

What do you want creativity to do?

By [Damon Stapleton](#)

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"What can creativity do?" Last week, I was asked this simple question. I have been asked this four-word puzzle a few times in my career. It is a strange question.



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You intuitively know the answer, but find it hard to be particularly articulate. I started to give it some thought. Creativity is many things. It also has a few levels of risk and reward.

I think perhaps a better question would be, “What do we *want* creativity to do?”

I think it is a question that is becoming more important to answer because it will determine the future and structure of advertising.

Personally, I think creativity is a bridge that breaks patterns. It is a bridge that can take the new, the different and the interesting across that little river called risk to the shores of success. Nothing else can do this without it becoming a repetitive formula.

I think creativity makes this alchemy in three pretty special ways:

1. On a basic level, it can **take the mundane and what exists and improve it**. It can make things beautiful or change perspective and make something feel new.
2. On a higher level, it can **solve problems** by thinking about them laterally.
3. And at its very best, the clue's in the name: It can **create things that were not there before**. From nothing, suddenly there is something. This magical quality comes with the most reward and the most risk. This is what causes a lot of friction and trouble. It is also what everybody wants.

The reason these different levels are important is because if we look at the industry going forward, the danger exists that we will not embrace all the levels and start to make the same thing over and over. And don't just take my word for it. [Read this article](#) by Samuel Scott. Seriously read it.

It shows what happens to creativity when optimisation is used as the ultimate filter. What happens is an ever-tightening consensus of what is good and popular. There is a right answer. Not an interesting one. Just a correct one.

Creativity's greatest power

So, as the article shows, you are not imagining it – a lot of popular music begins to sound very similar. Or as Mr Scott says, songs are becoming stupider. More Bieber. Less Rolling Stones.

Now, short-term this probably is not a big deal. However, longer term, what this does is it gets rid of creativity's greatest power. The ability to create new things. The ability to experiment. The ability to be like nobody else.

In essence, you start to get about 50% of what creativity can do. Creativity loses its true value. You also start to look like everybody else. You become the same as the next guy. And ultimately, you become boring.

Accuracy and precision are very valuable. However, they are far more valuable if what they are delivering is attractive and desirable.

I think this paragraph from the article sums it up well:

“ When everyone optimises for everything, it is no longer a competitive advantage. The only true competitive advantage that people will have is what rests in their brains – creativity. Without that, you will only be as good as everyone else.

”

This becomes the conundrum we all face every day.

Should we be safe and quite good? Should we push the boat out and try to be brilliant?

Perhaps, the answer lies in looking at creativity very differently. Instead of seeing it as a scary risk, we all begin to see it as a necessary bridge.

A bridge that takes us from the illusion of certainty to the opportunity of something far better.

This is what creativity alone can do. If you want it to.

“Creativity requires the courage to let go of certainties.” – Erich Fromm

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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