

# From underdogs to game-changers

By  Ann Nurock

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When David Droga, possibly the most creatively awarded person in the world takes to the stage, [people listen](#). When accompanied by Kevin Plank, founder and CEO of his client Under Armour at the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity, people positively flocked to hear their story.

Droga5 was launched in 2006 with Puma as an account, but resigned it for the smaller Under Armour. Their belief was that they should choose the clients that would help them grow the agency by doing really great work. This is a business relationship truly based on trust.

When Kevin Plank started Under Armour in 1996 he did every job himself including, his advertising. In 1999 he bet \$25k on a magazine ad, to the chagrin of his fellow directors. But he needed to get their story out and proved the power of marketing, as this one ad resulted in 8,000 direct calls and over \$800,000 in sales.



Droga and Plank

When Plank met David Droga his marketing changed forever. What attracted Droga to Under Armour was that unlike other brands, Under Armour had a point of view. They were an organisation true to their values, spent less than their competitors and were never swayed by their activities. They remained focused on their core beliefs, which is one of the reasons they have succeeded in becoming the second biggest sportswear brand in the US.

Plank states that the purpose of brands is to give you something you never thought you needed, but once you have you can't live without. Brands are everything.

## Always trust and keep challenging

For Droga, the success of the relationship is that Under Armour listens. It says what it thinks and then gets Droga5 to execute it. Droga believes the most intimidating thing a client can do is to trust their agency. Plank responds in jest: "I trust Droga until we run a lousy campaign."

Droga says that in terms of his agency's success, "we are always challenging." Agencies should never buy their own bullshit. "The ad industry spends too much time trying to prove we are average."

According to Plank, the opportunity is all about the brand. Challenge everything. Believe in yourself and build the product you're selling. He believes in the power of creativity, which is what is ultimately being sold.

The Cannes Grand Prix that Droga5 won for Under Armour last year for "[I will what I want](#)" spoke to women, which was a key need of the client. Plank says despite the challenge, they never believed it *couldn't* happen, as the campaign put a flag out there and forced them to improve their product line. The campaign has contributed to Under Armour becoming a \$17 billion brand.

This is truly an example of a client-agency relationship based on trust and one that turned two underdogs into complete game changers.

## ABOUT ANN NUROCK

Ann is a Partner at Relationship Audits and Management, a global consultancy that measures and optimizes client /agency relationships. Her proprietary Radar tool is used by 30 corporates globally and as a result she interacts with over 80 agencies of all disciplines. Ann spent 25 years plus in the advertising industry as CEO of Grey Advertising South Africa, and head of the Africa region followed by President and CEO of Grey Canada. Contact details: [ann.nurock@relationshipaudits.com](mailto:ann.nurock@relationshipaudits.com) | Twitter @Annnurock

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