

ahead in advertising

UK ADVERTISING STANDS APART FROM THE PACK IN TERMS OF CREATIVITY AND AUDACITY. ROBIN FEARON TAKES A LOOK AT WHY BRITISH ADVERTISING IS SO HIGHLY REGARDED INTERNATIONALLY AND THE CHALLENGES IT FACES IN THE NEW MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Turn on your TV or open the cover of any glossy magazine and you step into the world of advertising. It's a world where desire, need and creative wizardry mingle and clash in an ever-evolving contest of ideas. But it is often the simplest, most subtle ideas that have the greatest impact.

So what do a gorilla, a drum kit and a brand of chocolate have to do with subtlety? On the page it sounds like a recipe for disaster, but in the hands of British advertising agency Fallon, it was a moment of inspired TV lunacy that led to a Grand Prix at the Cannes Lions in 2008, the industry's biggest award ceremony.

Using a gorilla drumming along to Phil Collins's 'In The Air Tonight' to advertise Cadbury's chocolate, the advert beat its way into the hearts and minds of the awards jury the same way it hooked in viewers; with a mix of humour, music and surreal imagery that typifies British advertising.

BOLDLY BRITISH

'The United Kingdom is the most audacious market,' comments Georges Bermann, head of French advertising company Partizan. 'Agencies are keen to engage young directors because they bring with them the latest trends. And British advertisers take risks that others shy away from.'



Above and right Fallon's award-winning advertising campaigns for Cadbury and BBC HD

Far right JWT advertisement for Kellogg's Crunchy Nut cereal



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Cannes Lions festival PR manager Amanda Benfell says UK agencies have a distinguished history of producing award-winning ads. 'The UK adapts the comedy and humour of its TV and film industries and harnesses the creativity of its musicians and arts students to create the world's best advertising.'

While bigger markets like the US may have the muscle to out-produce the UK and win awards, it's the irreverence and cheek of the Brits that translates almost universally across the world.

'The more provocative it is, the better you remember it – that is the whole game,' says Mark Tungate, author of *Adland: A Global History of Advertising*. 'If you create ads that have a slightly saucy image, it works really well. That comes naturally from the British sense of humour and the fact we are very informal as a nation. In Britain you see brands satirising themselves, which consumers really like because it doesn't take you for an idiot. It's kind of like saying "Look we have to sell stuff to you, but while we're doing it we'll have a laugh or try and entertain you".'

THE GOLDEN AGE

Britain may not have invented the concept of modern advertising – that was the US – but

during the 60s, 70s and 80s, UK advertising companies effectively ruled the roost. Its ranks swelled with talent, including world-renowned film directors such as Alan Parker and Ridley Scott.

The 60s and 70s are often referred to as the 'golden age' of advertising. US TV series *Mad Men* dramatises the glamorous but gritty side of New York's Madison Avenue agencies during the 60s, when advertising was an exciting if slightly dishonourable profession. 'Everyone who works in advertising is a bit of character,' says Mark. 'It's interesting that my book came out at the same time as the series. Perhaps there's a kind of nostalgia for the golden age of advertising now that we have entered the age of the internet.'

TRUE TALENT

That wild image may be attractive, but the fact is the industry then needed absolute creativity and vision to survive, and that remains true today. Look at UK advertising. Each agency has its own strong internal culture and personal identity, but it is a small business in terms of the people it employs (approximately 19,000). That is a tiny number for a trade with such a high profile.

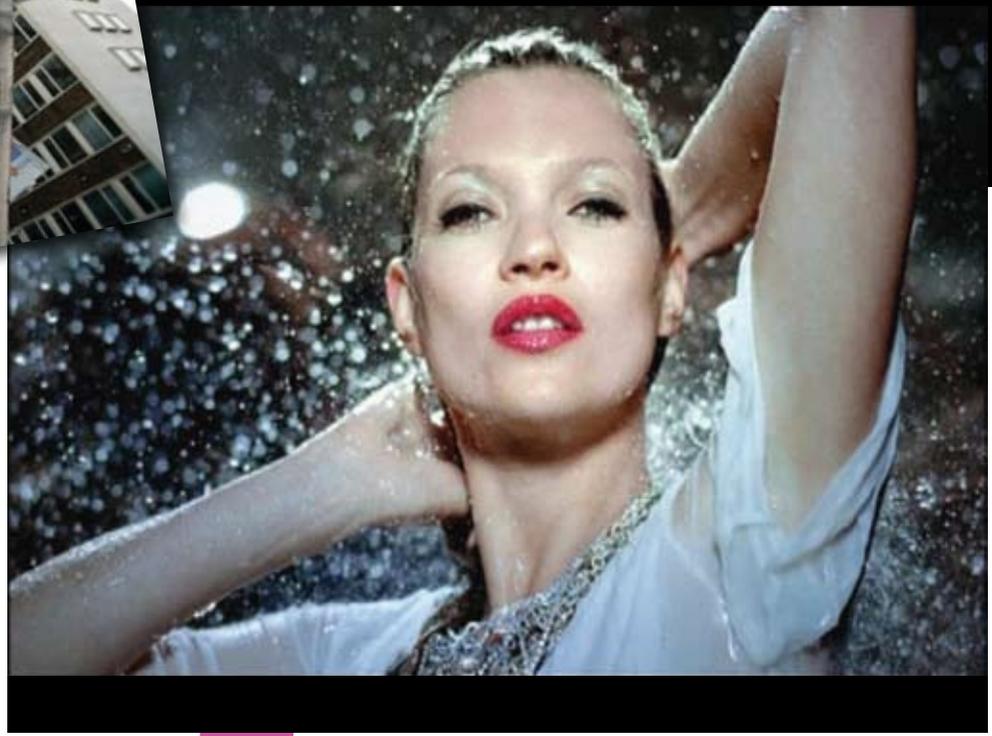
Tom Vick is joint managing director at JWT UK. He recruits people from around the world to ensure a high level of creative diversity. 'Right now our creative department employs five people from Brazil because it is a hot emerging market and they are

