

Cannes 2017: A temperature check and a future-casting exercise

 By [Eoin Welsh](#), issued by [Havas Johannesburg](#)

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We've just come out of Cannes 2017. Planet Ad (aka Up Uranus) is still aflutter with opinions on what won, scrambling to identify trends, and general attempts to make sense of it all. Because Cannes is not just gongs, gutter bars and gallons of rosé wine. It's the industry's annual temperature check, the optimum chance to get a bird's-eye view of what we do, what's working, what's not, and how (not to mention if) we keep ourselves relevant.

Last year I was a juror. This year I looked at it all from the viewpoint of my junk-strewn desk in Bryanston, with the world's worst case of FOMO. Ah well...

It's hard not to be caught up in Cannes fever. And since last year did indeed give me some rich insights into Planet Ad's trajectory in 2016, I thought I'd take the opportunity to see how that compares to where Cannes pointed a year later. 2016 was the year of Brewtroleum, #OPTOUTSIDE, The Next Rembrandt, The Swedish Number, Contours Baby Stroller and Manboobs, to name but a few. I am mentioning these particular few intentionally.

The trick to spotting learnings is to find commonalities in the work. What unites them? What gives them that magic touch that other work, good as it is, just doesn't quite have? Well, in terms of scale or budget, look for commonalities in the above-mentioned work at your peril.

On the one hand, you have campaigns that made biofuel from beer, shut down a statewide US retail chain on the biggest shopping day of the year, and created a brand-new Rembrandt piece using only digital technology. On the other, you have an adult-sized pram and, well, manboobs (used to show women how to check themselves for breast cancer).

But if that's where you're looking, you're looking in the wrong place. What unites them is the power and simplicity of the *idea*. Try the acid test that old farts like me have been applying for years. Ask of each of these, that most brutal of questions: *What's the idea?*

The answers for 2016's best of breed are breathtakingly simple, as a truly great *idea* should be:

Manboobs - "Facebook won't let us show women's breasts, so let's show men's breasts instead."

The Contour Baby Stroller - "Babies can't tell you what they want from a pram, so let's make one that can fit the people who can – their parents."

#OPTOUTSIDE – "Our brand champions outdoor activity, so let's close our stores on a busy shopping day so people can spend more time outside living healthily than inside shopping."

And so on.

Try it for yourself with some of this year's crop of big winners so far. It's revelatory:

Meet Graham – "To show how the human body cannot withstand the impact of a car crash, let's build a human body that can."

Fearless Girl – "Next to one of the most iconic symbols of masculine power, let's match it with a symbol of feminine power that shows just how little physical strength counts for".

Cook This Page – “Let’s take all the intimidation and elitism out of cooking, and make it as easy and fun as join-the-dots drawing.”

In short, Cannes’ big winners, as disparate and diverse as they are, have the same thing in common as last year – *beautifully simple ideas*.

Last year, I described Cannes 2016 as “the year that common sense prevailed.” That the shiny flashing lights of new media were not being lauded for their own sake. That the medium was not the message. That the big winners, regardless of size, shape, media choice, technology deployed, etc. etc. etc., were judged on the size of the idea. Which makes me very happy indeed. Because if what constituted the cornerstone of creative a year ago, is still the cornerstone today, it stands to reason that it will still be so tomorrow. Which is a key insight for a business like ours, that prides itself on predicting what tomorrow will bring.

Doubtless, tomorrow will bring countless changes both evolutionary and revolutionary – which is why at Havas, our key driver is to be “fluent in tomorrow”. That’s what makes our lives and our jobs exciting. But it’s great to see that there are some constants. And that the most important one of all is the great, simply beautiful and beautifully simple idea.

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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