

BECOMING A MADMAN

Hello there, my name is Bud Caddell. I'm a Strategist at the New York based digital think-tank, Undercurrent. On Twitter, I'm also known as Bud Melman, a mailroom clerk at Sterling Cooper Advertising in 1962.

What follows is an inside look into the recent Mad Men on Twitter phenomenon, and what it means for the future of media and entertainment.

We've been called obsessives.¹ We've been described as running amok.² You should just consider us fans.

But that isn't where our story begins.

As the second season of AMC's period drama Mad Men, a show centered around advertising professionals in the early 60's, was "shedding viewers at an alarming rate"³ and was at an all-time low among adults age 18-49, a curious phenomenon was being birthed on the web. The characters were coming to life. On the blog platform Tumblr.com, Don Draper, Roger Sterling, Joan Holloway, and Pete Campbell began doling out advice to fans:

*Dear Don Draper, how do I handle a passive-aggressive co-worker?
"Tell that punk to find a cardboard box, put all his things in it and get out of here."⁴*

*Dear Joan Holloway, what do you think of the institution of marriage?
"Who wants to be institutionalized?"⁵*

¹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2008/sep/01/internet.blogging>

² http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/sep2008/tc2008096_785921.htm

³ http://www.nypost.com/seven/08202008/tv/starr_report_125206.htm

⁴ <http://whatwoulddondraperdo.tumblr.com/page/10>

⁵ <http://whatwouldjoando.tumblr.com/page/2>

Like the show itself, these blog posts were engaging because of how well they were written, but unlike the show which existed only on television (or television's digital distribution platforms), these characters were popping up in an unexpected place. And while suddenly, the disembodied voice of a 1960's advertising lion spoke in a very web 2.0 way, he was for all intents and purposes, still Don Draper.

Then came Twitter

Twitter is considered a micro-blogging platform, where people broadcast and exchange information with others in short 140 character mouthfuls. People who use Twitter are called 'twitterers' and their expressions, or updates, are called 'tweets.' In order for one user to keep up with another user's messages, they can choose to 'follow' (or subscribe) to one another. Some users have these messages sent directly to their mobile phones, others play solely on the web. If Twitter seems somewhat amorphous it is because at its core, it's simply a bit of technology. Technology itself only influences behavior (here it limits the length of a single statement), but humans use technology in as many and varied ways as suits them. So for some, Twitter is a tool for marketing.⁶ For others, Twitter is a powerful form of citizen journalism.⁷ For a small group of engaged fans of Mad Men, Twitter became a tool for expressing their fandom.



In early August, Don Draper began twittering.



Unlike the Tumblr.com advice columns, Twitter allowed other fans of the show to directly engage with Don, to have a conversation and to subscribe to his updates. Within a matter of days, over 3,000 users of Twitter were following Don's updates⁸ and Don Draper was suddenly one of the most followed users on Twitter. Fans of the show could now interact with the drama in an entirely new way. While Don, by himself, represented a new variation on fan engagement and content consumption, he was not alone. Within a matter of tweets, Don was joined by a large portion of the show's characters. Peggy Olson, Pete Campbell, Betty Draper, Roger Sterling, and a dozen or so others began tweeting amongst themselves and fans on Twitter. Most profiles saw the same sudden

⁶ <http://pistachioconsulting.com/>

⁷ <http://www.alleyinsider.com/2008/11/mumbai-citizen-journalist-s-twitter-flickr-and-wordpress>

⁸ http://spreadsheets.google.com/pub?key=pLJY-KHKZGH9F8_LShvH7Cg

explosion of followers as Don's had. All told, they wielded a massive following of Mad Men fans on Twitter.



To understand why Twitter as a platform was such a success for Mad Men is to understand the make-up of Twitter's community. From its inception, Twitter has been championed by advertisers and marketers. Twitter first demonstrated its mass value in 2007 during the interactive portion of South By Southwest⁹, an Austin based conference on new media and marketing trends. Mad Men, as it explores a changing America and advertising in the early 60's, in many ways echos the shifts in advertising and marketing we see today. The show was an instant hit among today's Madison Avenue executives.¹⁰ The advertising trade publication Advertising Age even created a special mock issue¹¹ in reference to the series. Mad Men on Twitter was the perfect confluence of the right content finding the right environment of fans.

