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Amy Salzman

By Louisa J. Curtis



This month we are switching things up a little and interviewing Art Buyer/Producer Amy Salzman. I met Amy a couple of years ago when she participated in one of my panel events and we hit it off right away. Since that time, she has contributed on a couple more of my panels, including one where she literally "saved the day" by stepping in at the very last minute when one of my panelists had to cancel. I remember she had literally just got off a plane but bless her she still did it. So not only is she a very fun, genuine and informative person, she is also very dependable. When we first met, Amy was an Art Buyer at McCann Erickson, which is now the McCann World Group. Falling under that same umbrella is William Morris Endeavor Entertainment, where Amy is currently Senior Art Producer, working exclusively on the Almay and Revlon accounts.

I asked Amy how she had become an art buyer in the first place, especially as no one really goes to school to become an art buyer and she said, *"It was sheer luck! I was an advertising major, and I knew that I wanted to work for an ad agency, but back then you had to take a typing test and I didn't make the required 55 words a minute! The position of Art Buyer was new in those days and I liked people and math, so it was a perfect fit for me. The "creativity" was also intriguing to me."* And when I asked her what she liked best about her job, the word came up again. *"Witnessing the creativity,"* she said. *"I am not a Creative Director myself, so I enjoy witnessing the creativity. I also enjoy having interactions with all different sorts of people, from the clients, to the reps, the photographers and the creatives. I also enjoy the fact that it is always changing - sometimes you are starting a job, sometimes ending it, every day is different."* And when I asked her what she liked least about her job, without hesitation it was, *"Filing and paperwork!" I think I'm with her on that one!*

Having worked in the industry for a number of years now, I asked Amy how she felt the photography industry had changed (besides the obvious things like digital) and what current trends should photographers be aware of. She spoke first from her "mathematical" side by saying, *"Budgets have been cut and there is less of a need for traditional print photography. Now it is more for online and interactive usage as well as social media. And photographers have to learn the Red camera and video! They have to re-educate as to how to market and promote themselves and learn how to do motion stills and video. Photographers need to go outside of the more traditional photography and think outside of the box. Even change your name, if you are older, give yourself a new identity and re-brand!"*

With regards to photographer marketing and self-promotions, I asked Amy for her recommendations. *"A single promo piece, we still like something to hold in our hands, and make sure you have your contact information on it! The images should be in good taste and represent what you do. Don't send too many emails, because sometimes it is about the "timing" so every other month is good, maybe 4 promos a year?"* And when I asked if she has any "pet peeves" when it comes to promotions, she said, *"When they are not focused or targeted, especially now as I am just working on beauty accounts. Know who you are promoting to, do the research."* I asked Amy if she uses the Social Networking sites for business or just personal networking? *"Both,"* she said. *"You have to be out there to remind people you are there. I don't search for talent on Facebook, nor do I do use Flickr to look for imagery but once I know you or have worked with you, then I would check in with you on Facebook."*

I asked Amy where she goes to find new talent? *"Panels, portfolio reviews, industry events, but I don't have so much time for gallery shows. Sometimes I use older methods to find talent, but most of my research is done online. I like to check in with my roster of photo agents, primarily because a photographer who is not represented might not get back to me straight away and here in New York, everything happens in a nanosecond! Time is everything, so can you pull it together in a week? It's all about the trust factor and can you shoot on Friday? The 80s were a great time for the photo reps and they made a lot of money. It was all about the personal touch. There was more time for everything back then and the unrep'd photographers still had a chance. Now it is better to have a rep. There are fewer agencies, less buyers and no time to meet with anyone. Oh yes, and I hate that line, "I'm in from out of town..." I might meet with a photographer if they were recommended or as a favor for someone."*

I just want to add here that this may sound harsh to the photographers out there without representation. Art Buyers are very busy and as Amy said, they have less time than ever before to turn a job around. And we also know that there are not enough reps for all of the photographers out there. Having said that, this does not mean that a photographer without a rep cannot be successful. I could name plenty of them, but one thing they have obviously mastered, besides taking great images, is the ability to efficiently manage their business so that the Art Buyer trusts them. And if dealing with the business side is not their area of expertise or preference, then they have someone else in-house handling it for them.

I also asked Amy what is she looking for when seeking out new talent? *"Photographers who think outside of the box! Back in the 80s it was all done traditionally, with hand-drawn layouts, the Black Book and so on. Now, you have to nail "visually" what the agency is looking for. You have to have the right look and feel and at the same time bring something else to the party. Perhaps it is in the photographer's treatment, or the ideas that he/she brings to the table. They need to be intriguing, have a good attitude and figure out how to separate themselves for the rest of the pack, however that is. It takes an extra thought process and requires collaboration, rather than looking for someone else to be accountable and to give the answers."* I also asked for her favorite photographer(s) but she emphatically replied, *"No-one! My favorite is whoever is right for the job!"*

And last but not least we have the **ChatterDozen** quick questions:

- 1) What is the funniest moment you can recall from a photo shoot? *"We were casting for breath-freshening Dentyne Gum and needed couples kissing. We had to ask them all to make out in front of us and it was very strange, almost uncomfortable having to watch, it felt very voyeuristic!"*
- 2) What would you do if you weren't an Art Buyer? *"I'd be a Guidance Counselor for a Middle School, a mentor. I really like to help kids."*
- 3) What is your favorite TV show? *"All of the Housewives, Sex in the City, Reality TV. I also loved Curb your Enthusiasm and the Sopranos. I like to see other people's drama rather than my own, and it makes good coffee-talk chatter! I like to keep up with the news."*
- 4) What was the last movie you saw? *"Julie and Julia, and I am scheduled to see Toy Story 3 with my kids. I like Disney."*
- 5) When is your birthday? *"June 19th, I was born on Father's Day".* So Amy is a Gemini and if you know anything at all about this sign of the zodiac, then you will know that one of the reasons why they identify with children is because they are big kids themselves! And if she wasn't an Art Buyer, remember she said she would be mentoring kids. And the very fact that she admitted she loves math, people and coffee-talk chatter demonstrates her Gemini nature.
- 6) Who (dead or alive) do you admire? *"My Grandmother (my mother's mother). She was an independent, hard-working city woman. She was a milliner and made hats. She lived to be 101 and always had great stories and I spent a lot of time with her."*
- 7) If you could be born in another period of history, when would that be? *"In the future, 50 years from now. I already know what was there in the past, so I want to know what I don't know yet. What are they wearing in the future? Are we all working from home? How will we be communicating and is what we are hearing about now going to happen?"*
- 8) If you could get on a plane tomorrow, where would you fly to and why? *"Paris. I've never been."*
- 9) What is your favorite food? *"Sushi. I like to share with people."*
- 10) And your favorite color? *"Blue."*
- 11) How about your favorite animal? *"Dog, but I don't have one right now."*
- 12) If I handed you an Oscar, whom would you be thanking in your acceptance speech? *"Joanne Decarlo. She was the head Art Buyer at Saatchi and my mentor. She was the one who really started me out in my career."*

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