

Cannes highlights danger of getting carried away by technology

Cannes Diary: Margaret Gilsonan on a wake-up call for marketing

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Juliana L. Chugg, Rosie Arnold, actress Alysia Reiner, Aline Santos, director R. Balki and journalist Lucy Hocking attend the Unilever's #unstereotype panel discussion on portrayals of gender in advertising

Digital, data, content, speed, agility, AI, VR and a host of other acronyms were integrated, promoted, celebrated and lauded at the Cannes Lions this week.

But a note of caution was also evident, suggesting that in our haste to keep up/get ahead we might be doing our businesses no favours.

Are we reacting or acting strategically? On this topic, three big themes emerged:

1 Digital Distraction: This got a lot of airtime and the plea was to spend a little time thinking before pressing the 'go' button. Perhaps not very flatteringly to those in marketing and marketing communications, there is a view that we are being swept along in a flurry of excitement by digital innovations and developments.

In an attempt to disrupt or be first to do something we act with little thought given to the link between this 'brilliant' activation and what we actually need to achieve from a business point of view for the brand. Are we using digital in the best way or just using it?

Marc Pritchard, P&G's Chief Brand Officer, inset, was brutally honest when he spoke about the thousands of pieces of content they were creating each year, adding to the 'noise' and what he phrased the 'Content Claptrap'. He challenged the audience to look at their own 'Hall of (content) Shame'. P&G has called stop and become ruthless in its pursuit of appropriate content, linked to the Brand Idea or Purpose, and demands much higher standards of creativity in each of these pieces.

He and others spoke about the greater need for creativity. In a world of adblocking, the only way to win is to create content that people want to watch. In a further note on adblocking, Peter Field, inset, reminded us that the industry has faced this crisis before when TV had to find a way of stopping people channel hopping or fast forwarding through the ad break. The answer: limit advertising minutage (content overload) and raise the creative bar.

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2 Data and Humans

There were many reminders that this should not be an Us versus Data scenario. Data is an invaluable source of information and knowledge, but that knowledge must be interpreted and understood, and most speakers on the topic (apart from those with only binary code running through their veins) believe that humans are critical for true understanding.

3 Short termism is killing creativity

As a communications strategist, perhaps the most worrying finding of all is the impact of short-term communication approaches on effectiveness. On Thursday, Peter Field presented his latest study on Creative Effectiveness.

In the past creatively awarded campaigns were found to be 12 times more business effective than their non awarded counterparts. They also tended to take a long view in terms of brand building, with campaigns building on campaigns.

Since the financial crisis and the advent of digital advertising, the focus has shifted to instant impact rather than long term brand building. This has been exacerbated by reduced budgets. The upside is immediate returns, the downside is the negative impact on long term brand building.

This short term approach has halved business effectiveness of creatively awarded campaigns from a multiple of 12 to a multiple of 6. He called on agencies and clients, to be business smarter and consider our campaigns with a longer lens and find ways to make these short term initiatives part of a longer brand building strategy.

Perhaps we should learn from the words of Simon and Garfunkel and 'slow down, we're moving too fast' and take a moment to pause and think before pressing 'Go.

Margaret Gilsonan is head of strategy at Boys and Girls.

Irish Independent

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