It's all fun and games until someone calls the lawyer

In these first weeks, many bloggers lauded AMC and their digital advertising, Deep Focus, as brilliant marketers for extending the characters from the show into Twitter. This advertising strategy can be called transmedia planning¹², the notion that elements of a story are told through different mediums to generate word of mouth. If done well, fans are compelled to follow and collect these separate pieces and assemble them into their own, unique story. Moreover, communities begin to form when individuals come together and share pieces of the story with one another, exchanging information as social currency. While the characters of Mad Men on Twitter were accomplishing this rare feat, this was not a brand or agency sanctioned use of those characters. Fans were actually behind it all.

What happened next still remains a murky picture. The Twitter profiles for nine of the Mad Men accounts were disabled¹³, including Don Draper, Joan Holloway, and Peggy Olson. After some time, Twitter revealed the takedowns were the result of DMCA notices sent to Twitter by AMC's lawyers. The DMCA, or the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, essentially protects the infringement of intellectual property or copyrights. AMC was in essence saying that they owned the characters from the show and that

⁹ http://blog.wired.com/monkeybites/2007/03/twitter_is_ruli.html

¹⁰ <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/23/business/media/23adcol.html>

¹¹ <http://www.adage-360media.com/adage360/madmen/>

¹² http://farisyakob.typepad.com/blog/2006/10/transmedia_plan.html

¹³ <http://venturebeat.com/2008/08/25/twitter-blacklists-mad-men-characters-some-of-them/>

ownership was being infringed upon by those fans (and only AMC, the owner of that intellectual property had the right to use the characters in that way). A few of the targeted characters didn't take a little thing like the threat of litigation lying down. Peggy Olson created a new account (Peggy_Olson) and continued tweeting:

I worked hard. I did my job. But the boys at Twitter are just as churlish as the boys at Sterling Cooper. Such a pity that they're so petty.

The creators of these accounts were not the only ones upset over AMC's decision to take legal action, though. Their own fans and followers were upset, too, and many blogs began to express this 'widespread outrage'.¹⁴ Many who hadn't even been following the characters on Twitter began to notice as well. Suing fans that had so far acted in good faith seemed like a crushing error for AMC. As lawyers often do, their threats had created far more controversy and negative publicity than the fans could have possibly threatened.

My name is Bud Caddell

On Twitter I am also Bud Melman, an employee in the mailroom of Sterling Cooper Advertising in the year 1962. When Paul Isakson¹⁵ assumed the identity of Don Draper on Twitter and began twittering, I was one of his first followers. I was already a user of Twitter¹⁶ and quite a fan of the show; consuming the content on AMC and purchasing episodes through iTunes. I also happen to have strong opinions about the future of entertainment. I thought the execution was quite novel for a cable series and joined the group as a completely original character. Bud Melman was never a character on Mad Men (Larry 'Bud' Melman was a well-known comedian, but unrelated). Bud Melman was created to be a mere spectator of the goings-on at Sterling Cooper. As an employee in the mailroom, he could have the curse and the good fortune of being invisible, which means I could tweet about what happened before or after the scene you saw on television. When the DMCA notices were issued and character accounts suspended, I felt compelled to speak on behalf of these engaged fans playing the other characters. Within a matter of hours, I created the manifesto WeAreSterlingCooper.com and wrote these words:



¹⁴ <http://techdirt.com/articles/20080826/0920102101.shtml>

¹⁵ http://paulisakson.typepad.com/planning/2008/11/don_draper-twitter.html?cid=139424620

¹⁶ http://twitter.com/bud_caddell

Fan fiction. Brand hijacking. Copyright misuse. Sheer devotion. Call it what you will, but we call it the blurred line between content creators and content consumers, and it's not going away. We're your biggest fans, your die-hard proponents, and when your show gets cancelled we'll be among the first to pass around the petition. Talk to us. Befriend us. Engage us. But please, don't treat us like criminals.

