
Red Bull, Blade Runner and the trough of disillusionment

OPINION

BY NICK PALMER, HEAD OF CONTENT STRATEGY, MEDIACOM BEYOND ADVERTISING 27 JAN 2017

An awful lot has been written recently about creativity and effectiveness in advertising being at an all-time low. And I'm not going to disagree with that sentiment. But I will suggest it's natural.

There are few models rolled out more frequently than [Gartner's Hype Cycle](#). More often than not to explain why it is or is not a good idea to target early adopters. But it also helps explain where we, as an industry, are today, and reassures us that things will get better.

It's September 2006. Facebook has just opened its doors for anyone above the age of 13 with a valid email address to join. A month later Google paid \$1.65 billion for YouTube.

That was our Technology Trigger. A number of things happened.

A new breed of 'marketer' (or should I say 'evangelist') emerged who would woo with talk of 'engagement' and 'conversations' between brands and customers. No need for evidence.

We got given lots of examples of Red Bull. We created a lot of short-term KPIs that we vigorously optimised against. We were told that advertising would never be the same again. It's what's known as The Peak Of Inflated Expectation.

Then the kicker.

It's 2008. The world's economy grinds to a halt. The inevitable reactions happened; short-termism and risk aversion.

Client briefs demanded the rational over the less tangible to boost short-term KPIs. Individuals feared for their livelihoods and were in no position to say 'no' to their bosses. Agencies were fighting over diminishing budgets and were in no position to challenge their clients. CEOs began entrusting procurement to objectify what is inherently a subjective topic.

Creativity was stifled.

In hindsight it was a perfect storm. Desperate for short-term accountability and terrified that everything had indeed changed, The Peak Of Inflated Expectations peaked high; its shadow is still looming large today.

I'm writing from The Trough Of Disillusionment.

Consumer trust in brands is at an all-time low. Attitudes towards advertising are the same. Ad-blocking is a natural consequence and increasing exponentially. At the same time the digital advertising industry is under more scrutiny than ever before.

Even what should be one of the bedrocks of advertising – that the message you're paying for is actually reaching living, breathing human beings – is being seriously called into

question.

We still get lots of examples of Red Bull. But I don't think we're at the depths of The Trough any more. We've moved past that.

Around me recently there has been a growing groundswell for reversion to advertising based in theory and fact. 'The Long And Short Of It' and 'How Brands Grow' seem to be quoted in every strategic meeting I'm in.

And while the principles re-emerging are excellent, and far more robust than evangelist rhetoric, I fear they miss tangible application in the world we run headlong into.

When Ridley Scott shot Blade Runner he didn't get the financing he wanted. He didn't get the set he wanted. All he got was the set of a disused, generic, 1920's town used to shoot gangster films.

How could he shoot a Science Fiction film about robots from the future on a rundown set reflecting the 1920's prohibition period?

He was insulted. Annoyed. But not defeated.

Ridley Scott realised something. The future is never about just the future. The future isn't just about the latest things.

To quote Dave Trott "the future is always about the latest things overlaid on what came before."

We're entering a fascinating time in advertising. Overlaying sound theories of what we know

worked with the realities of media consumption in the future. That's what the Digital Marketing Age Of Enlightenment will look like.

But we'll still get examples of Red Bull.

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