

Has advertising lost its sense of humour?

 By [Damon Stapleton](#)

8 Mar 2017

There is a saying in Hollywood that comedies never win at the Oscars. It would seem the stats back it up.



Be interesting! Image © – [Damon's Brain](#)

Guess how long it has been since a comedy won best picture at the Oscars? 40 years. *Annie Hall* won in 1977 and that was the very last time. In total, comedies have only ever won Best Picture six times in 88 years.

It's a very strange fact. It's almost like we cannot reward or acknowledge humour. It's as if it is not a deep enough emotion to be rewarded. We need tears, angst or deep meaning to say a film is truly great. It has to be worthy of our praise. The problem with worthy, however, is that it is a very serious business.

The truth is, to make something funny is one of the hardest things you can do. And if you are honest about the films you love or the YouTube clips you show to your mates, comedy wins every time.

As I read all these stats about the Oscars I started to think about if this is true for advertising. Are we any different? How

often does funny win best in show these days? And, I stress *these days*.

Innovative, sure. Helping the planet or others, check. A story that makes you feel deeply, that's a yes. Something that makes you laugh your ass off, not so much. So, does advertising still have a sense of humour?

One of advertising's greatest weapons was the ability to **make people laugh**. We shouldn't underestimate or throw away its power.

While I was thinking about this I stumbled on a brilliant *SNL* skit that perfectly explains where advertising is at right now and the problems we are creating. And, it uses humour to do it.

Do yourself a favour and watch it. It's worth four minutes of your time.

If you are in the USA you can watch it [here](#).

Or, if you are not in the USA, it exists on metatube.com. Search for 'pitch meeting' or [click here](#).

What this fantastic skit highlights is the **real danger for advertising** right now. Everybody is jumping on a cause. Should every brand have a deep purpose or meaning? If you are a chip called "Cheetos" like the one in the *SNL* skit, should you really be trying to save the world?

Now, having said that, I think there are some brands that have walked the talk and have used this type of advertising or way of behaving to great effect. What you will normally find though is that there is some sort of natural fit and it makes sense for the brand. These brands normally back up what they say. And, most importantly, because of this the consumer doesn't think it is all just bulls#!t and puffery.

However, without mentioning names, look at the [Super Bowl work](#) from this year and you will see many brands jumping on very generic trends that really have nothing to do with their brand or past behaviour. Somebody told them that people care about these issues and they just smashed their brand into a cause or purpose with very little truth, humour, charm or, most importantly, relevance. This is advertising's version of alternative facts.

It's like meeting somebody at a dinner party who just keeps saying: "I am a good person, I care about the world, love me. I am a good person, I care about the world, love me. I am a good person..." It's pretty weird, right? A little intense. You would move to another part of the table desperately looking for someone who has a good story that will make you smile.

For me, the lesson is simple: A trend is not an idea. Information is not a story. And sometimes, you don't have to be worthy, or save the world.

Just make me laugh.

"When humour goes, there goes civilisation." – Erma Bombeck.

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 Clio, 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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