

# John McGee: Business leaders must see Cannes case for creativity



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Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg in on the line-up for the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity

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In three weeks' time, a large posse of Irish marketers and ad agency folk will descend upon the beautiful French city of Cannes for what is seen by many within the wider marketing world as the biggest and most important awards programme in the world.

Dubbed the Oscars of the advertising industry, the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity celebrates the very best creative advertising and marketing in the world and over 40,000 people will make the annual pilgrimage to what effectively draws the curtains on the annual awards season.

While the awards take centre stage, the week-long festival also includes a stellar line-up of guest speakers and celebrities drawn mainly from advertising, the arts and business. This year's line-up, for example, includes Dame Helen Mirren, Alicia Silverstone, Ian McKellen and Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg.

The Dublin-based agency Rothco and its sister agency Guns or Knives, meanwhile, will fly the Irish flag by delivering a workshop while the former will take to the stage to talk about its work for AIB's The Toughest, the bank's creative content initiative that supports its GAA sponsorship.

This year, the Irish delegation will also include seven teams of young creatives and marketers, all under the age of 30 who will take part in the Cannes Young Lions, an awards programme aimed at a younger industry cohort. Thanks

to sponsorship from several companies like Core Media, Shutterstock, Wide Eye Media and Independent News & Media, publisher of this newspaper, these bright young things will get a first-hand glimpse of the best advertising in the world and hopefully be inspired by the creative thinking and strategies that will flow as freely as the cold beers and rosé wine.

If ever there was a time in the history of advertising and marketing when a true understanding of the power of creativity was needed, that time is now.

It was the American advertising legend Bill Bernbach, the co-founder of Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB) who said that "if your advertising goes unnoticed, everything else is academic". And while he believed passionately in the power of creativity, his opinion wasn't backed up by any evidence, empirical or otherwise. It was just a deep-rooted hunch and perhaps an insight into the human psyche. It was years later after Bernbach's death in the early 1980s when academia and an emerging cohort of marketing scientists started taking an interest in advertising and the impact that it had on brands, the bottom line and, ultimately, the success or otherwise of companies.

As Bernbach contended at the time, the vast majority of advertising does go unnoticed simply because it lacks the creativity to make it stand out, resonate with consumers and, ultimately, be effective. And ineffective advertising is akin to throwing money into a fathomless black hole.

At Cannes, and other international awards programmes like the D&AD awards and the One Show, the cream of the world's advertising and marketing strategies usually rises to the top. And thanks to the marketing scientists and academics, we now know that these advertising campaigns tend to deliver a meaningful return on investment and ultimately commercial success for the companies behind them.

Unfortunately, the link between creativity and commercial success has too often been overlooked by companies and for lots of reasons. Some of it has to do with marketing's apparent inability (though not in all cases) to make the case for creativity in the boardroom. Some of the blame also lies with advertising agencies' inability to deliver truly creative campaigns for their clients. And some of it has to do with creeping short-termism and the need for a quick-fix solution or an immediate desire to placate shareholders. You can add to this list fear, indifference and even stupidity.

Short-termism was one of the obstacles that was identified in *Marketing Multiplied*, the award-winning publication that was published by the Association of Advertisers in Ireland (AAI) and Core Media earlier this year.

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