

Don't believe the hype

 By [Damon Stapleton](#)

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"I believe that truth only has one face: that of a violent contradiction." Georges Bataille

Over the years I have met many snake oil salesmen. They do well in advertising and marketing because it is a weird land of contradictions. Anything might be true because we are often talking about the future. We live in a jungle of opinions. That is why certainty is so attractive. It is, in fact, so attractive that it makes us want to ignore the ugly contradictions staring us in the face. And who can blame us, they can be very unpleasant.

In short, we like to believe what is easiest or what everybody is saying.



Don't be a sheep... © Dalibor Sevaljevic – [123RF.com](#)

So, I thought I would use two examples to show how we often believe our own crap. One is about popular advertising wisdom meeting commercial reality. The second is about ridiculous labels and titles facing the inherent value of a creative. For me, both are massive contradictions that are worth looking at.

The first one happened over Xmas

I am watching festive season television. Amongst the infinite amount of tinsel-infused retail I began to notice an ad that kept playing over and over. It was for Game of War, a mobile gaming app. In the very next break, there is another for Clash of Clans and Mobile Strike featuring Arnold Schwarzenegger. These very expensive commercials are played over and over like a brainwashing experiment for the CIA.

They are television commercials for digital products that you can download from the app store. There is huge media spend behind these commercials. So, they must be having an impact in terms of sales.

The reason I mention this is if you look at what gets said and has been said in our business every day by many so-called experts about television and the power of digital, it doesn't really make sense. And don't even get me started on the wisdom of banner ads or the definition of content. A mobile app spending millions of dollars on television is just one more contradiction in our business.

Here is another

Claire Beale, the editor of *Campaign Magazine*, recently wrote an excellent article called 'Time to remind ourselves creativity is special.'

Here is what she said:

'Apparently, being a creative thinker is a very good thing, but being "a creative" is increasingly seen as a limited and limiting tag.

It seems that if you're a creative now, a lot of other people think you might be sitting around having a nice time doing soft things like doodling or looking at YouTube and not actually contributing very much.

Maybe people always thought that about creatives. The trouble is, the word 'creativity' is increasingly being demystified and commoditised. Creativity has become so democratised that it's applied - sometimes fairly, often ridiculously - to everything from database management to procurement; anyone who actually calls themselves a creative is assumed to be doing only half the job.

Bullsh!t, of course. You might very well be sitting around doing soft things such as doodling or looking at YouTube, but that's probably because such pursuits might help you actually do the one thing all those other people are unlikely to ever do: come up with brilliant ideas that change culture and businesses. Sometimes.

Anyway, the good news is that people who sit around doodling and coming up with great ideas that get made into movies or West End shows or handbags or ads for price-comparison websites contributed a record amount to the UK economy in 2014.

Our creative industry sector is growing three times faster than any other, up almost 9 percent last year, and is currently worth £84.1 billion to the UK economy or - to put it another way - £9.6 million an hour. Of course, all sorts of specialist skills - not just creative genius - contribute to this success story. Yet there's a disconnect between this economic performance and the way genuine creativity is valued within many businesses and within the wider system, from education to taxation. A new report from BOP Consulting shows that while the UK tops the rankings for the value of creative exports per capita (£248 per head), the government's annual investment in culture languishes at just £52 per head.

Back, then, to my researcher and the demise he identified in the status of creativity as a pursuit. In the ad industry, we have people actually called "creatives" and a wealth of evidence for the value of their work in growing businesses. So why do more and more agencies now seem hell-bent on finding ways to imply that their creatives and creative departments are nothing special: just another function and not always the defining one? If we need reasons to enshrine creativity as something precious and special(ist), then the latest growth figures do a fine job. But anyone in our business who needs convincing of that might be better off working for a management consultant.

So, it would seem many believe being a creative thinker is a good thing but being a creative is not. Figure that one out.

In the same week this article was written, Andrew Keller was hired as global creative director of Facebook. He used to be a lowly creative in a creative department. I would call that a contradiction.

Both these examples for me illustrate the gulf between what is often being said about our industry and what is actually happening.

There are the theories and a lot of noise about media and what actually works. This is why during Xmas we see gaming apps relentlessly advertising on television.

We have experts that endlessly segment people that have ideas. This has devalued the word 'creative'. In reality, however, these creatives are the ones being hired for billion-dollar corporations because they have ideas. No matter what you call them. Actually, if these so-called experts really understood what creatives did, the title 'creative' would be said with far more pride. It would also have far more value.

The truth is, as an industry, we really do believe our own bullsh!t sometimes. And, when it comes to bullsh!t, we should know better. We are in advertising.

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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