

The History of the APA

Vol 1



The Advertising Producers Association is the trade body for the commercials production industry – for commercials production companies and, since 2004, for post production, editing, music and sound design companies who are involved in the production of commercials.

The purpose of the APA is to create the best possible business environment for its members to operate in.

The APA began in 1955 as the Advertising Film Producers Association – the same year that the first television commercial aired in the UK.

Screen advertising had begun in the late 1940s, with films being made to be played in cinemas. The first production companies to make these films were those with franchises from the movie theatres, such as Pearl & Dean, the Rank Organisation and Pressbury's.

At the time, people who worked in production were reluctant to work on short advertising films. Many considered it a rather undignified practice. Advertising agencies took a long time to appreciate the value of screen advertising too, much preferring the copywriting and art direction of print and posters.

Trade unions were central to the industry in post-war Britain and the Association of Cinematograph Technicians (ACT) – the film union that later became the ACTT – dictated how the production industry worked from the start. They had two sections to their production agreement – one for features, which required 12 people to work on a film unit (four each in the production, camera and sound departments), and one for documentaries, which required only four people in total.

The ACT decided early on that commercial production should fall under the feature agreement. Feature films were shot on 35mm at the time, while documentaries were photographed on 16mm. Advertisers and agencies did not want their brands exhibited alongside the feature films in a lesser format. Also, as cinema commercials preceded those transmitted on TV by a number of years, many of the makers of these and early TV commercials were feature film directors who wanted to bring the same high standards to the quality of the commercials they directed as they did to the features they made.

The first television commercial aired in the UK on 22nd September 1955, advertising Gibbs SR Toothpaste (“It’s tingling fresh. It’s fresh as ice”). In the preceding months the production industry manoeuvred to accommodate the emerging business of commercials production.

The existing associations for the film production industry were the British Film Producers Association (BFPA), who were concerned with feature film production, and the Association of Specialised Film Producers (ASFP), who were responsible for documentaries. Neither wanted to take advertising production on under their representation, fearing it would disrupt their established businesses. In preparation for the coming change, the ASP asked James Garrett to propose a restructuring of the association. An ex-union man, Garrett was working for Pearl & Dean at the time. His report suggested the formation of a specialist association purely for commercials – the Advertising Film Producers Association.

The new association was accepted by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) and its member agencies, who welcomed it as a buffer between themselves and the powerful unions.

The AFPA's first major move was to negotiate the production agreement for advertising with the IPA, setting out the details of how production companies and advertising agencies should work together in this new area of advertising, laying out which party was responsible for which parts of the process and procedures and guidelines to ensure an effective, fair business.

This agreement went largely smoothly between the two associations and was agreed to by the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers (ISBA), who represented corporate clients. Sometimes referred to as "The Blue Contract", it became the legal foundation for all engagements between clients, agencies and production companies. This was an important step for the emerging industry, leading to greater acceptance of the AFPA and an influx of members. It was also the start of a strong relationship with the IPA, which continues to this day.

The AFPA's first member companies were subsidiaries and offshoots from the established documentary companies. The Film Producers Guild was the biggest of these, whose specialist advertising production company was called Guild Television.

In the first years of commercial television the AFPA membership had to build an industry from the ground up. Early challenges they faced included technicians' desire to work on more glamorous features rather than commercials, a lack of equipment hire companies (crew were sometimes hired on the basis of the kit they owned rather than any ability to do the job) and laboratories unable to handle short footage at the speed commercial deadlines required.

For the first decade or so the AFPA only had a few dozen member companies, but as TV commercials became more creative in the much-romanticised era of the late 1960s, more production companies began to join.

Originally part of the ASFP, Mike Luckwell of HSFA and Leon Clore of Film Contracts helped set the AFPA up as an adjunct of the BFPA, although the relationship between it and this parent association was not always smooth.

Throughout the 1970s the AFPA struggled to resolve disputes with the unions. In general, the closed shop and events like the three-day week of 1974 were a huge hindrance to production. More specifically, the ACTT's insistence on minimum crewing arrangements was a problem that dated back to the first production agreement and made overseas shoots particularly difficult.

The battles against the unions strengthened relationships between production companies in the AFPA, who were forced to combine forces to protect their business. 1978 saw unprecedented cooperation within the association during protracted negotiations with the Inland Revenue, resulting in the Revenue recognising that many freelance crew were allowed to be self employed and not liable for employers' contributions or deductions.

The AFPA became the AFVPA in 1982 when Mike Luckwell, then Managing Director of post production early innovators the Moving Picture Company, introduced a 'V' for 'videotape'. Post production worked on tape at the time and the new companies in this area were keen to be more included in the association.

