek them out and study how that work popped. You can't learn creativity, but you can understand the inspiration. Concentrate a little less on drinking yourself legless.

**CNN MONEY**

“An 800-pound gorilla fights back”

May 9 2007

**David Lubars gave legendary ad agency BBDO an extreme makeover to pump life into a troubled business. Business 2.0 says his is the new model to beat on Madison Avenue.**

For an ad agency that once accidentally set Michael Jackson's hair on fire while shooting a TV commercial, this was pretty low-key stuff.

In a conference room at its New York headquarters, BBDO recently unveiled its latest creative effort on behalf of client [General Electric](http://money.cnn.com/quote/quote.html?symb=GE&source=story_quote_link) ([Charts](http://money.cnn.com/quote/chart/chart.html?symb=GE&source=story_charts_link), [Fortune 500](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/2007/snapshots/561.html?source=story_f500_link)): four short, whimsical films, each lasting a few minutes.

No celebrities, no slick Hollywood direction, no jingles -- no sales pitch at all. The films looked like shorts at an indie film festival, or something you'd stumble across on YouTube. And they were designed to run only on a video-on-demand cable channel and the GE website, meaning they'd be viewed by a tiny fraction of the audience that sees a typical prime-time commercial.

But that didn't stop GE ad director Judy Hu from beaming proudly during the screening. Nor did it faze David Lubars, BBDO's chairman and chief creative director for North America, who stood and introduced the films with a boast that could also be seen as a concession of sorts: "This is the new BBDO," Lubars told the gathering. "There is no medium we don't perform in."

[**The quest for the perfect online ad**](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/business2/business2_archive/2007/03/01/8401043/index.htm)

This is what things have come to on Madison Avenue: big agencies and their bigger clients trying their best to play "small ball," as million-dollar commercials give way to modest "content" made on shoestring budgets. It's a whole new game, with other big ad agencies, including [JWT](http://money.cnn.com/quote/quote.html?symb=WPPGY&source=story_quote_link) ([Charts](http://money.cnn.com/quote/chart/chart.html?symb=WPPGY&source=story_charts_link)) and Ogilvy & Mather, scrambling to adapt too. But no one is trying harder to reinvent itself than BBDO.

Known for decades as the swaggering king of the blockbuster commercial, BBDO was turned upside down in mid-2004 -- when, in a moment of TiVo-inspired panic, top management ousted much of its established New York leadership and brought in Lubars, the brash new creative talent. At his direction, BBDO began making hip-hop webisodes, pulling funky films off YouTube and turning them into ads, making billboards that responded to text-messaging, and thoroughly confusing New Yorkers by filling their streets with giant office supplies. (We'll explain later.)

It has all been very unorthodox and decidedly non-BBDO-ish. Yet it seems to have made the agency even more attractive to clients trying to navigate a strange and bewildering new-media landscape.

Since Lubars arrived and the agency declared itself reborn, new clients have poured in: [eBay](http://money.cnn.com/quote/quote.html?symb=EBAY&source=story_quote_link) ([Charts](http://money.cnn.com/quote/chart/chart.html?symb=EBAY&source=story_charts_link), [Fortune 500](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/2007/snapshots/457.html?source=story_f500_link)), Hertz, Mitsubishi, [Motorola](http://money.cnn.com/quote/quote.html?symb=MOT&source=story_quote_link) ([Charts](http://money.cnn.com/quote/chart/chart.html?symb=MOT&source=story_charts_link), [Fortune 500](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/2007/snapshots/907.html?source=story_f500_link)), Sony, [Target](http://money.cnn.com/quote/quote.html?symb=TGT&source=story_quote_link) ([Charts](http://money.cnn.com/quote/chart/chart.html?symb=TGT&source=story_charts_link),[Fortune 500](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/2007/snapshots/1310.html?source=story_f500_link)), and others, joining a blue-chip roster that already included Chrysler, [FedEx](http://money.cnn.com/quote/quote.html?symb=FDX&source=story_quote_link) ([Charts](http://money.cnn.com/quote/chart/chart.html?symb=FDX&source=story_charts_link), [Fortune 500](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/2007/snapshots/502.html?source=story_f500_link)), GE, and [PepsiCo](http://money.cnn.com/quote/quote.html?symb=PEP&source=story_quote_link)([Charts](http://money.cnn.com/quote/chart/chart.html?symb=PEP&source=story_charts_link), [Fortune 500](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/2007/snapshots/1033.html?source=story_f500_link)). More important, agency billings have jumped 35 percent to $4.6 billion, and revenue is up 24 percent to $637 million.

