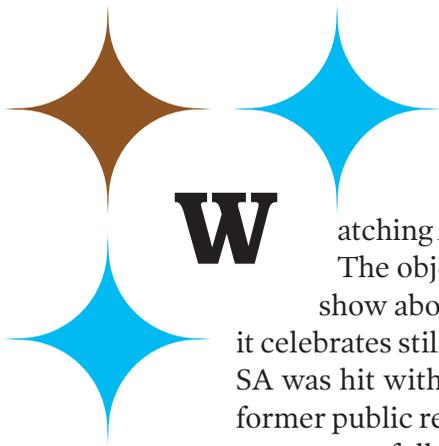




# madwomen



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atching *Mad Men* can be a little like using your car's side-view mirrors: The objects in them may be closer than they appear. Although the hit show about ad men is set 50 years ago, some of the retrograde attitudes it celebrates still hang over the industry. Last winter, France's Publicis Groupe SA was hit with a \$100-million gender-bias lawsuit by one of the company's former public relations executives who alleged that she and two other women were wrongfully dismissed after returning from maternity leave. For some, the incident recalled a speech in 2005 by an apparently tone-deaf Neil French, then worldwide creative director of WPP Group, in which he suggested that women tend to fall behind because they too often choose motherhood over career.

Still, the speech cost French his job—proof that the industry is catching up with the times. And despite lingering sexism, a growing number of women are grabbing the reins of Canada's ad agencies, an industry with an annual economic impact of \$15 billion per year. Here are six of this country's mad women who are making changes from the top.

by Simon Houpt

photographs by  
Henrieta Haniskova



## Sunni Boot

CEO, ZenithOptimedia Canada

*Boot oversees about 150 people in Toronto and Montreal who place approximately \$500 million in advertising for clients that include L'Oréal, General Mills Canada and Hasbro.*

**Why she's the boss:** *Although media buyers—the singularly talented people who figure out exactly where and when to place ads for maximum effectiveness—tend to stay in the background, the charmingly no-nonsense Boot has been a very public advocate for the industry.*

◆ In 1998, when Publicis Inc. purchased Optimedia from FCB, Boot admits she panicked, worrying that no clients would follow her from her old parent company to the new shop, ZenithOptimedia Canada.

"I didn't think we'd have anybody," she recalls. But within 60 days, she had secured \$80 million in client billings—a testament to her tenacity.

It's hard to believe, but when Boot got her first job

in the mid-1960s at Toronto's Ronalds-Reynolds ad agency, office departments were sharply determined by gender roles. The media department, though, was the realm of women—in part because it wasn't seen as important compared to the other departments. And there were lots of reasons to admire the gals she worked with. "Ad men had nothing on the ad women of the time," Boot recalls nostalgically. "They were very attractive, well-groomed women. They

smoked cigarettes, they had long painted fingernails, they had diamonds in their ears."

Somehow, the women carried it off despite subsisting on a salary Boot estimates was between 60% and 80% less than any of the men. When she landed in management and heard the excuses that were being offered up for the income disparity—like, "She's married; her husband has a salary"—"I was appalled." In time, she helped usher in an era of equality. "Absolutely, I take some pride in that."

## Nancy Vonk (left) & Janet Kestin

Co-Chief Creative Directors, Ogilvy & Mather Toronto

**Why they're the bosses:** *They oversaw a large part of Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty, which continues to challenge the psychological toll on young girls and women wrought by the cosmetics and fashion industries.*

◆ Kestin & Vonk are like Lennon & McCartney: Sure, they're talented on their own, but working together has produced a rare alchemy. Since pairing up 20 years ago on an assignment for Unilever's Dove that increased sales by 73% over a four-year period—and also blunted the entry of a major

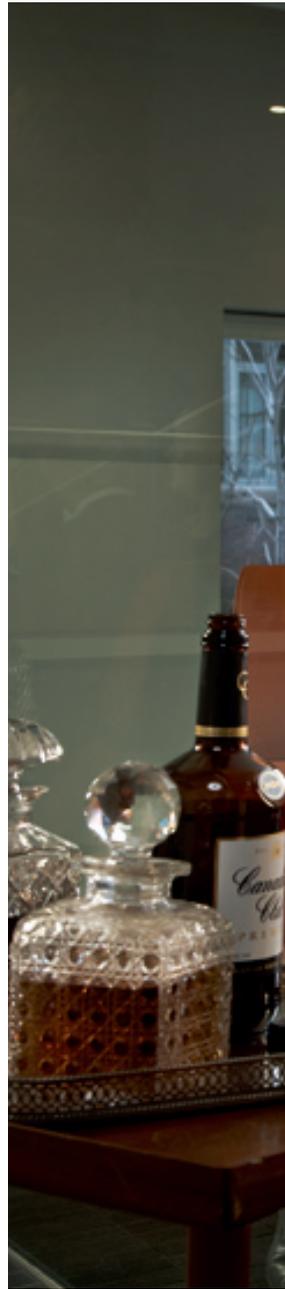
competitor into the market—the pair has won fistfuls of awards for their work on the brand.

