

Dancing with our audiences

By Mark Shaw

Speak to me and I'll listen, inform me and I'll act, entertain me and I'll dance.

Don't worry, it's a metaphor and although I do consider myself to be one of the best Dad-dancers around, I am not going to start throwing shapes every time I am entertained by something.

At last year's Media Week Awards there was a bit of a revolution. For the first time ever in history the Award for the best campaign went to 'the customer'. This was to mark the massive shift that has taken place in communications: the customer (that's us by the way) chooses their own content, selects the messages they want to listen to and edits out everything else that is deemed irrelevant.

This places even greater emphasis on the quality of the content in our design and marketing work. If we talk at the customer we won't be heard. If we speak to them they might listen. If we inform and interest them we are likely to create a reaction but if we can entertain them we can enjoy a positive relationship that may last and last.

In this context 'entertain' doesn't mean make them laugh or show all of your best tricks, it means engage them by capturing their interest and stimulating them to think about the subject matter in a real way. This requires a subtle combination of graphic design and copywriting to create a powerful communications approach that targets the audience, grabs their attention and solicits their involvement.

The secret is to crystallise ideas into compelling messages. Ideas can work magic, in the right time and the right place – so long as you remember to keep your reader at the heart of your message.

The way we perceive the world around us is influenced by many external factors, and perceptions can be altered. You can't talk people into something they don't want to do, but you can open their minds to the things they want. Every message has a meaning and in that meaning you can create ideas that will resonate with the audience.

The future of creative thinking is in amalgamating all of the creative arts – photography, illustration, graphic design, typography, copywriting and every other aspect of design and innovative thinking

– into a harmonious blend that carries a single idea for maximum effect.

Every element in the creative melting pot on any brief must support the clear and effective communication of the compelling idea. If this means the imagery leads and copy is left in the wings, great. If it means the typography takes the place of all imagery, great. There is no formula for a correct creative solution, but every successful one will have the same characteristic: clarity.

So lets work as closely together as we can and share our creative thinking, but lets also focus on the quality of the finished item and be prepared to play a minor role if this is what is required.

Clear communication has to be the goal of every business or organisation but without startling innovation or shocking newness we're only doing half of our job as creative thinkers in this new age of communication. Follow advice, follow trends, follow the market but above all, follow your instincts.