But in an ad market that seems to grow more uncertain and chaotic by the minute, BBDO hasn't yet proven that a big agency can survive in a small-media world. Doug Cameron of the up-and-coming Amalgamated agency, one of the growing number of smaller players poaching on Madison Avenue's turf, observes that giants like BBDO "have been around since the radio days and still have the initials of the dead founders on the door. Yet they're trying to convince people they're going to lead the way in the era of YouTube. I don't envy them that challenge."

[**5 Advertising startups to watch**](http://money.cnn.com/galleries/2007/biz2/0702/gallery.nextnet.biz2/16.html)

If Lubars, now 48, is at all ruffled by the tall task facing him at BBDO, it's difficult to tell the difference. He always has the look of someone who's just rolled out of bed: slightly unkempt with a nonchalant expression, though he talks rapid-fire as befits a Brooklyn native.

He seems to have the attention span of a gnat -- or maybe a 21st-century consumer. "He has this whole ADD thing going on, where he constantly jumps from one thing to the next," says Bruce Bildsten, who worked as a creative director with Lubars at the Minneapolis ad agency Fallon.

On a recent afternoon, as he and several collaborators prepped for a high-stakes new business pitch, Lubars was so relaxed that he draped his knees over the arm of his oversize easy chair and lay on his back facing the ceiling, like a baby in a cradle. His partners peppered him with ideas. One he liked because of its "strange weirdness"; another he wasn't sure about.

"Why not?" one of his creative lieutenants inquired. Lubars's answer: "I just feel it might ... suck a little bit."

Suffice it to say that's not how business has been done -- ever -- at this storied agency, which was formed in 1928 by a merger that united admen named Batten, Barton, Durstine, and Osborn. (Comedian Fred Allen once quipped that the four combined names sounded like a trunk tumbling down a flight of stairs.)

Always considered highly creative, BBDO was never known for its subtlety. Forty years ago the agency drove millions of TV viewers a little mad with its "Ring Around the Collar" jingle for Wisk detergent.

By the '80s and '90s, its specialty was churning out glitzy award-winning commercials for Pepsi and other big clients. BBDO, a division of the $11.4 billion holding company [Omnicom](http://money.cnn.com/quote/quote.html?symb=OMC&source=story_quote_link) ([Charts](http://money.cnn.com/quote/chart/chart.html?symb=OMC&source=story_charts_link),[Fortune 500](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/2007/snapshots/996.html?source=story_f500_link)), was adland's version of a Hollywood studio, with the attendant egos and infighting.

Agency veteran Bill Bruce recalls, "People said about BBDO back then, they don't stab you in the back -- they stab you right in front." Presiding over it all was creative director Ted Sann and a handful of other veterans who had turned making commercials into an enviable formula: Sign a big star (after Jackson, it was Madonna, then Britney, then Beyoncé), bring in top ad director Joe Pytka to shoot it, book the best prime-time or Super Bowl slots, and then count the money.

[**Lubars scores again with M&M's spoof**](http://blogs.business2.com/madisonavenuewest/2007/05/viewers_love_mm.html)

But when the ad world began to question the future of the 30-second commercial, BBDO found itself behind the curve. In mid-2004, Allen Rosenshine, chairman and CEO of BBDO Worldwide, decided to install Andrew Robertson, a 40-ish wunderkind who'd shot to the top at BBDO's U.K. office, as the new CEO in New York.

Robertson's mandate was to modernize the New York flagship. "BBDO needed to refocus," Robertson says. Its emphasis on buying and filling prime-time slots was becoming outdated because, according to Robertson, "in the digital era, you can't just buy people's attention anymore. You must engage them." To do that, Robertson says, he needed a forward-thinking creative partner. "And I wanted David Lubars to be that partner."

Lubars had done a short stint in the early 1990s as a creative director of BBDO's West Coast office. But he was best known for his work at Fallon, where in 2001 he helped create a series of short Web films for BMW. Called "The Hire," the series was hailed as a model of "branded content": It wove cinematic stories around the car-as-star and drew high traffic to BMW's website. Thanks in part to "The Hire," Lubars was seen as a cutting-edge creative director.

When Robertson approached him, Lubars saw it as a challenge: "I felt, if you can go into the bowels of a huge New York agency and help it change," he says, "that can be historic shit." He took the job -- and then all hell broke loose at Hollywood East.

Sann, the incumbent creative director, was blindsided. "He came back from a big Pepsi meeting and got whacked," says Tom Hollerbach, a former BBDO executive. The aftershocks were felt throughout the ad business, especially when, a few months later, Sann's longtime working partners at Pepsi seemed to retaliate against BBDO by pulling a $33 million chunk of Diet Pepsi advertising from the agency.