One of the landmark events of the association's history took place in 1985 with the renegotiation of the standard contract by what became known as the Pliatzky Committee. The document had remained largely unchanged for over 25 years since the association's founding, and as the foundation for all professional relationships within advertising production it was in dire need of updating.

The committee was assembled from members of the AFVPA, IPA and ISBA. Each part of the industry had its own grievances and objectives, so an independent chairman was sought to mediate between them. Leo Pliatzky, a retired civil servant, was selected to identify where the business of advertising production was failing and where it was succeeding and to ensure the business became fairer for all parties.

After 18 months of negotiations on all manner of subjects, from transparency in budgeting to invoicing best practice and post production's place in the industry, the committee emerged in 1987 with The Pliatzky Report, a 150-page document containing standard blueprints for multiple documents such as contracts, schedules and invoices. In the name of transparency, the budget form had expanded from two pages to a 12-page document.

In 1995 the three associations returned to the negotiating table for Pliatzky 2 under the chairmanship of David Lamb, a former client at Rowntree Macintosh. Focusing on animation, insurance, the employment of artists and multinational commercials, their additions to the production handbook were the most recent significant change to the standard documentation.

The association was renamed the APA in 2000, when current Chief Executive Steve Davies took up his role and John Hackney and Lewis More O'Ferrall became joint Chairman.

From that time it has built on its traditional services in contracts, crew terms, answering production queries and resolving disputes into providing new services that help APA members businesses grow.

In 2001 the APA Show was launched. This takes place in London every September. It showcases the best commercials from APA members in the APA Collection, shown cinema style and is followed by a party for 900 people. The APA Show is now established as one of the most popular events in the UK advertising calendar. The APA Collection is then seen around the world via screenings and a DVD, distributed by Shots magazine.

The APA Masterclass was launched in the same year. It takes students (over 1,000 since the Masterclass commenced), who are production managers or assistants at APA Member companies, through every stage of production, with the whole industry – creative, producers, directors, editors, post production, composers and sound designers sharing their expertise.

The APA initiated the promotion of its members to new markets, commencing with the event it created in Japan, The Tokyo London Creative Forum 2004. Typically these events involve the APA taking around 25 members to participate in forums that the APA creates, to help APA members make connections, build trust, learn about new markets and promote themselves.

Subsequent overseas events have included the Shanghai London Advertising Forum 2007, the Beijing London Advertising Forum 2009, the Mumbai London Advertising Forum 2011 and Creative London Comes to Silicon Valley 2013.

In 2004, post, editing, music and sound design companies in commercials production were admitted to membership and specialist groups formed to discuss the issues of specific interest to them.

The APA launched The Future of Advertising...In One Afternoon in 2006, which takes place at BAFTA in London every February. It was created to keep APA members up to date with the new opportunities that come from moving image being available in an ever expanding set of media beyond TV.

In 2012 the APA formed APai, a group for interactive production companies: those building websites with a film element.

Also in 2012, the APA launched the Beak Street Bugle, an online magazine and newsletter, that promotes the APA membership worldwide.

The APA continues to address key production issues, creating strategies in relation to opportunities and to challenges and issues that APA members face.

One of the APA's strengths is the close involvement of APA members in seeking the APA's advice (and in doing so alerting the APA to industry issues it can usefully address) and in members sharing their wisdom with and investing their energy in the APA.

The History of the APA

The following have held (or do hold) positions within the APA:

Chairmen of the APA:

Leon Clore
James Garrett
Patrick Hayes
John Hackney (current)
Doug Kentish
Mike Luckwell
Lewis More O'Ferrall (current)
David Peers
Peter Plumstead

Secretaries of the APA:

Gwyneth Dunwoody
Hank Nimwegen

Chief Executives of the APA:

Steve Davies (current)
Cecilia Garnett

APA Council Members:

Jeremy Barnes
Charlotte Bavasso
Mark Benson (current)
James Bland (current)
Robert Campbell
Joce Capper
Marisa Clifford (current)
Charlie Crompton (current)
Karen Cunningham
Caspar Delaney (current)
John Doris (current)
Danny Fleet
Johnnie Frankel
Jo Godman
Lizie Gower (current)
Cathy Green
Helen Hadfield (current)
Adrian Harrison
Nell Jordan
Pat Joseph (current)
Tim Katz (current)
Katie Keith (current)
Helen Kenny (current)
Kai Lu-Hsiung
Hector Macleod
Amanda Martin
Bertie Miller
Greg Mills
Glynis Murray
Kate O'Mulloy
Richard Packer (current)
Bash Robertson
Paul Rothwell
Madeleine Sanderson (current)
Frances Silor
Rupert Smythe (current)
Helen Stanley (current)
Mark Stothert
James Studholme
James Tomkinson (current)
Debbie Turner (current)
Mike Wells
Orlando Wood (current)