

# Are you more of a right or left-brained thinker?

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This is the question I was challenged to answer and understand its relevance in terms of advertising last week, at the IPA session with Orlando Wood. We were talking about his ground-breaking book 'Lemon. How the Advertising Brain Turned Sour' that shows how a shift in thinking styles is undermining creativity and making advertising less effective.

Advertising has lost its power to persuade, entertain and make people feel. But how did we lose this power and how can we get it back? Orlando's outlook on the topic has certainly challenged how we think about advertising.

Accounts of the crisis look to a variety of factors, like shifts in spend towards digital channels, or greater emphasis on short-term campaigns. According to the publication, the reasons underlying the crisis relate to the way the brain attends to the world. In order to fully understand this, Orlando investigated the science of the brain. The way our brains see and process the world affects our whole approach to work and creativity. Using a unique mix of neuroscience, cultural history and advertising research, the author shows how an increase in abstract, left-brain thinking has spread across business and popular culture.

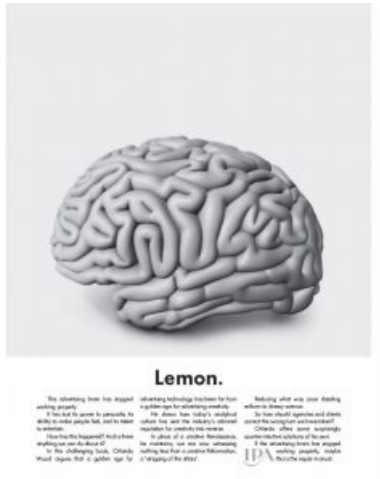
Orlando showed us that the shift in thinking style doesn't apply only to the present times, but in fact leaves traces in culture. We were shown two pictures from mid to late-Roman Imperial mosaic art. In the first picture we could see depth of perspective and detail, a moment caught in time, and a strong sense of informal and emotional relationships between figures – these are **right-brain characteristics**. In the second, perhaps 400 years later, that perspective is gone, and we could see flatness, schematic figure work, and one-sided communication – these appeal far more to the **left brain**.

In his book, Orlando applies these insights to advertising which, in the last 10-15 years, has seen the rise of the left-brained style. Taking a broad view of modern pop culture, he finds evidence of a shift towards material which appeals to the left brain; songs have become simpler and lyrics more repetitive, there are more competitive TV shows and programmes about making things.

After taking some time to reflect on what made the session valuable, a few observations stood out to me as key takeaways:

- Right-brain features presented across ads have declined, and left-brain features now dominate;
- The rise in left-brained elements coincides with the decline in creative effectiveness;
- More emotional ads are amplifying brands' share of voice;
- We can make more effective, right-brained ads by promoting and prioritising characters/ people in advertising.

Orlando identified the structural shifts in advertising to make left-brained work more prevalent, however, I believe it's important we make sure our efforts are equally balanced, so we encourage the combination of both right-brained and left-brained thinking in our industry.



*Orlando Wood is Chief Innovation Officer at System1 and his book ‘Lemon. How the advertising brain turned sour.’ was produced by the IPA.*

*Photos courtesy of IPA*

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