

# Here's a purpose for the marketing industry: Help fund the arts.

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If we were worried that the arts were underfunded before the pandemic, the future's looking even bleaker now.

In many countries around the world, government support has been too little too late. Arts venues are closing, and swathes of artists, writers, producers and other creatives are hunting for money that simply doesn't exist.

Some of us, who have arts backgrounds, made the decision to enter full-time employment within the commercial sector. And while many of us are lucky enough to still be working, too many of these artists, creators and freelancers face an uncertain future.

Many of them are our friends. People we've known and worked with for years. People we

should hold in the highest regard for pursuing a life less certain, driven by an admirable desire for a creative career not solely focused on selling other people's products.

Some [governments](#) have stepped in to provide some emergency funding during the current crisis but, in a sector based around freelancers, it's often more about supporting institutions rather than individuals.

Battling with its own COVID-19 fallout – as well as the apparent recent realisation that its workforces aren't representative of the populations it's trying to target – the advertising industry feels like it's at a crossroads.

On one hand, the industry could continue planning its eventual (if not quite complete) return to the office, and quietly rebuild its workforces to include creative people that might not have been available for hire before.

On the other, it could consider a more fundamental rethink of how creativity in this industry could actually work. Or, more specifically, the type of work it should be producing and how it produces it.

Here's the thing. For years, we've been considering (at least some of us have) that younger audiences are beginning to turn away from traditional advertising formats. Yes, linear telly still delivers comparably large reach and consistent ROI, but the old argument that copywriters should be coming up with scripts so good that they cut through all the other ads, won't stand true when much of the target audience isn't watching advertising at all.

The 'purpose' debate is also wearing thin. Yes – many customers may indeed respond better to companies that put a strong purpose at the heart of their business. But advertisers that produce cute adverts about a brand purpose that people simply don't believe, or worse, can't be substantiated, do so at their peril. This type of work just doesn't cut it with ever-increasingly cynical consumers.

If brands really want to use marketing spend 'for good' here's something to consider:

The arts – by which I mean the likes of theatre, dance, music, fine art etc – are full of brilliantly talented people who produce wonderful forms of creativity.

And yet the arts, and the people in the arts, need more funding. Let's consider the UK as an example. The UK creative industries are admired across the world and yet, even before Covid-19 hit, it was [widely reported](#) that government funding in the arts had fallen by 35% since 2009/10 and business contributions were down more than a third since 2012.

At the same time, brands and many of their agencies need an injection of new creativity and new ideas from a more diverse talent pool. I'd say this is even more important right now, with so many of us confined to our home offices, not being exposed to, or inspired by, the world around us in the same way we once did.

With ad blocking and subscription services growing, cracks are beginning to show in traditional forms of advertising, so brands need to seek out more interesting ways to communicate to people.

I almost don't need to say it, but I will anyway. The logical conclusion is that brands should start investing more in the arts.

How?

How about shifting money out of multi-million-dollar ad-shoots into building longer-term relationships with up-and-coming talents who need commercial funding? Sound difficult? That's why, citing another UK example, organisations such as [Creative England](#) exist.

More specifically, how about investing marketing spend into long-term sponsorships of orchestras, theatres, community arts groups or comedy clubs – negotiating, as part of the deal, access and opportunity for talent to feature in brand-funded films and other forms of content. This will provide vital exposure for individuals involved in those particular groups or venues. (Too many existing corporate sponsorships are for badging or VIP access – rather than a means to help the artists themselves.)

Or, how about nurturing creative talent on social media; people who are producing quality creative work, rather than ploughing money into influencers who want to be famous for the sake of being famous?

For those brands looking to do something 'good' with a portion of their marketing spend, it might seem that they can barely scratch the surface given the catastrophe facing the arts sector across the world. But that's exactly why we should collectively start acting now. Brands, and their agency partners, have the opportunity to contribute to arts institutions and venues, and to give a glimpse of hope to the artists and creators that rely on them so much.

There's an uncertain path ahead for the marketing industry. But this will be mutually beneficial. Working out a way in which we can all help fund the arts, is perhaps a true purpose that we can unite around.