

# Of rock stars, sex toys and bean bags - why I'm so stoked to be a Cannes judge

 Byeoin welsh

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A few weeks ago, I found out that I was going to be a Cannes judge.

I couldn't have been prouder if I found out I was going to be a dad. (Well, OK, maybe a little). It's a helluva thing, to be considered worthy to help select the best communication ideas in the world. But in truth, that's not the main reason I'm counting the days till June.

Two years ago, I went to Cannes as a participant. What I experienced both amazed and confused me in equal measure. Confused, because after a couple of days, I was struggling to figure out what this festival actually was about. I thought it was all about cool ads that won prizes. Boy, was I wrong.

Sex toys (the actual products, not their advertising), a brilliant digitally-created paedophile trap, and a 3D printer that could print out cost-effective prosthetic limbs for landmine victims, all shared stage space – and accolades – with actual advertising.

Rock stars (real ones), astrophysicists and captains of industry got to say their say alongside industry legends. Lots of big giant heads from Facebook, Google and YouTube said that everything has changed. John Hegarty said that nothing has. Weirdly, they're both right. (Mr Hegarty also said the immortal words: "*Just because you sit on a bean bag, doesn't make you a creative*," and compared digital "gurus" to the Taliban. May you live forever, Mr H).

So what the hell was Cannes? An advertising festival? A tech expo? A talk show? An ideas generator?

After a while I realised the answer: Cannes is Cannes. All and none of the above. Officially, it's a "festival of creativity". Which, as everything-and-nothing titles go, is as good as any.

Cannes is what you make it. It's a peerless ensemble of smart people, awesome thinking and wonderful ideas laid out like a big creative buffet. Help yourself. Pig out.



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It's also a rollercoaster. It's a thrill ride – a creative adrenalin rush. And like a rollercoaster, you don't try and analyse the reason for its existence. You just get on and have a blast.

As soon as I stopped trying to figure out what it was, and just climbed on board, it was breathtaking. I loved every minute (even the hangovers) and came back a better creative, a smarter thinker and a more curious, quizzical human being. Because Cannes is not just about advertising. It's certainly not just about competing (much as we may think it is).

Cannes is about experiencing. About taking a week and soaking your brain in some of the most wonderful thinking and ideas the world can offer. It defies description, and it defies titles. Thank God for that. So, yeah, I'm superchuffed about being a judge. Thrilled to have some small role to play in acknowledging the best of the best.

But you know what I'm really stoked about?

Just being there.

## ABOUT EOIN WELSH

Born in Dublin, Ireland, and bred in Johannesburg, Eoin began his career writing property brochures. From these humble beginnings he has risen through the ranks to creative director at such esteemed agencies as Draft FCB, King James, Metropolitan Republic, Lowe & Partners (both in South African and Europe) and now is the chief creative officer executive creative director of the Havas Group of Companies in Southern Africa...

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