

Would you sit next to you at a dinner party?

By  Damon Stapleton

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This is a piece I recently wrote as a convener of Axis 2016, New Zealand's largest advertising show...



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This is one of my favourite *Economist* headlines. The line isn't about being correct, it is about charm, wit and having a good story. It is about being interesting. This is a quality that seems to have been forgotten about lately. As an industry, we are seduced by the idea of accuracy. Well, as the late, great David Abbott once said, it doesn't matter how fast sh!t reaches you, it's still sh!t.

This pretty much sums up my feeling about where advertising is today. As the convener of Axis, I thought it would be worth writing about the crossroads advertising is at and the value awards have in this brave, new world we are entering.

How will it be interesting? What is its purpose? Why are we putting it there? These are the three questions that have always driven our business. And lately, two of the questions, what and why, seem to be getting far more attention than the other one. How?

Our business has become about certainty. There is an idea that you can find the exact answer at the exact time. From data to programmatic buying, we are entering an age of precision. So what is the role of creativity in all of this?

Imagine you are a trout fisherman. And imagine you always come to my store. You walk in and I tell you a story about another trout fisherman. Let's call him Chris. Imagine I told you the same story every day. I tell you about him buying bait and casting into a clear blue lake. In the beginning maybe that would be a good story. But eventually that would become very boring. You would probably find another store. So, to stop that from happening, I add to the story. I tell you Chris doesn't really like trout fishing, he actually has a rubber fetish and just likes walking around in rubber waders. The story just got interesting again. We went from generic and correct to specific and interesting.

Creativity is not about perfection. It is about perspective. Einstein once said that creativity is intelligence having fun. And fun always starts with the how. How do you make something interesting? How do you tell a story? How do you look at a problem? How do you come up with a solution that is not the same as all the others? 'How' is what takes something from being generic and boring to something interesting. And, I am sure you will agree if you were at a dinner party you would far rather listen to someone who is interesting than someone who just spews out fact after fact.

So why is that important? Well, for one, I would say that if everyone has very similar data and algorithms, we will have to have something more interesting to say than the next guy, when you're reaching the same people.

I am not here today to bash data. In fact, I believe it could be the single biggest ally of creativity. The future of our business is going to be about how these disciplines merge. All I am saying is that I don't think it is enough to just be correct. You have to be interesting, too.

The data tells us not to live in Los Angeles because of earthquakes. Yet, 20 million people live there because they love the sunshine. Humans are tricky. This is why creativity is so important. It makes information an experience. In the end, knowing what to say is only half the battle. The other 80%, with apologies to Sir John Hegarty, is knowing how to say it.

That is what Axis is celebrating. Perspective. This is what creativity does. This is what creativity gives us. It creates a point of view. Brands today need this more than ever to stand out from the crowd. Being interesting is not just a nice to have.

Today, it is the best chance of success.

In this new world we are entering, we need to remember that if anybody can reach somebody, they will only listen to somebody who doesn't sound like everybody.

The people that can do this are the people that can create. They create something out of nothing. The world is a little bigger or a little different because of them. Leonard Cohen said it's the cracks that let the light in. We have never needed those cracks more than we do now.

So, here's to the ones that find them and make them. Here's to the crazy ones. If there was ever a time to acknowledge great ideas and the people that have them, it is now. So, for me, Axis is a moment in time to look at these ideas that can change everything. And then, we take a breath and we go again. I look forward to seeing you all there.

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ABOUT DAMON STAPLETON

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