

Creativity needs insights as much as your brand needs creativity

 By [Velia Duncan](#)

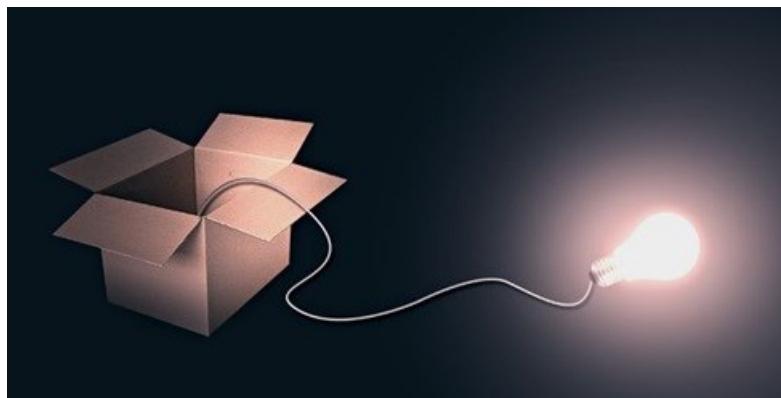
3 Sep 2015

Mark Tutssel, Chief Creative Officer of Leo Burnett Worldwide, famously said that "creativity is the logical conclusion to brilliant thinking". What he didn't say is: "Brilliant thinking is the logical conclusion to brilliant insights". But he should have...

Because the reality is that the creative thought process does not happen in a vacuum; it is prompted by something, and that something more often than not is a useful insight - into the brand itself, or the target market; how the brand is used, or how it is perceived.

Typically, these insights are uncovered as the result of a lengthy, in-depth and often costly research process. But what if you don't have the luxury of indulging in such research? What if you are bound by cost and time constraints?

My advice: Don't skip the research. Nothing good ever came out of guesswork.



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But, remember that research comes in many shapes and forms. Of course, I support formal, in-depth, empirically-proven research, but I also know that you don't always need a 180-page PowerPoint deck with matching bound report to reveal the singular insight that has the power to change your business for the better.

The tools of basic research are all around us; we simply need to start using them.

Start with the data you have on hand. Look at it from a different angle. Get someone else to interpret it for you. You never know what you might find!

When you're done with the data, turn to people.

Talk to people. Engage with your family, friends and colleagues about the category in which you're operating. Seek out specific people: if you're dealing with a pet food brand, speak to your friends who have pets, or get some insight from your local vet.

Listen to people. Not only in the physical world, but also in the digital world.

Observe people. Watch where they shop, how they shop and what they buy. Watch them using the brand or the service.

Ask people. Try a quick, focused online survey, such as the Arc Survey, which is specifically designed to get quick insights at a palatable cost.

Use people. Try your concept out on people you know before you sell it. It's much easier to sell a concept to a client if they can physically see it in action.

When all else fails, try a little common sense. Put a bunch of smart people in one room and get them to talk about your brand problem. Eighty percent of the time they will crack the concept, provided you don't allow them to overthink it!

It might sound too simple to be successful, but over the years we have proved the power of simple research.

In the 1990s, for example, we started a 'Preferred Customer Club' off the back of a customer complaints database, by simply asking these customers what they actually wanted. This was the start of one of South Africa's first FMCG loyalty programmes.

More recently, by reading between the lines of the many online 'Mommy Bloggers' as well as talking to a selection of working moms, we won the opportunity to work on the launch of an early childhood development programme that coincided with the introduction of South Africa's first ECD curriculum.

By unpacking the cliche of the 'crazy cat lady' and talking to friends, colleagues and vets about the passion that people have for their pets, we created an online engagement campaign that exceeded not only client expectations, but also our own.

Over the years, research has been much maligned. But the reality is that creativity needs insights as much as your brand needs creativity. Ask any creative team: the best ideas, the ones that work and have the power to change behaviour, don't materialise out of thin air; they are ignited by a spark, and that spark is an insight that comes from someone, somewhere, who has talked to someone, heard something, or seen something that gives us a little peek into human behaviour and motivators.

That spark, that brilliant insight, is very often the result of highly effective research.

ABOUT VELIA DUNCAN

Velia Duncan has been in the Direct Marketing and CRM industry for 16 years. Armed with a B.Bus Sc degree from UCT, she started her career in retail at Stuttafords. After travelling and completing a further diploma in interior design, Duncan cut her DM teeth working for Reader's Digest as Product Manager on multiple product ranges in South Africa and Africa.

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