This site exists to catalogue the conversation around AMC's Mad Men and its fanbase across the social web. But it's just the beginning. 'We are Sterling Cooper' is a rallying cry to brands and fans alike to come together and create together.



Aggregating the action

WeAreSterlingCooper.com also featured a link list of my favorite blog entries about the future of media and entertainment. The list started with a post from Ian Schafer, the CEO of AMC's agency Deep Focus, entitled 'How Not to Do Social Media.' The post discussed the error of Best Buy delivering DMCA notices to the group Improv Everywhere for printing t-shirts with a parody of their logo and to a blogger who happened to write

about it¹⁷. At some point between the emergence of the Mad Men Twitter accounts and the publication of this report, that post has been deleted or moved.

Also on WeAreSterlingCooper.com, I aggregated all of the characters' Twitter accounts and their latest tweets so fans could follow everyone. Peggy Olson (or the still yet unnamed and clever fan behind the profile) was a great help building another larger list of links consisting of well known blogs and publications covering the DMCA notice against the Mad Men characters to add to the site, too. Josh Pigford of Sabotage Media¹⁸ created the basic framework behind the site, and Jordan Berkowitz, Group Director at Undercurrent, helped to sort out the details. (A special thanks to these collaborators who helped to bring We Are Sterling Cooper to life so quickly.) Over the last few months, the site has maintained a surprising level of traffic after being linked to from sites like BusinessWeek.com and David Armano's Logic + Emotion¹⁹.

¹⁷ <http://web.archive.org/web/20080115075921/http://www.ianschafer.com/2007/12/12/how-not-to-do-social-media-best-buy-edition/>

¹⁸ <http://sabotagemedia.com/>

¹⁹ http://darmano.typepad.com/logic_emotion/2008/08/memo-from-a-mad.html

The accounts get reinstated

After the initial backlash against the DMCA notices, the accounts were reinstated by Twitter. Reports vary, but Silicon Alley Insider reported that Deep Focus told them they gently nudged AMC to rescind the DMCA notices²⁰. Having read Ian's post and having a sense of his agency's progressive approach to new media marketing, it's easy to believe that they were savvy enough to recognize that they were essentially shutting down free advertising and in turn creating a good deal of bad PR. However, knowing the typical dysfunctional relationships between content creators, publishers, broadcasters and agencies, it's impossible to know what really happened and who was in favor of these Twitter characters and who was vehemently opposed.

At the time of the DMCA notices, many of the nine characters attempted to make contact with Deep Focus and AMC to reach some consensus. Paul Isakson even offered AMC his Don Draper account and access to his few thousand followers. A representative of Deep Focus did tell one of the characters that they were not interested in legal proceedings and said that Twitter had made a knee jerk reaction in shutting down the accounts (this was later corroborated by an AMC spokesperson²¹). When the character expressed interest in creating more complex story arcs between episodes with the other Twitter characters, the representative was very taken aback and extremely concerned. Other characters shared similar conversations, but many were ultimately met with silence from both AMC and Deep Focus after the uproar faded.

Tweeting as one

Once WeAreSterlingCooper.com was created, many of the characters contacted Bud Melman (some to have their Twitter accounts added to the site, some to make sure I wasn't working with Deep Focus). One element of entertainment and media that consumed me at the time as a marketer was the idea of what to offer fans to consume between commercial breaks, episodes and seasons. The Twitter characters could provide other fans a way to play and interact between Sundays when the show aired. From a practical perspective, each single character by themselves was a novelty, but together they could weave an intricate web of conversations and events to follow.

