

What will advertising be like in 500 years?

 By [Damon Stapleton](#)

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This is an article that chief strategy officer Rupert Price and I recently wrote for *Idealog Magazine*. We were asked a simple question: "What will advertising be like in 500 years?" Now, Rupert and I are not very good at thinking ahead. Even when it comes to what we want for lunch. And 500 years is a bloody long time. But we gave it a go. And then we went to an unplanned lunch. Enjoy.



Image source: Gallo/Getty.

"It took millions of years for man's instincts to develop. It will take millions more for them to even vary. It is fashionable to talk about changing man. A communicator must be concerned with unchanging man, with his obsessive drive to survive, to be admired, to succeed, to love, to take care of his own."—Bill Bernbach

Change is a very seductive thing and of course, very easy to see. However, what this 70-year old-quote shows is that although many things change, people don't.

That is a particularly important point as we time travel 500 years into the future.

What advertising will look like at that distant horizon is based on three questions:

- Will choice still exist for human beings?

- Will status still be something to be obtained?
- Will humans still want to belong or be seen as an individual?

We believe the cornerstone is choice. If human beings still make decisions, advertising at its core will not be that different. How that information is conveyed and received will of course change beyond belief. But, the fundamental idea of one thing being better than another thing in your mind will drive your behaviour as it does now.

If human beings no longer make choices and decisions are made by A.I., perhaps we will have to create advertising for machines, which is an interesting thought.



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Where we struggle with this concept is that making things easy for humans only works to a point. People don't want to all be the same. People are irrational and driven by emotion. I feel like there would be a radical response to daily conformity. Don't take our word for it, ask communism.

This brings us to our second point. If a hierarchy or society of any kind exists 500 years from now, status and getting ahead will not be that different from today. Now, that hierarchy might be a digital one or your status might be determined by what kind of microchip is under your skin. But, you will still want the best microchip, right? Just a bit better than your neighbour's one.

“ We don't want to be the same as everybody else. That's just how human beings work. We want to feel like we are unique. We also tend to want to belong to a tribe of like-minded people. These drivers have been a part of us for thousands of years. They will be with us for thousands more. ”

The question is, what will advertising be like in 500 years? Perhaps, we should ask another question: What will people be like in 500 years? If we go back 500 years, how different were people when it came to their desires? Not very different at all.

When it comes to advertising, we are often seduced by the new way or the shiny new channel. The truth is perhaps more mundane. Things change a lot, people don't.



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Now, that would have been a great place to end this article, except there is another way this could all go. What if people could change?

After all, we did say 500 years, right? And what we are about to say could easily happen in the next 50 years or so.

As we said, advertising will exist as long as people make their own choices and have their own preferences. But, what if those decisions were made before they were born? What if we are at the birth of intelligent design?

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For 4 billion years, the planet and all species upon it have been governed by the laws of nature and natural selection. However, we can now select gender, we can prolong ageing and rebuild humans through replicating DNA. We are also starting to see ideas like bio-hacking becoming very popular.

All of this will only snowball as we learn and do more. It is also not going to just go away.

“ So, the question becomes, if we can pre-program eye colour and gender, could we pre-program tastes and preferences into our off-spring before they are even born? ”

A human being's education could be paid for using their DNA sequence. What would an idea like that be worth to a brand? I know, it's insane. And quite possibly, deeply offensive. But it could happen. Very easily. If you look at how social platforms have polarised and shaped our beliefs and choices could this be the next step?



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And, here's another funny idea. What if, as those crazy kids grow up, they could be persuaded to get back at their parents by changing their choices, by changing their DNA to a different brand?

DNA advertising. I am not sure I like it, but, you heard it here first, folks.

Looks like we might need some more office space.

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 global ECD of Standard Bank. He has won over 500 awards internationally, including a D&AD Black Pencil, Cannes Grand Prix, Grand Clio, ADC Black Cube and most effective ad in the world by Warc 100. Damon is now regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia...

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