

# the inquisitive eye

Sparks of creativity ignite rigorous method so that knowledge is power. The results are high impact campaigns.

## **Creativity... art or science?**

At DogStar, we don't take sides on the science versus art debate. We know first hand how much both method and the spark of raw creativity work as the twin inspirations for communications that delight and deliver. And, after 12 years forging just such solutions, we're convinced that great campaigns begin with an inquisitive eye, cocked at the specific slice of the world the client seeks to change.

## **On your mark, get set**

The true artist, it seems, begins each project with a bare slab or blank canvas. But this doesn't mean the world is wide open or that anything goes. Rather, a whole set of questions is likely to be organising his or her process: What's the truth of my subject matter? What are the limitations of my materials or my technique for using them? What's the most...or least...my dealers/buyers/curators will tolerate?

Moving from the garret into the commercial studio, these questions become: What is my client aiming to achieve in this communication, and why? Who or what changes when the campaign succeeds? Is this campaign aimed at a single or several audiences, each with their own preference for the form and content of messages? What are the limitations in terms of practicality?

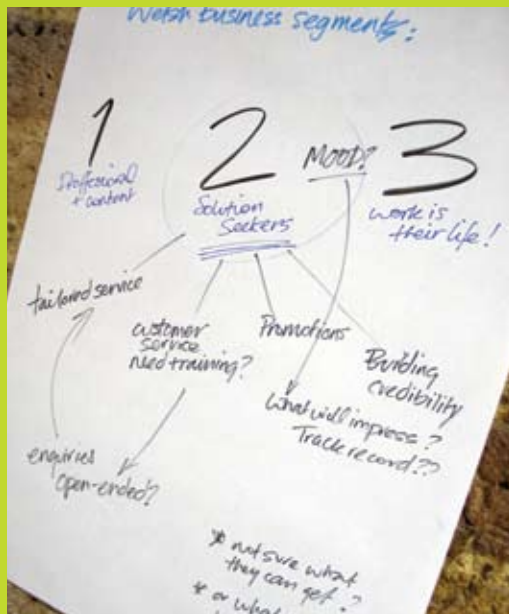
We put these questions to our clients. Conversations ensue. Out of this dialogue comes a shared understanding of what is called for and how we'll recognise the best possible solution. Often, the solution evolves seamlessly, and our attention moves to perfecting the execution and implementation of a campaign. We don't call this method scientific, but it is fact-based collaboration that unleashes the creativity of our combined team. And we think it may well explain why two-thirds of our clients have worked with us for three or more years.

We also take inspiration from research. Research can increase the knowledge that fuels our best work. We're particularly interested here in the insights produced by well-established techniques for investigating and categorising different audiences. Perfected by consumer marketing, these methods have migrated into B2B and public sector communications. Wherever they're well applied, they help make sense of how individuals fit into audience groups. And it's this move into the rich territory between the particular and the general where creative thought finds traction.

## **Why design flourishes on a knowledge-enriched diet**

Formal research extends our field of vision. It shows us more about the world in which our communications campaigns seek to intervene. The output of most research companies "sits still" on the page. We circle it, trampoline off it and refer back to it. The outcome, often as not, is that we ask more, and sometimes better, questions.





These questions, and more, bring us back around the table to build with our client a shared understanding about what we're communicating to whom, and why.

Rather than curtailing conversation with a client, formal research deepens and extends the discussion. But it is just one way for us to scope out the requirement. We also take on the role of investigator, interviewing project stakeholders, the frontline staff who will be a brand's ambassadors, and keep our ear to the ground for the views of end users. Equally, we apply our personal experience where it's relevant, drawing on our decisions and preferences as professionals and as consumers and citizens. But, for as many projects that are "close to home", there are just as many that take us far from our comfort zone, and the world we feel we know already.

That's when we take to the field. So it was that agency MD **Simon Davies** and Client Services Director **Joanna Papadopoulos** drove in a borrowed 4x4 several hours into Wales...

Their destination was 9<sup>th</sup> of Britain's 10 worst places to live (according to Channel 4's 2005 ranking), and the site of a £300 million regeneration project designed to transform the former Ebbw Vale steelworks. Standing on a bluff overlooking the disused works, Simon and Jo were struck by how vast it was, all of it: the place, the loss of its economic heart, the redemptive vision. The brand needed to convey this scale.

Seeing Ebbw Vale showed us that the past wouldn't be buried, it needed to be brought into a new, more hopeful present. We recommended that the consultation process around the brand engage residents and local stakeholders in the actual plans – for affordable housing, for local schools within a learning community, for a hospital, not just a business park – rather than trying to use possible names and new looks as the rallying point. In this case, the brand was a means to a much more substantial end... measurable far down the line not just in terms of developers' ROI but employment rates, levels of family income, educational attainment, even life expectancy. Amongst the names we generated was "The Works" and this was the name the stakeholders ratified. The Works was what it was, what it will be again: that's how the past gets reclaimed.

**The Works** is a project with as much grit as glamour. Other times, the visual and linguistic outcomes may be more overtly ingenious. But consistently, we're too smart to play clever. For each opportunity, we spend our time working through the research... knowing first and foremost that exquisite concepts come from learning and discovery... from looking at what is before us and imagining something more, something better even if that isn't always something brand-spanking new.

Fair to say we bring an inquisitive eye, but truth is, we're all ears.

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