I was not alone. By now, there were over twenty characters from the show on Twitter, and the deluge of emails back and forth were too difficult to follow. Many of these characters expressed an interest in tweeting together. Soon thereafter, I set-up a private wiki for us all to toss out our ideas. Inside the wiki, some characters revealed their identity while others chose to remain anonymous. It was surprising how many of us were working in the fields of PR, marketing, and advertising and that none of us had participated in a form of fan fiction previously. When I asked why each person had chosen to start twittering as a fictional character from a television show, the answers

²⁰ <http://www.alleyinsider.com/2008/8/twitter-amc-wise-up-restore-mad-men->

²¹ http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/sep2008/tc2008096_785921_page_2.htm

were varied but shared a consistent theme: love. Our strange new behaviors and identities were the result of an advanced relationship to the world of AMC's Mad Men. It was our appreciation of the subject matter, the writing, the acting, and the product as a whole that spurred our expression. We were contributing freely, and no conversation about compensation was had. We were operating under the typical fan community "gift-economy."²² But regardless of why we got started, we all saw this as an opportunity to prove a model, that fans and brands should work together and create together (and we all still hoped AMC would respond to us). We were all very much invested in the success of our characters as a new form of engagement and as a way to create more meaning and relevance with fans. At the time, it seemed as though we were aligned to do extraordinary things, but we ultimately failed to work together effectively.

We were still a crowd, and not a community. While we shared a common purpose, we suffered from a good deal of infighting. The wiki was littered with arguments between the two people twittering as Betty Draper, each one asserting that they were the true and original character or that they had a greater right to assume that character. My own participation in any group activity was questioned because I was not a character that had appeared on the show. Main characters (Don and Peggy) wielded a greater following, and with that, more power. Also, because multiple characters were being written by the same individual, there was a fair amount of accusations and paranoia that any agreement by characters in the wiki were merely fabricated by that one lone individual. Some were quite concerned that any attempt at creating story arcs between episodes could ultimately hurt their careers if they were to be outed; they saw our activities as an annoyance to AMC and Deep Focus. One character in particular was consistently worried that someone would out everyone at any opportunity. Trust was indeed missing, and that was what inevitably doomed our collective participation at that time. In the world of fan fiction, none of these fights or concerns were novel. And if any of us had understood that better, we could have worked to overcome our lack of trust. I certainly take responsibility for not leading us better and it was apparent that I failed to build trust with the group.

Episode Five, a New Hope

Of course, trust is earned with time, and as the characters interacted on Twitter, through email and the wiki, they did build trust with each other. On October 23rd, a handful of characters worked together to create a very small arc of meeting at the Tom Tom Club for drinks and shenanigans. That tiny interaction breathed life and optimism back into the group, and although my participation had waned at that point, I was incredibly happy. And each of those characters, Peggy, Sal, Paul, Ken, Harry, Kurt, the Smiths, and Frank O'Hara deserve kudos. I hope that it's a sign of what's to come next season.

At this time, there are over seventy Mad Men related characters on Twitter.

²² http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2008/03/the_moral_economy_of_web_20_pa.php

The impact on the future of media and entertainment

When this all began, I couldn't help seeing it through the lens of a marketer. Media and entertainment have long been consumed with tune-in, opening weekend and season premiers, but in a world of never ending content, retaining attention between those distinct events is a growing concern²³. Each Sunday afternoon, fans would check many of the characters' Twitter messages to look for hints at the upcoming episode because they did not know we were working separately from AMC. During commercial breaks, we often twittered back and forth with fans sitting on their couches or in their beds watching the show. As a whole, we were only concerned with ostensibly coloring in the lines between episodes; no person talked in the wiki of dramatic departures from the show's canon, we all wanted to merely tell the story between this week's and next week's episodes. As season two drew to a close, fans twittered that they hoped we would continue between seasons to keep them engaged. Quality content creates crowds hungry for more, but there's always a new show or something on the web that can still divert their attention and loyalty. AMC didn't owe it to us to work with us; they had provided content we loved, but they certainly could have worked with us in truly groundbreaking ways.

