

## Foote, Cone and Belding: Hollywood Powerhouse

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*This presentation analyzes the work of Foote, Cone and Belding (FCB) in Hollywood during the late 1940s by drawing primarily on the papers of Don Belding at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, the David O. Selznick archive of the University of Texas at Austin, the published writings of Fairfax Cone, and reports in motion picture trade papers of the period. While Belding's papers have not been discussed much by scholars, they offer a richly detailed view of the internal workings of a successful agency in this period and illustrate the strategies it employed during an era when the relationships among radio, television and film companies were changing rapidly. Short case studies of FCB's work for individual clients such as David Selznick illustrate the distinctive strategies the firm developed in this era.*

*As John McDonough notes in his entry on the firm in The Encyclopedia of Advertising, Foote, Cone and Belding succeeded the Lord & Thomas agency when that agency's founder Albert Lasker retired in 1942 and turned the company's assets over to three other executives: Emerson Foote in the New York office, Fairfax Cone in Chicago, and Don Belding in Los Angeles (2003, 600). Over the next few years the agency contributed to the war effort by crafting public service commercials that stressed conservation, including commercials for the U.S. Forest Service that featured their still-enduring creation, Smokey the Bear. Like other agencies of the time, FCB was challenged to reinvent itself after the war. After it chose to give up its largest account, American Tobacco, in March 1948 FCB focused on emerging consumer products such as Toni home permanents and the Kleenex pocket pack. The three executives who oversaw its launch eventually moved to other firms, and Foote, Cone, Belding itself reorganized and was eventually acquired by the Interpublic Group (McDonough 601-603).*

*Like J. Walter Thompson and Young & Rubicam, FCB opened offices in Hollywood during the late 1930s to support its clients who sponsored radio programs. In the late 1940s FCB clients sponsored programs starring Bob Hope, Jack Benny, and Jack Paar. Inter-office memos from the Belding archive detail the organizational structure of the company's west coast office and the men assigned to handle these accounts. General Manager C. Burt Oliver oversaw the legal aspects of talent, time and program contracts; Production Supervisor Albert L. Capstaff*

*supervised day-to-day production activities of programs such as the "Bob Hope Show"; Victor Hunter scouted new talent for both the Los Angeles operations and the firm's New York and Chicago offices; Hilliard Marks produced the Jack Benny show; and Arnold Maguire worked as West Coast Television Director as well as producing spots for motion picture companies (Ballin 1947). Records from this period provide a detailed picture of how this west coast agency managed the radio programs it sponsored. I will contrast FCB's methods with those employed by Young & Rubicam, in whose archive I carried out my Gallup research.*

*Yet the late 1940s and early 1950s was also a time of transition in advertising, when television replaced radio as the dominant broadcast medium and when motion picture studios diversified into other areas in the wake of the 1948 Paramount decree that effectively ended the system of vertical integration that had characterized Hollywood since the late 1920s. Belding's memos of the early 1950s illustrate the instability of the agency's Hollywood branch; one piece of correspondence from 1951 notes that 111 people moved through the Hollywood office in a ten year period (Cone 1951). It was sometimes difficult to define individual responsibilities in this shifting terrain and to remain flexible in the face of changing technologies, rapidly shifting audience tastes, and client demands (Oliver 1954). Memos explore ways to structure assignments to maintain efficiency in the firm's west coast offices while also meeting the needs of its related corporate offices in Chicago and New York. Flow charts and internal reports explain the various methods FCB used to keep up with these changes in the advertising industry while keeping a high level of service for its existing clients.*

*In addition to its television work, FCB also handled advertising campaigns for several Hollywood producers, such as Samuel Goldwyn for The Best Years of Our Lives and David Selznick for Duel in the Sun (Cone 1969, 176). Although the documentation of this work in the Belding archive is sparse, I will piece together an outline of FCB's approach from my research in the Selznick archive at the University of Texas at Austin and from trade papers of the period. Don Belding also undertook an anti-Communist campaign for RKO Radio Pictures during the blacklist period of the late 1940s, and my analysis of this project will serve as a means of considering his views on the social and political role of advertising.*

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*In this paper, then, I hope to contribute to the excellent discussions of the CHARM conference by reviving interest in Foote, Cone and Belding; by analyzing its role in the media environment of the 1940s and 1950s; and by uncovering its founders' view of the social role of advertising.*

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## REFERENCES

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