

Cannes. A Cathedral of confidence?

 By [Damon Stapleton](#)

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This is the strangeness of Cannes. Russian tour guides, hustlers, believers, charlatans and sometimes you occasionally meet a genius who may or may not be a hustler.

"All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence, and then success is sure." Mark Twain.

It is a strange thing flying 30 hours to France to be welcomed by a thick Russian accent. My driver, Ivan, was a tour guide originally from Vladivostok, now living in Nice. I am not sure Russians make great tour guides. Even when they say have a nice day, it sounds vaguely threatening and sinister.



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My Russian tour guide was originally an electrical engineer but could not get qualifications in France. I asked why he stayed. He replied the weather, the women and the fact that he could say whatever he wanted. He could have an opinion. And Cannes is certainly the right place for that.

As I have said in a [previous blog post](#), Cannes is like a beautiful picture frame but every week the picture changes. One week it is film, the next week porn, the week after that advertising. And so it goes on.

This is the great contradiction of Cannes. The place, the old stone buildings and eternal landscape have a feeling of having been there forever. Yet the conversations are always about the future, where things are going. Yesterday's buildings remain but the billions of words will be gone in the morning.

And the thing about the future is, nobody knows. We can pretend we know, we can guess and some of us might think we

are certain. But nobody really knows. Some just believe more than others.

Last week I listened to a lot of opinions. A lot. Cannes seems to be this strange place where ideas go to be believed in. All these ideas, navigating their way through waves of opinions to try and reach the shore. For me, Cannes is an attempt at navigating when you have no stars. In a world made of opinions, we do this pilgrimage to find some confidence for our journey. Simply put, we want to believe we are moving in the right direction.

I listened to ECDs, CCOs, CEOs, clients, media people and a variety of others, from Pharrell Williams to drunk Italian waiters. And, amongst the wine, finger food and salesmanship, if you listen closely, they all have a theory about where things are going. What they don't have is confirmation and they never really will. This is why they come to Cannes. They are looking for confidence. Or trying to give some to others.

Confidence is almost everything. Ideas need confidence to survive. And when it comes to the business of the future, confidence and belief is just as important as fact. And, our business, from winning a pitch to making a great idea happen, is all about confidence. Now, I don't know if getting any kind of confidence from Cannes is a moderate form of insanity. Actually, I am pretty sure it is. In fact, I know it is. However, year after year, in a business of endless opinions, we use this little French seaside town to tell us what this year's facts are going to be. It might be crazy but confidence is a fuel our business desperately needs. Now, more than ever.

I don't say this as some sort of Cannes zealot. I have been a creative for 20 years and know better than most what a cruel mistress Cannes can be. There is so much bullshit. One year you are a genius because you won the Grand Prix, the next year you are average because you didn't make a shortlist. And you are still the same person. One year, everybody talks to you, the following year, they are looking over your shoulder through their mirrored Ray-Bans to see who else is in the room. I have been elated there and I have been depressed there. I have loved those quaint shutters and rude waiters and I have also hated every inch of the place. Either way, it has moved me forward. Sometimes through happiness, sometimes through anger and determination. Creating momentum is the hardest thing to do in this business, so however it happens, be grateful for it.

Our business is an ocean of opinions and to conquer that ocean you need two things. You need an engine and a compass. Strangely, in its own way, Cannes can be both for you. It can give you the confidence or sometimes the anger to try and move forward. And, in our business, momentum and finding almost any direction will always help you far more than standing still.

That is what I saw this year. An industry full of brilliant people and ideas looking for the confidence to move forward in a rapidly changing world.

And what if you take the wrong direction?

Don't worry. Next year's pilgrimage awaits, where you can once again look for that next unreachable, imaginary North Star.

ABOUT DAMON STAPLETON

Damon is regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia. Before that, ECD at Saatchi and Saatchi Australia, before that, group ECD of TBWA Hunt Lascaris and global ECD of Standard Bank. He has won over 500 awards internationally, including a D&AD Black Pencil, Cannes Grand Prix, Grand Clios, ADC Black Cube and most effective ad in the world by Warc 100. Damon is now regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia...

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