

Don't get mad, get creative

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There's a lot to celebrate this Women's Month, but women at the helm of the creative industry is not one of them. Instead of waiting around to retweet yet another media list or brand #campaign #empoweringwomen, let's do what we do best - get creative.



Same old story

It's that time of year again when every brand, business and media outlet scrambles to put out the most woke ads and tweetable lists to celebrate/honour/recognise women in leadership. #youngogirl! Of course, they (and thus all women) have very good reason to celebrate. Women are doing amazing things across all industries, despite every effort to keep that glass ceiling firmly intact. And while the glass ceiling does show some sign of cracking, it's still nowhere near breaking point. Especially in the creative industry.

Our creative blind spot

You've got to love the creative industry. Put us in front of a client and we're all big talk and big data when it comes to proving we really understand and resonate with our client's target audience. And then we go back to our offices, fall back into rank and file and don't blink when men still lead and decide campaigns selling products to women buyers. If only our presentations revealed the ugly truth – that while women make up only [11% of all creative directorship](#) positions worldwide it is estimated that they control around [85% of all purchasing decisions](#) product-wide. How does that make any sense?

As Emma Reeves, Executive Director of [Free the Bid](#), an international organisation driven to improve female representation in the media and production world, points out: "If the majority of your production is male, as a marketer you have to ask yourself if you are genuinely tapping into and authentically speaking to your actual consumers because across the board 85% of consumers are female."

Years later and not much has changed beyond the hashtags that keep reminding us that #thisgirlcan even when the stats

say that #thatwomanwon't. It's not to say that big brands like Dove and Nike aren't changing the narrative by lending their big budgets, platforms and enviable reach to spreading the word about female discrimination in the workplace. They are. As they should. In 2019, you would have to be completely tone deaf not to position your brand as fighting for equal opportunity/pay/leadership for women. Even Barbie, not usually a brand associated with female empowerment, changed its tune and tone in 2015 with its #imaginethepossibilities campaign. So, if Barbie can imagine a world where talent and opportunity marry to create a new generation of female-driven leadership, why haven't we moved into the Barbie Dreamhouse already?

Don't wait for the stats and industry to change

The stats for women in the creative industry aren't great or nearly where they should be. In the US, only [0.1% of ad agencies](#) are founded by women and [only 2% of venture capital investment](#) goes to female founders. And even if SA is better, we know it's not good enough. Yes, we have top creative women heading up agencies and, like Suhana Gordhan, serving as the Loeries Chairperson. These positions matter because they allow women to lead the change from within. It seems Suhana Gordhan would agree: "One of the things I specifically look at as the chairperson is making sure we have more women judges on our judging panels, we have been doing a lot of things to try and make that happen but it is a slow burn."

Perhaps Gordhan was the driving force behind the Loeries 2018 MasterClass entitled: "Female representation and the media - who controls the narrative?" More's the case it was just topical and on point.

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What do we do in the meantime, while the industry plays catch up? What do we tell the women sitting on the far end of the office and the ones coming up behind us? To wait? To be patient? To trust that the industry will be woke when the world is? Or do we tell them to stop acting like a creative that is waiting to be seen, and start becoming a creative that demands to be heard?

Because the good news is that, even while the industry is slow to change, technology and its creative platforms are growing fast and reaching wide. There are many more ways than just the traditional ones to make waves in the creative industry. You just have to do what you've been trained to do and "think outside the box".

As a company driven by women and focused on delivery Creative Intelligence (CQ), we have a few thoughts on how to think more creatively about our creative careers...

Explore new ideas through new channels

Don't wait for a creative brief to land on your desk. If you have a great idea, tap into one of the many free platforms out there to hone it and own it. Whether you choose to start a vlog, blog, podcast or Instagram account, there is channel to tell your story and share your creative genius. It doesn't matter if your product is bad or if your audience is niche. What matters is that it's original and authentic. The rest is just a matter of time, practice and patience. The point is to be proactive and disciplined about living a more creative life, every day, in your own way.

Never stop learning or exploring

At any given point in the day, you are surrounded by creative thought leaders that can support your creative journey. You just have to do some research and find out who to watch, follow or listen to. And then act on it. Make sure you regularly tune into their podcasts, watch their Ted Talks or download their books onto your Kindle to receive an instant Masterclass in creativity. And while you're at it, don't just start and end with the Seth Godin's of this world. Creativity is best served by broadening your references and tapping into other disciplines. Ask yourself, how can popular psychology enrich your ideas? What can philosophy teach you about minimalistic design? Can poetry add another layer to your rhythm and writing? If you want to create deeper, richer, more interesting products, you will need to reach and think beyond the usual creative paradigms.

Curate to originate

People that are financially rich are time poor. They usually look for websites, businesses and influencers that know how to curate information and deliver it to them in a pretty package. BuzzFeed springs to mind. While origination should always be the end goal, researching and curating content can be a great way to train your eye, hone your skills and build a reputation (and audience) for having your finger on the creative pulse. A cool side effect of curation is that you usually find your own voice by listening and noting what others are doing and saying.

Collaborate

It takes a lot of skills to put a good creative/cultural product together. Design, photography, strategy, writing, tech savvy, marketing. You know the deal. But that shouldn't stop you trying. Rather it should motivate you to find other creatives to collaborate with. The bonus of working with other creatives is that you can motivate, inspire and support each other to keep on creating, even if you don't have an audience or market for your cultural product. Yet.

In between pushing the industry to change, make sure you leave some time and energy to push yourself, creatively speaking. Because at the end of the day, creativity is not limited to a title, brief or industry. It's much bigger than that. And so are you.

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