

The Marketing Society Forum

Is traditional brainstorming still an effective way to innovate?

As part of The Marketing Society's effective innovation series, experts convened this week to discuss the best ways to come up with bright ideas



Dave Allan, co-founder, What If! The Innovation Company

Innovation is about far more than brainstorming. It is about making the world a better place for potential users, while generating profits for the business that delivers the idea, ideally, in a way that leapfrogs rivals and provides long-term competitive advantage.

The delivery of such an innovation is a complex mix of consumer insight, technical breakthrough and new thinking, driven by a passionate team.

At What If! we believe that while a traditional brainstorm has its place, creativity should live and breathe in every part of an innovative culture alongside fundamental disciplines such as making money, understanding your consumers and delivering quality products to market.



Tom Fishburne, UK marketing director, Method Companies

Companies that treat innovation as an isolated brainstorm, rather than a continual process, end up breathing in their own exhaust fumes.

At Method, we have to innovate constantly just to survive. We search far and wide for inspiration, including international scavenger hunts, a wide range of industries, and unlikely experts, for example, asking a famous designer to rethink the soap bottle.

We then surround ourselves with stimuli. Our offices are framed by what we call 'wiki walls', where anyone can build on each other's ideas. It is messy and unruly, but ideas thrive in messiness, not in a scheduled brainstorm between a forecast meeting and a budget review.



Daniel Heale, sales and marketing director, Travelodge

I think brainstorming remains a highly effective way of generating lots of new ideas, but how you set it up, who runs it and what you do with the output is what really matters.

I was fortunate enough to attend a two-day residential session with OMD's Ignition team a couple of years ago, which taught me some interesting and challenging ways to approach idea-generation.

Getting the right facilitator is vital, as their enthusiasm should be infectious and help to clear cluttered minds. Energy levels should be high and the best brainstorming sessions I have attended have been fast-paced and short. It is clichéd, but it is crucial to be open minded and leave cynicism outside.



Stephen Castens, managing partner Eureka Europe

Traditional brainstorming, the Osborn method, aims to take participants to extreme places where, theoretically, 'big blue sky' ideas came from.

Based on random thinking, these sessions are often unstructured, alarming for some and very good at creating bad ideas.

Most successful innovation has its origin in left-brained people, who hate innovation sessions. Yet when they feel involved, they can perform miracles.

A set of principles called six sigma, based on the proposition 'think, act, check, do', has taken the US by storm. It appeals to process-oriented people as well as allowing creative minds to flourish and has resulted in radical and successful innovation across the Atlantic.

Letters marketing.letters@haymarket.com

TfL poster censors seem to defy logic

I would be interested to hear whether any other creative teams are having problems with designs for Underground posters.

The latest issue has been with our artwork for the West End musical Wicked. The design incorporates a distressed, torn edge and Transport for London (TfL) is suggesting that this means the artwork will look badly posted.

We also had problems with Spamalot, when a word on the

poster artwork had been crossed out, and replaced. Again, this was not acceptable to TfL.

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat had a similar issue. The design gave the appearance that the logo was graffiti, which apparently encourages the public to do the same to the Underground. However, if we were to trademark the logo, it would then be acceptable.

Since then, we have designed an ad for The Country Wife at the Haymarket Theatre, which depicts a young, naked girl riding a cow in the street and holding a pig to her breast - TfL had no problem with this.

Using TfL's logic, did the statues of naked men by Antony Gormley that, until recently, were situated on and around Waterloo Bridge encourage the public to walk the streets in the nude?

Who exactly are the designers, TfL or us? Who is responsible for



Cadbury: ad is unadulterated fun

this censorship and, more importantly, where does it end?

It seems to be a recent phenomenon, as we have been designing theatre posters for years, without issue.

Bob King, head of creative, Dewynters, London WC2

Cadbury's monkeying about is good for ads

How refreshing to see some fun injected back into the Coronation Street ad break.

The latest Cadbury ad, featuring a gorilla playing the drums, has got everyone talking. There

is no voice-over describing its milk content, no sexy woman, just pure, unadulterated fun.

There has, of course, always been humour in advertising. The reason we don't see as much fun as we should is that agencies and clients get scared when a 'silly' idea is put to them.

Both have stuck their neck out on this one and it has worked; the ad has received 500,000 visits in one week on YouTube and has its own Facebook group.

Often, a successful piece of creative starts a trend for other agencies to use it to sell their own brand of humour. The problem is convincing the client to be as brave, but unfortunately it seldom works.

TV is so bad at the moment that ads have little to compete with. So come on, let's have some more gorillas and Martians.

Steve Eltringham, creative director, WAA, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands

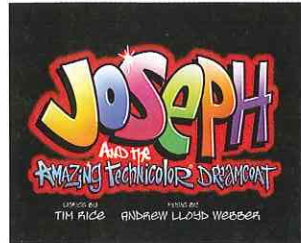
Personal touch will be ultimate differentiator

As absurd as it might sound, face-to-face communication is set to increase, thanks to the web.

Every day, more firms make more products available online. Even more sites feature help or information and there are price-comparison sites for almost any product.

So, how are firms to differentiate themselves? It won't be long before the personal touch becomes a key advertising tool. We have already seen a return to UK call centres, backed by ads, and in this impersonal world, this could soon be replaced in ads by 'real people will come to meet you'.

We are not there yet, but fashion, design and marketing are always about creating something different and one day, perhaps, meetings will be the new black. Nigel Cooper, executive director, P&MM, Milton Keynes.



Joseph: TfL vetoed 'graffiti' posters

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