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All images courtesy of JWT

producing some really progressive ideas,' he explains. 'It helps us remain ahead of the pack.'

Regulations governing UK advertising are the strictest in the world, says Vick. That means agencies are tightly controlled in what they can say and do. But he is undeterred in his assessment of the British market: 'It is still one of the most creative advertising environments in the world, because the more regulated you are, the more ingenious you have to be in terms of what you say and how you say it.'

CREATE, DESIGN, CODE

Total UK advertising spend across all media is estimated at £6 billion annually. It makes a sizable contribution to the economy but Vick says despite its reputation, the Government is just waking up to the contribution that creative industries such as advertising, film production, design and architecture make to 'UK Plc'.

Left to right
JWT was the agency behind Crimestoppers, Rimmel and Trident campaigns

The fact that the country has such a rich cultural heritage of ideas and concepts should be celebrated. And at no point in modern history has there been such a variety of different media to get the message across. Advertising, like all industries, has had to move with the times.

'Boundaries between media are blurring,' says Vick. 'Years ago we had the TV screen to advertise to people. Now we have video on mobile phones or the web. In fact right now there's a battle going on to establish what will be the most important visual medium. A lot of teenagers live via their mobile phones so it is more important than TV to them.' Mark Tungate agrees. These are interesting times for advertising agencies. There is an entire generation of consumers that they

must now engage with in a brave new media landscape. 'A lot of them were still operating on a 1960s "chassis" created to serve TV, radio and print and they've had to adapt overnight to accommodate digital media,' he adds.

'They have had to deal with the way the internet put consumers in control,' he continues. 'Now if you don't like a product, you can blog about it or mention it on a social network and because of the rapid way that digital communities work, that information is spread far and wide. It means that TV and print are much less important mediums, because young consumers spend a lot more time on social



Lions Academy

The Roger Hatchuel Lions Academy

Brainchild of the former Cannes Lions festival chairman and named in his honour, the Roger Hatchuel Lions Academy was founded in 2003 and provides a one-week training and education course to a selection of students studying advertising, marketing, communication or design.

Each year a class of 30 students (from 18 to 23 years of age) from around the world are selected by festival representatives in conjunction with a local school, university or foundation. They are invited to attend the entire festival where they learn about industry trends, attend discussions and tutorials, as well as take part in activities such as seminars, screenings, exhibitions and award ceremonies.

The academy offers free full registration for all students. Sponsors cover the cost of airfare, accommodation and some expenses. Students are presented with graduation certificates at a celebration lunch at the end of the week.

For more information on the academy contact:

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networking sites than they do watching the box or reading magazines.'

THINK SMALL

Another more obvious barrier has been shifted. In the past, it was only multinational corporations that did creative advertising. Hiring the best agencies required serious financial muscle. But that is changing with the advent of websites like YouTube, where users can create their own content or produce viral ads that create waves around the world.

At the Cannes Lions in 2008, perhaps the most interesting category of all was the Titanium award. Devised to capture these creative new media campaigns,

becomes crucial. Mark Tungate views it simply. The one constant with all of these different channels is the individual who creates a vision for the product.

'An ability to fire people's imagination is what brands are looking for,' he says. 'Our world is dominated by marketing, so saying "Buy our detergent because it washes whiter", doesn't work any more. You need to be able to create content and to do that you must have storytelling ability to entertain the public, on a mobile phone, online or through a TV ad.'

Agencies are hungry to employ 'net literate' people, but flexibility and problem solving are still the most important commodities for those

the winners were a Japanese watch company who developed a dancing clock for people to use in their blogs and a series of viral ads for the launch of Xbox game Halo 3. Viral ads can be made much more cheaply because

they don't have to use state-of-the-art production methods. They can be irreverent or off-message and are often made by small specialist producers.

TELLING A BRAND'S STORY

Agencies now need to integrate their efforts across so many different platforms, from viral ads or emerging technologies like mobile barcodes and digital posters, that balancing out the advertising mix to give maximum return on investment

looking to get ahead in advertising. 'For great advertising to flourish, you need a developed, creative community, and the kind of budgets to make it happen,' concludes Amanda Benfell. 'Many countries like Thailand, Brazil and Argentina are producing great advertising, but the truth is London is still a world centre for creative excellence' ■

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