

creativity and (way, way) beyond mychael

mychael. creativity and (way, way) beyond.

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I was at my most creative.

(I think).

When I was 5 years old.

Just before I began to worry about what the other children thought of my own childish, fluid, unchecked and adventurous notions.

Just before I started doing everything to them.

That they were doing to me.

Judging.

Comparing.

Laughing, even.

5 years old.

That's the age I was.

When the purest creativity I ever had.

Died.

Creativity and (way, way) beyond.

Now that my creativity is back.

Now that I am allowing my own childish, fluid, unchecked and adventurous notions to flow once more.

Here is an essay about how I contextualise and corral my own creativity.

And the creativity of others.

Inside world-class brand building.

And it is also an essay about how creativity alone.

No matter how creative and talented a person or a team may be.

Is never, ever enough.

Creative Content

When an agency.

A creative individual.

Or a creative team.

Develop creative content as part of a business or organisation's strategic brand communications.

There are two fundamental parts to get right.

1. **Idea.**

2. **Execution.**

It is rare that both are excellent.

Personally, I see a lot of good ideas that get quickly fucked up by clients.

Clients that are allowed to meddle.

Or I see a lot of good ideas that get quickly fucked up by designers.

Designers that don't know when to stop designing.

And I frequently see masterful execution of idea-less, irrelevant, anodyne messaging and random, unanchored notions.

So if we take this thinking to its conclusion.

There are, of course, only four kinds of creative content.

And here they are:

1. **A great idea that gets fucked up by meddling clients. Or by designers that don't know when to stop designing. Or both.**
2. **Masterful execution of irrelevant, idea-less or anodyne messaging and random, unanchored notions.**
3. **An idea-less, irrelevant or anodyne messaging or a random, unanchored notion that gets fucked up further by meddling clients. Or by designers that don't know when to stop designing. Or both.**
4. **A great idea that gets executed masterfully.**

I only care about number 4.

But not as an endpoint.

As a start point.

Because if we want world-class, branded content.

We have to go beyond creativity.

Way, way beyond.

Thirteen things.

If we want to create world-class, branded content.

It's worth thinking about.

And asking about.

13 things.

This is not a 'how to' guide.

Because creativity is, and should remain, inexact.

These are discussion points for everyone involved in the creative process.

Brand Strategists.

Creative Directors.

Art Directors.

Copywriters.

Designers.

And more.

So here are the 13 things to think about and to talk about.

Below.

1. Is this a clever idea?

Or is it an idea at all, in many cases.

Just what is the thinking behind this work?

Where did the thought come from?

It is important to note how energetically, insightfully, articulately and completely that key people answer this.

2. Is this idea brilliantly executed?

Highly subjective of course.

But I'd personally look – first – for adventure.

Emotion.

Surprise.

And bravery!

Before anything else, I'd ask myself if the work was actually going to get noticed.

Because over 90% of advertising.

Is not noticed.

By anyone at all.

Pixel precision is important too.

Are we chasing perfect execution?

Because we should be.

Is there consistent execution of a house style?

Or if the rules are broken consciously – what's the reason?

Is there a 'wow' element?

Just one.

Typography so beautiful it makes us tearful, for example.

An image so beautifully cropped that it tells a story.

Or asks a question.

All by itself.

I really do look for superb and complete end-to-end quality.

Because 99% right.

Is 100% wrong.

3. Is the work brand additive?

Does the work acknowledge and show an understanding of what the brand actually stands for?

Does it make the brand stronger?

Not just for the campaign within which it sits.

But within the context of the enduring brand position.

4. Is the work easily understood?

They have to 'get it'.

The message I mean.

They have to understand what you are actually saying.

So ask people early.

See how the work is interpreted.

5. Does the work have a narrow focus but broad appeal?

Brand cleverness lives here.

Some outerwear brands make clothing for mountaineers.

Because they have a target audience of commuters.

Some whisky brands talk to whisky connoisseurs.

Because a big part of their target audience are gifters.

This kind of strategic thinking should be discussed and explored.

6. Is the work targeted?

Are the customer avatars really clear?

Both by demographic.

And by mindset.

Yes, we need to know how old they are, what gender they are and what their expendable income might be.

But we need to understand how they think, too.

7. Is the work aligned?

Does the work sit well within everything else that's going on?

Do the dots join up?

Does the work pay homage to everything it should that has gone before?

And does it pave the way for what comes next for the brand?

Strategically, I mean.

8. Does the work have talkability because it is different and interesting?

Design is boring.

Advertising is boring.

Business is boring.

The world is boring.

Researching the hell out of an idea or indeed anything.

So that it is left so wrung-out of pioneering thought, left-field approaches and bravery is boring.

So don't just live in the world of the probable.

The world of the possible is so much more interesting.

The world of the possible tickles the brain.

It lights people up.

It is more easily remembered.

And never forget this.

It is better to be different than it is to be better.

9. Does the approach exploit the medium so that the chosen channels are absolutely integral?

In so many ways, the medium is the message.

Is the platform or the channel you are going to use to deliver the creative and the message an afterthought?

Or was it built into the process at the beginning?

Do the chosen media strengthen what you are trying to say?

Is the channel right for the brand?

And in some cases.

Is the creative communication clever enough to actually depend on the medium?

So that the message becomes stronger because of it?

10. Does the work have a crystal clear and measurable objective?

To educate and inform.

To attach an enduring and unique feeling.

To remind.

To initiate a clear call to action from the target.

What is the work actually for?

And how do you propose to check it's working?

11. Is it wonderfully well written?

Words can paint a thousand pictures.

So make sure they do.

12. Is the timing right?

The world changes so quickly.

But do keep in mind that the work should launch only when you anticipate that it is at peak power.

In the context of whatever else the audience may know, may be experiencing or may be feeling.

And conversely.

Also remember that just because something didn't work 'then'.

It doesn't always mean that it won't work 'now'.

13. **Is it simple?**

Simplicity is crucial.

Simplicity frightens people, though.

Because it looks so easy.

But it's not.

And all you need to remember here is that if you want people to remember what you are saying.

(And you do want people to remember what you are saying).

Keep it simple.

Thirteen Things.

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