While Pepsi executives insisted the move was strictly business, the ad trade publications saw it differently: "It was personal," *Ad Age* declared.

[**Madison Avenue's do-it-all startup**](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/business2/business2_archive/2007/02/01/8398979/index.htm)

But in came the frenetic Lubars, on a mission to get BBDO's creative staffers, many in their 40s and 50s, to think outside the traditional channels. He kept pushing them to look for, in his words, "ideas that are the most horizontal" --meaning concepts that can work on TV, in print, on the Web, maybe even on a street corner. This was a rude awakening for ad people trained to think of 30-second TV skits; they had to cast a wider net for ideas and learn to work in unfamiliar media formats.

Many were shaken by Sann's firing. "The feeling was that if you could get rid of Ted, then no one was safe," one insider recalls.

Lubars played it smart, gradually transitioning himself during the first few months, shuttling between his old agency and the new one. "The most calming thing David did was to slowly adjust the agency rather than whacking through the halls right away," says Susan Credle, one of BBDO's executive creative directors.

Lubars also tried to keep things light and breezy: He rented school buses and a mid-town movie theater one day and took the gang to a showing of *Team America*. He also removed Sann's office door and replaced it with a glass one ("a very symbolic gesture," says one BBDO staffer). And he roamed the halls and talked to everyone -- another contrast to Sann, who'd tended to keep to his inner circle.

But during those early months, Lubars wasn't just making nice; he was taking stock. "I saw people here who were anxious for change and were just waiting to be liberated from the old way of doing things," he says. "But there were also people who made it clear they weren't going to buy into change, or that they couldn't change."

In early 2005, the other shoe dropped: Lubars laid off 17 creatives, including longtime veterans. One source close to the agency describes the cuts as "particularly brutal, because it involved people who'd been loyal to BBDO for years."

The layoffs were softened by generous payouts, though in exchange the departed had to keep quiet and sign noncompete agreements; several high-profile staffers vanished overnight from the business. Some of them, including Sann, who were contacted for this article would not comment. A few clients known to be loyal to Sann, including Visa and Doritos, also abandoned BBDO in the aftermath.

Despite the turmoil, Lubars wound up keeping more than 80 percent of the department, and he promoted soft-spoken veteran Bill Bruce to be his chief creative officer. He filled the gaps by bringing in a wave of new talent, some from smaller creative agencies outside New York, such as Fallon and Portland's Wieden & Kennedy (famous for Nike's "Just Do It" ads).

The agency also beefed up its interactive arm, created a new in-house design group, and modernized its consumer research department.

It took a while for the changes to show up in BBDO's ads; during his first year and a half, Lubars was busy restructuring, melding the old and new people, and getting pulled into new-business pitches. Meanwhile, existing clients waited anxiously to see if Lubars would live up to the hype. GE's Hu says, "He came in telling us, 'We're going to help you find great new ways of communicating,' and my reaction was 'OK, show me the money.' Then he came back with 'One Second Theater.' It was different from anything I'd seen before."

Lubars's idea was to take on TiVo by co-opting it. The agency made a series of commercials that had embedded images -- advertising Easter eggs, if you will --squeezed into a single one-second frame of each commercial. These images could be seen only by freezing the ad on a TiVo or other DVR and then advancing, frame by frame, through the embedded material (which consisted of pictures and text, a kind of slide show tucked inside a commercial).

BBDO hyped the ads at the start of the program so viewers would know to look for the bonus material, which, in the case of one ad, told the humorous behind-the-scenes story of the ad's main character, Elli the elephant.

[**The rise of Web TV**](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/business2/business2_archive/2007/03/01/8401044/index.htm)

Hu was thrilled with the campaign because it encouraged viewers to engage with GE's ads instead of ignoring or zapping them. In fact, viewers spent an average of three times longer with the enhanced commercials. In the past year, other advertisers have begun to embed material in their ads too, but "One Second Theater," which debuted in May 2006, was at the fore-front. (A second wave of the commercials began airing in February of this year.)

"BBDO is nimble even though it's big," Hu says. "I feel like I'm working with a creative hot shop."

The agency had similar success last year with a series of four-minute webisodes produced for Snickers that blended elements of comic books, videogames, and movies and drew an average of 12,000 unique visitors a day to the Snickers homepage.

By December, BBDO was moving heavily into user-generated content. For the Mountain Dew spinoff drink MDX, the agency got the rights to a couple of wildly popular homemade Web films on YouTube, then reedited the videos by inserting the agency's own brain-teasing twist. And Lubars gave good old M&M's candy a digital makeover by enabling website visitors to create M&M's characters in their own likeness. That, too, proved to be a hit, generating a flood of traffic.

