

Chris Moerdyk pays tribute to John Farquhar

By Chris Moerdyk: @chrismoerdyk

30 Jan 2012

This is most unlike you, [John](#). This dying thing*. I mean, dash it all, we had a lunch date in mid-February and it really is most unlike you to do anything that might compromise lunch, especially as it was my turn to pay.



Caricature of Farquhar by Peter van der Merwe for Advantage Magazine celebrating Farquhar's 50th year in the business.

As far as I can recall, you had a lunch date pretty much every day since the Battle of Trafalgar. Other people might have had exercise fetishes, going out drinking with the boys, or jogging. But for you it was lunch. You had everything in the right perspective.

I must say, I really enjoyed our regular lunches, sitting there nursing a drink and listening to you rant on about how, for the past two millennia, there had not been a single creative in the entire global ad industry who owned more than a fraction of a brain cell. How all advertising was crap.

Loved trading verbal blows

I loved trading verbal blows with you over the ASA, which you defended to the hilt for some quite incredibly inexplicable reason. And your views on SAARF and RAMS and TAMS and heavens knows what else. If it moved, you had a view on it. Usually acerbic.

A lot of people, like me, really loved the way you were not only opinionated but opinionated with such breath-taking pompous elegance. A lot of people, mostly ad agency creatives, didn't like you one bit and one could only admire the way in which you really didn't give a toss about your detractors.

It must have been exceedingly frustrating for them because your sensitivities were so firewalled; the slings and arrows of your enemies just bounced off without so much making the slightest dent in your resolve to uphold your reputation as the advertising industry's most grumpy critic.

You set some fine examples

You set some fine examples in your decades-long career as an editor, publisher and commentator in the advertising realm.

You taught many of us that the important thing was to speak your mind and have a firm opinion. You taught many of us how to create dialogue, to raise burning issues and to slaughter holy cows. To throw bricks through windows and not hang around for an angry crowd to gather but rather start looking for another window.

I will never forget, John, those wonderful early days of [Marketingweb](#), working with me, Alec Hogg and the perennially patient Alastair Telling-Smith. The way you admitted that you had absolutely no idea how to write online content, nor how to put it up on site. And how your first online column was on paper faxed to Alastair.

The highlight of that partnership we had was when we had a meeting with all the bigwigs at SABC and I asked you whether you thought it was appropriate that we should use the opportunity to tout for a bit of advertising on Marketingweb.

Trademark grunt

You didn't respond beyond your trademark grunt but, as we walked into the meeting, before we had even sat down or been introduced, you stared them all down and at the top of your voice asked, "Why the fu*k haven't you given us any advertising yet?"

An order for six months' worth of banner advertising arrived the next day and, because John had no idea of online rates and had just quoted a figure that seemed nice, that order is still, I believe, the most amount of money paid for an online ad banner right up until today.

You were a man in a million, John, but it would be remiss of me not to use this opportunity to mention that, even in your case, the old adage of "behind every successful man is a strong woman" applies.

When you had that almighty fight with Hunt Lascaris that ended with you being fired as editor of ~~Marketing Mix~~ *Marketplace*, [Sandra Gordon](#) was there to throw you a lifeline and a wonderful job as editor of [AdVantage](#). A magazine that the two of you turned into a hugely successful industry bible.

When the board of Primedia Publishing so churlishly put you out to pasture like some prize bull that had just run out of semen, it was Sandra Gordon who threw you yet another lifeline.

Many critics and many friends

You had many critics and many friends, but none so loyal as Sandra.

So now, my old friend, you have gone to that great big magazine in the sky. Those of us who have worked with you for so many years will miss you terribly. You have been so much part of the advertising fabric of our South African society that it is going to be extremely difficult to imagine life without you.

I would have like to finish by wishing you well but I am still heartily pissed off that you used such a lame excuse as death to get out of having lunch with me.

The 27 members of the Old Advertising Farts Society (OAFS) of Cape Town will join me in raising our glasses to you at our next lunch.

**John Farquhar passed away on Saturday morning, 28 January 2012, a few months short of his 85th 84th birthday. Bizcommunity.com extends our condolences to his family, friends and colleagues.*

Details of wake:

- Date: Friday 3 February
- Time: 12.30pm-3pm
- Venue: Bryanston Country Club, Bryanston Drive, Bryanston, Johannesburg

Bizcommunity and *AdVantage* magazine have set up a [special page to commemorate this legend](#) and we invite everyone to add their tributes.

For more:

- Bizcommunity: [Special tribute page for John Farquhar](#)
- Bizcommunity: [John Farquhar, a man of fascinating contradiction](#)
- DEKAT: [Hamba kahle, John!](#)
- Marketingsite.com: [John Farquhar's last email to Cathy van Zyl recounting his life in advertising](#)
- TheMediaOnline: [A tribute to a legend](#)

For More list added at 12.23pm on 30 January 2012.

Corrected at 2.15pm and 3.31pm on 30 January 2012.

Wake details added at 9.43am on 31 January 2012.

For More list updated at 9.43am on 1 February 2012.

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Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on moerdykc@gmail.com and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](#).

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