They've also been brave critics of the gender status quo. "If women aren't fairly represented in the workforce broadly, and certainly in my world, business is depriving itself of half the great thinkers available," argues Kestin. "It's like having a whole side of your body that doesn't work."

If Kestin is a role model, it's probably as much for how she has bent the job to fit other demands in her life, like her family. "As a woman, I think you do need to make your own rules

to some degree—whether that's the hours you work, or to work in a partnership—whatever works for you. I think you kind of have to create it because there isn't a precedent, really."

Vonk believes their work for Dove helped nudge the world forward—slightly. "I'd never be so egotistical to think that our team has changed the world," she says. "We certainly haven't solved a problem. But am I really happy to say the world is a little bit different, thanks to some of our work? Yeah, I think we have helped to make a difference."





**Jill Nykoliotion**  
President, Juniper Park

Since opening in 2007, the Toronto agency co-founded by Nykoliotion has grown from a staff of six to just shy of 100.

**Why she's the boss:** Juniper Park created Virgin Mobile Canada's "Membership" program, which gives customers insider access to special promotions such as Katy Perry concerts and discounts at H&M.

◆ Nykoliotion took an unusual route to agency leadership, moving from retail banking to a nearly 11-year stint at Kraft. At the packaged goods giant, she created a hugely successful

program that established a direct relationship with consumers through initiatives like the launch of its *What's Cooking* recipe magazine and a regular e-mail newsletter. After

two years as a partner at the agency Grip Ltd., the chance to build Juniper Park came along. Partnering with three creatives, Nykoliotion seized the opportunity.

"The fact that I've worked on the client side—I speak 'client'—is more differentiating than me being a woman," she says. "We have a number of client-side people on our team, and that allows us to go further up into the client organization.

We can understand what they're thinking, what the implications of some decisions are."

Maybe because she only began working as head of an ad agency six years ago, Nykoliotion says she's never seen any inequality in the industry. Still, she sees herself as a role model for young women. "Gender should not matter. I hope I'm a role model for young men in the industry as well."

## Judy John

CEO and Chief Creative Officer, Leo Burnett Canada

Oversees about 160 employees in Toronto and Montreal

**Why she's the boss:** Leo Burnett forged a strong bond between the Moosehead-owned James Ready Beer and drinkers with its campaign asking fans to help "Keep our beer a buck."

◆ John laughs now when she thinks about how unprepared she was for her first job interview, in 1990—she followed a creative director around the

office on his daily rounds, as he shot her occasional questions for which she had no good answers.

But something about her enthusiasm impressed him. Still finishing up a degree at Centennial College, she landed a position as the first creative intern at then-superhot agency Chiat\Day's Toronto office.

After six weeks in the print traffic department, she spent seven weeks in creative, where she wrote her first ad—a point-of-purchase poster for Nissan (on how

to back up a car) that was honoured at The One Show, a prestigious New York-based awards show.

She joined Leo Burnett in 1999 as chief creative officer, and though she took on the CEO role in March, she says she remains "a tortured creative" at heart. "I pretty much hate everything I do, probably the week after I did it," she chuckles.

After it goes out the door, "I think, 'Oh, I would have just changed one thing...'"





## Jane Hope

Vice-Chair, Taxi



Helps lead  
more than  
360 people

across seven offices,  
including two in Toronto  
and one in Montreal, as well  
as outposts in Amsterdam  
and Vancouver, with more  
expansion in the works.

**Why she's the boss:** She's  
one of the brains behind the  
creation of the Telus brand.

◆ If the industry is conservative, Jane Hope understands (though doesn't excuse) it: "In the advertising and marketing business, we trade in clichés—that's the fastest way to communicate a message. So [in a commercial] a sommelier has to be French, the bouncer at a bar has to be a huge muscular guy," she notes. "Sometimes I wonder if we fall into the same sorts of role-playing."

When Hope graduated from Concordia University with a bachelor of fine arts in the mid-1980s, she didn't believe her father when he told her she'd never get a job. "Of course, it was true," she says. Eventually, she started doing fashion illustrating for the Bay in Montreal, which led to a job at Cossette. In 1992, she and Paul Lavoie left Cossette to open Taxi, which was founded on the premise of what they called "holistic brand creative"—that is, disciplines like design, digital and creative all working together.

Which is partly why she's not a fan of legislating diversity in the industry. "We're talking about gender diversity, but I think diversity in all its forms is more and more the norm. I'm not just talking about culture and gender, but about the world that we live in that is open-source, cross-platform." 