Where have all the good ideas gone?

By Michael Zylstra , issued by Dentsu

26 Mar 2019

"Is it just me, or has science made advertising worse?" wonders DAN SSA Chief Strategy Officer, Michael Zylstra.



There's no doubt that technological advances have improved life for most of us immeasurably. Cars are cheaper and more efficient, for example. Logistics has been transformed. As has power generation, medicine, architecture and so on.

But what about advertising? Has science made that better? I'd say not. I'd say there's less craft. Less empathy. Less imagination.

As an ideas industry, we don't talk enough about ideas. What's an idea? What's a great idea? How do we come up with more of them? How do we judge them? Protect them? Charge for them? In our world, we should be completely obsessed with ideas. We should be like, "ideas, ideas, ideas" all day long.

Because here's the thing...

...Look past all the rhetoric, the confident future gazing, the self-congratulation, the slick case studies, the awards, the campaigns du jour, the smart-ass blogs, the authoritative keynote speeches... and it's plain that the vast majority of what we produce as an industry isn't brilliant or even good. Most of what our industry puts out into the world is banal, mediocre, unremarkable. Some of it is much, much worse – patronising, insulting, hectoring, polluting, stupid, intrusive, toxic.

Perhaps this is not surprising at all. And yet...

We have a choice

All that effort, all that ingenuity, all that inspiration, all those years honing one's craft, all those long hours, all that Powerpoint, all those brilliant rationales, all those conference calls... all those missed school plays and cancelled dates, all those postponed vacations, all those lovers never loved, all those bedtime stories never told, all those plans postponed, all those promises broken, all those passions never pursued. All to produce crap?

I confess I know from years of firsthand experience that producing bad work takes almost as much time and effort as producing stuff that's good or better. So it strikes me that we have a choice.

We can choose to make those sacrifices in the name of producing crap, or in the name of producing something good.

Less crap, more good ideas

So, I implore you, from today – as we sit down to work, resume unfinished tasks and start fresh ones – as clients, as creatives, as account people, as planners, let's all say, "No to crap!"

Crap conversations. Crap teamwork. Crap ambitions. Crap expectations. Crap standards. Crap objectives. Crap briefs. Crap advice. Crap feedback.

Because if we aren't going to reclaim more of our lives, then at the very least we should maintain (or reclaim) our standards.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Zylstra is DAN SSA Chief Strategy Officer.

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