

Ideas: They are not for everyone

 By [Damon Stapleton](#)

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Narratives that don't make sense. If you have been in advertising for more than 10 minutes, you will have seen this before.



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Invariably, over time you find these narratives have far more to do with making or saving money than anything coming close to the truth. Look what was said five years ago about digital advertising and you will see what I mean.

Right now, there are two narratives floating around advertising that are diametrically opposed to each other.

The first one goes like this: Nothing is more important than creativity. It is our secret weapon. We need it. It is what separates us from the rest. The other is, creative should not be left up to the creatives. Ideas can come from anywhere. Anybody can come up with an idea. We should be open to everybody having ideas.

Now, I would agree that anybody can have an idea. Any creative director worth his salt will look at the idea, not where it came from. I also understand that a lot of these conversations come from dealing with how many puzzle pieces there are these days. And how little time exists to make that pretty picture on the box.

However, when I look at these competing narratives I have some issues about the misconceptions many in our industry have about creatives and why they are so necessary. For me, these problems begin with two words. **Creative** and **idea**.

Creative is not a job description

'Creative' is not a job description, it a vague, undefined ability. I have told people I am a creative and they have responded by saying they are also creative, they love to cook or are quite keen on gardening.

So, what you often have is the erroneous thought by many in our industry that anybody can be a creative because the job description of being an advertising creative is undefined. This description also erodes the value of what we do. However, there is a far bigger problem.

The second word I mentioned is the word 'idea'. What is an idea? Seriously, think about it for a second. For those that aren't sure, I can put your mind at rest by telling you it is far more than a couple of words on a bloody Post-It.

For many, the perception exists that having an idea is hard. The truth is that the hard part is actually caring about an idea. Everybody can have an idea but, selling, making and caring about an idea that leads to potentially hundreds of executions, often over a couple of years needs a person with special qualities. That blend of talent and dedication is very hard to find.

Creatives are often described as rock stars but the truth is really great creatives are far more like shepherds. They are there when an idea is born. They try to keep it safe and moving in the right direction. They try and make sure it doesn't die. To use a comparison from the other end of the job spectrum, I often think it feels similar to being an actor in LA, going to auditions every day and being rejected for being too short, too tall, too fat, too boring, etc. Talent is important, but so is toughness. It's not for everyone.

Everyone thinks their own ideas are great

The other tricky thing about ideas is that everybody thinks their own ideas are great. This is fine if you don't have to make one. It can just be a nice theory. Nobody gets hurt. But, if you are actually making an idea, which can often cost millions of dollars, somebody has to be responsible for the end product. Who decides? And to be clear, if it is a committee or involves brainstorming, you are already in deep sh!t. Somebody has to make a call. And not just one decision but hundreds of tiny, unglamorous decisions.

Paul Klee once said that a line is a dot that went for a walk. It is one of my favourite quotes because it perfectly describes the difference between having an idea and the endless process of making an idea.

Many at the moment are making the mistake of thinking that having an idea is the same as making an idea. Whether it is the disaster of an event like the [Fyre Festival](#) in the Bahamas, the infamous Pepsi ad or the hundreds of ads that all look like each other because people have cut corners, we need to remember in the end **it is the making that matters**. This is why creatives matter, they make ideas real. They understand more than anybody that an idea means nothing if it isn't made. It is what drives them. It is why they push further. It is why they are different. It is why they are valuable.

The truth is, having an average idea is pretty painless and can be done by many. On the other hand, making a truly great idea needs a person or people that have a lot of courage, passion and a very high pain threshold.

Despite what some may think, it's not for everyone.

"Ideas are easy. It's the execution that really separates the sheep from the goats." – Sue Grafton

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

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