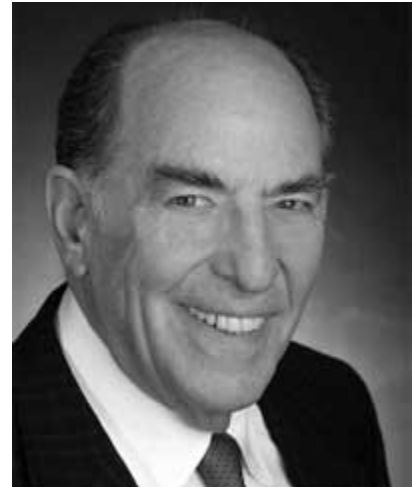


Alan Pottasch '49

Alan Pottasch tells a good story. And after 45 years with Pepsi-Cola, most spent in advertising and marketing, he's got a slew of them. He's worked on television commercials with the famous—Ray Charles and Michael J. Fox—and infamous—Michael Jackson, whose hair caught fire during one memorable commercial shoot in the early 1980s. He's known as the father of "The Pepsi Generation," a landmark ad campaign that shifted the focus from describing the product to defining the consumer—in this case as young and vibrant. He collected the highest prize, the Grand Prix, at the annual advertising film festival held in Cannes.



It could have turned out differently. Pottasch, a native of New York, started at Penn State as an electrical engineering major. His most vivid memory of college life was "getting beat up every Saturday." That's because Pottasch was on the boxing team but laughs, "I was a lousy boxer." He interrupted his college years with a stint in the Navy Air Corps, where he trained as a pilot. When he returned to school, a creative writing class with Ed Nichols prompted his switch from engineering to Liberal Arts. Intrigued by television, then in its infancy, Pottasch attended a television directing school in New York following his graduation from Penn State in 1949.

A creative cover letter landed him a job as a "gofer" at one of the networks for \$35 per week. He hitchhiked to Dallas, Tex., for a promised job at a television station there only to find the offer had been overstated: The station was still under construction. So, Pottasch got a job laying bricks and, literally, built the station where he would work. When ABC bought Personality Puzzle, a panel show he developed, he moved back to New York. He spent eight years as a producer- director of ABC-TV.

In 1958, because of his love of travel, Pottasch started working for Pepsi International, accepting different assignments including stints in pre-revolutionary Iran, Latin America, and as president and CEO of Pepsi-Cola Japan. But Pottasch devoted most of his career to marketing and advertising. In the early 1960s, he was one of the first to recognize the coming youth culture, dominated by the baby boomers. Of that era he has said, "Pepsi named and claimed 25 million young people for its own with a big, sweeping invitation to live life to its fullest." This was the "Pepsi Generation," one of the longest-running, most successful advertising campaigns in history. By 1972, Pottasch was senior vice president, Worldwide Creative, the post he retired from in 1991.

But he didn't really retire. At 77, Pottasch continues to work for Pepsi as a creative consultant. Among other things, he oversees commercial shoots and is writing a short film on the history of Pepsi's advertising and how it reflected America's cultural and historic trends.

In addition to his work at Pepsi, Pottasch has served on the boards of Cayman Airways, The Association of National Advertisers, and The Advertising Council. His commercials have won more than 60 major awards, including the Grand Prix at Cannes. That ad, known as "Archaeology," featured students on a dig 3,000 years from now unearthing a Coke bottle and asking their instructor what it is. His reply as he examines the object: "I have no idea ..."

Pottasch holds an interest in several businesses in the Cayman Islands, a favorite scuba diving spot. (He taught scuba diving until two years ago.) He flies an antique seaplane—which he parks on the lake in front of his home.

Pottasch was previously honored by Penn State with the Alumni Fellow Award (1993) and served as commencement speaker for the College of Communications in May 2004. His advice to graduates was pure Pottasch: Pursue your passion, persevere, and maintain perspective on what's important in life.

Pottasch lives near Danbury, Conn., with his wife, Lisa, and their daughter. He also has three grown children from his first marriage.

*This career summary is excerpted from the 2005 Distinguished Alumni Awards Ceremony booklet (June 3, 2005, The Pennsylvania State University).