Lubars has also been injecting fresh energy into that most staid of advertising platforms, the billboard, by making it more interactive. One, for BBC America, accepted cell-phone text messages from passersby, who could vote on -- and actually change -- the content on the billboard.

BBDO also suspended magician David Blaine in midair in Times Square to promote Target's annual two-day sale last fall. And to call attention to the merger of FedEx and Kinko's, the agency planted giant, lifelike facsimiles of office supplies on the streets of Manhattan and other cities. Stunts like these, Lubars argues, can generate outsize bang for the buck; in an age of cell-phone cameras and YouTube uploads, a compelling outdoor gimmick will be photographed, posted online, and shared.

[**Bringing 30-second spots to mom and pops**](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/business2/business2_archive/2007/03/01/8401040/index.htm)

All of this is just the beginning of where Lubars wants to take BBDO's advertising. The agency is helping to redesign a clothing line for one client and getting ready to debut a prime-time network television series this summer for another. When Lubars talks about the wide-open possibilities of life beyond TV, he can sound like a kid in a candy shop -- he has so many options now, he almost doesn't know which to choose.

Making little Web films and orchestrating sidewalk stunts may be what marketers need these days. But small ball is in some ways a step down for the big agencies. It's not as glamorous as making star-studded commercials, and it doesn't seem likely to be as lucrative.

For one thing, it invites more competition from all sides, and especially from below. Anyone can play in this game, right down to a teenager with a webcam. As the industry moves away from slick, big-budget commercials, it opens the door for homemade ads by consumers (who helped make commercials for several of this year's Super Bowl advertisers, including one BBDO client).

And it levels the field for "all those small agencies that are eating more and more of the big agencies' lunch," says Joseph Jaffe, president of the marketing firm Crayon and author of *Life After the 30-Second Spot*.

Clients increasingly have been turning over experimental ad projects and new-media ventures to creative boutiques, interactive-only shops, and guerrilla-marketing specialists like New York-based Interference, which was behind the disastrous light-box stunt for Cartoon Network in February. "The real threat to the big agencies," says Emily Riley, an advertising analyst at Jupiter-Research, "is from smaller, specialized, and highly creative agencies that tend to be on top of trends and are good at interacting with consumers."

Even BBDO's oldest, most faithful clients recognize they have more alternatives now. For decades Pepsi's marketing focused on big-budget commercials made by BBDO, but its newest brand campaign, unveiled early this year, downplays big commercials in favor of custom-designed soda cans, consumer-created billboards, and a passel of funky websites.

Lubars would love to tackle all of this, but Pepsi has turned to outside design and Web specialists for much of the work. Meanwhile, GE, which has praised Lubars's new-media acumen, isn't putting all its eggs in his basket either; Hu employs a handful of small interactive agencies alongside BBDO because, she says, "in the new-media environment, ideas come from all over, and you want to be able to take advantage of that."

[**Online ads find new landscapes**](http://money.cnn.com/2007/02/12/magazines/business2/virtual_mapping.biz2/index.htm)

Heightened competition isn't the only problem. Small ball may well translate into a downsized bottom line.

Clients, of course, are eager to scale back on the exorbitant costs of TV commercials in heavy rotation. But those big-media billings were the lifeblood of the big agencies. In its commercial-making heyday, BBDO took a 15 percent commission based on the cost of airing commercials; if the agency had a dozen spots on the Super Bowl, as it did in Sann's time, BBDO could net several million dollars in one afternoon -- and would make millions more for as long as the commercials ran on TV.

Now the agency, like everybody else in advertising, gets paid a relatively flat fee for its creations, based on a complex formula that includes costs, labor, and various negotiable built-in incentives. To make up for the loss of the old 15 percent premium, Robertson and Lubars are lobbying clients to tie their compensation directly to a campaign's performance and sales results.

Robertson says he'd like to be paid based on, say, the amount of time consumers spend with BBDO-generated content, and he wouldn't mind getting an ownership stake in that content either. "I see us moving in that direction," he says. But it's a battle that BBDO and others have yet to win, and it could ultimately determine whether shrunken advertising is financially feasible for big agencies.

For the time being, however, Lubars's arrival has buoyed the agency's fortunes, primarily because he's helped to lure in so many curious new clients. Indeed, with the makeover, BBDO seems to have done for itself precisely what it did for so many clients' brands through the years: hired a fresh face, made a compelling pitch, and gotten people to sample the new, improved version.