Fan Fiction

After WeAreSterlingCooper.com received some initial attention, I asked to speak at the Interesting Conference²⁴ here in New York. I was paired with Amber Finlay²⁵, a senior strategist at Naked, to talk on the topic of fan fiction. Quite honestly, I knew very little about fan fiction outside of my own limited experience. But after preparing for the presentation and speaking with Amber²⁶, I was able to compare the Mad Men on Twitter with other fan fiction communities. What I found most interesting is Twitter's place in fan fiction. As other fan fiction communities are tightly collected in places like LiveJournal²⁷ where fan fiction writers complete denser volumes of work, Twitter represented both shorter and quicker snippets of storytelling. As Madeline Flourish Klink, a graduate student in Comparative Media Studies at MIT, said about the characters' use of Twitter, "It's more immediate than even LiveJournal RPGs, and it does tell a story. It can also be interactive with readers in a way that neither fanfic nor LJ RPGs have historically been."²⁸ Both the characters and fans invested far less effort to play along using Twitter (only 140 characters to write) but yet, Twitter can connect fans and fan fiction writers in a much more direct way. Twitter was built for two-way communication, so Twitter fan

²³ <http://www.buddytv.com/articles/lost/lost-season-4-suffers-ratings-17888.aspx>

²⁴ <http://interestingnewyork.com/>

²⁵ <http://bigsecretpizzaparty.typepad.com/>

²⁶ <http://vimeo.com/2108065?pg=embed&sec=2108065>

²⁷ <http://www.livejournal.com/>

²⁸ <http://www.blotts.org/blotts/?p=262>

fiction characters rely more heavily on audience participation to create content. Twitter also allows human beings to be connected in instances of time as tweets bounce back and forth, character-to-character, character-to-fan, and fan-to-character. This creates the opportunity to generate fan fiction with the audience in near real-time, say during an episode of *Mad Men*. Twitter should continue to allow ‘fakester’ profiles²⁹ because they demonstrate how the platform could evolve for complex uses..

The friending/following functionality on Twitter helped to influence fan fiction in new ways, as well. For better or worse, the community on Twitter judges individual members by the number of people following them³⁰. The more followers, the more that person is judged to be worthy of your attention. And in order to garner more followers, one must follow more people themselves and pay close attention to their tweets. As someone uses Twitter longer, they become more adept at writing tweets that are likely to attract new followers. What this really creates is an element of gameplay in socialization. Users gain points for successful participation, points that are exchanged for social currency, and the act of being followed by someone else is the system providing positive feedback. If you add fan fiction on top of that, you create a very competitive environment for creation. In fact, as the two Betty Draper’s argued about who deserved that character, the number of followers and the number of individual tweets played a significant role in their arguments. Fan fiction communities often grapple with exclusion, and Twitter’s unique environment provided additional fodder.

The evolution of the fan

Perhaps my most compelling insight came in the final days of writing this report. I had contacted Deep Focus to share a few conversations related to them in the wiki to ask for their response. Unfortunately, they refused to comment in a “public forum” and offered no details. I pleaded with them (I even quoted Rush’s *Freewill*) but agency hands and tongues are often tied, and I do appreciate their position. But one statement they made really puzzled me. In my pleading, I said that by not responding they could be playing into their harshest criticism—that fans are not taken seriously as honest stewards of the work, or as partners in the storytelling. They responded that because I was asking questions and writing a report, I was essentially not a fan, but a “marketer and psuedo-reporter.” This reminded me of the early criticisms against the Twitter characters themselves; that we were not fans, but brand-hijackers or pirates. What constitutes a fan in the age of the web? Before, an engaged fan cooked up pop-corn, called their friends over, and had a small party the night each episode aired. They talked at their water coolers, they taped a few episodes, perhaps they named their cat after one of the characters (Jean-Luc Picard), and a small few created fan-fiction and fanons³¹—using the characters and components of the show to tell entirely new stories.

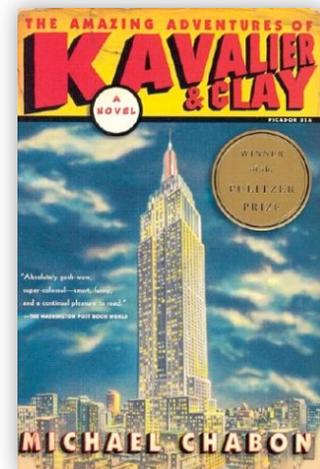
²⁹ <http://www.danah.org/papers/FriendsterMySpaceEssay.html>

³⁰ <http://blog.guykawasaki.com/2008/12/how-to-use-twit.html>

³¹ <http://starwars.wikia.com/wiki/Fanon>

That last group has always endured a love³²/hate³³ relationship with content creators. Even though the web has dramatically changed how we can express our fandom, brands still rely on outdated ways to measure us. We've been far too reliant on the Nielsen³⁴ model of tracking impressions—hits, views, and ratings. Joshua Green, Research Manager at MIT's Comparative Media Studies program, said it best to me, "we've got to move from measuring impressions to expressions." What if a completely normal expression of fandom is what Faris Yakob describes as recombination³⁵, taking parts of something, like characters from *Mad Men* and adding to them or changing them by inserting them into the world of Twitter? The web has augmented the behaviors we've demonstrated in the past. It's easier to understand why some fans upload scenes from their favorite shows to YouTube (considered stealing) when you watch someone walk in the office the morning after their favorite show aired and they attempt to reenact a scene to their friends. It's the same kind of behavior, applied with a different technology. Today, having fans and being a fan is simply a more complex relationship because of that technology and our outdated sensibility towards ownership. Just as the two Betty Draper's duked it out in the wiki over their right and ownership of the character, AMC saw most of us as stealing something that was theirs. When in reality, we were all expressing our affinity for the characters and the show. And I'm only continuing that by writing this report now. I still have a huge amount of optimism and excitement around the possibility of *Mad Men* working closer with fans, and I hope this report aids the effort. I don't think by writing this I'm less of a fan, or more of a marketer. In fact, I hope this demonstrates just how engaged I am as a fan.

Regardless of how I'm perceived, the relationship between fans and creators is much larger and ultimately more important than Bud Melman. Grant McCracken, the Anthropologist, has said, "Narratives and brands will flourish or fail according to the way they address this problem.³⁶" Crowds will always congregate around a flame, but how long it burns and how it is carried into the rest of the world will rely on that relationship. Some writers already have different attitudes about their own creation. Michael Chabon, author of *Kavalier & Clay*, has said "I came to realize that everything I do is fan fiction. I think everything that we all do, all fiction, is fan fiction in that you are always inspired to write by things that you love. So much of writing for me is about finding a way to convey my own love of other writers'



³⁴ <http://www.nielsen.com/>

³⁵ <http://farisyakob.typepad.com/blog/2008/11/interesting-a-history-of-recombinant-culture.html>

³⁶ <http://www.cultureby.com/trilogy/2007/11/fan-fathoming.html>

work.³⁷” If we begin to see all works as an extension of what has come before, we begin to appreciate something like Mad Men on Twitter for what it is, a story. It should be judged as a piece of entertainment and art; for how well it engages an audience and what it has to say about a changing world. We shouldn’t threaten fans with legal notices and we shouldn’t isolate them. We should cultivate the relationships we’re either lucky or gifted to have and help them with their expression of their fandom. Brands should offer as much content in as many types to its audiences with the hope that they feel compelled to rearrange them and add novel elements to tell their own stories. We fight to insert ourselves in the conversations of real people, and that is exactly what happened with the Mad Men characters on Twitter. If we cling to this sense that we are the sole owner of creative work, we’ll continue to isolate that work from the actual world and the human beings we work to affect. In truth, we are all Sterling Cooper.

Thank you for reading this report, I greatly appreciate your time and attention and I would like to get to know you better. I’ll be traveling quite extensively in early ’09 and chances are excellent that I’ll be in your area and I would love to meet you in person. Find me through <http://BudCaddell.com> and email me at reachme@budcaddell.com. Thank you.

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³⁷ http://men.style.com/details/features/landing?id=content_5477