

LIVING IN THE ATTENTION ECONOMY

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Eight years ago, we took the word advertising out of our name in our 152 offices in 92 countries because we don't believe 'advertising' agencies are the future. We are an *ideas* company, and so our thinking is not restricted by technology or TV channels. They're simply tools.

What I want to talk about today is why I believe that in the attention economy, *ideas* are the *currency*.

We operate in an attention economy because this is the age of *over*-information. To give you some idea of scale, it's estimated that *one edition* of the New York Times, contains more information than a person in 17th century England, would gather in a lifetime.

Another measure is the calculation that says the amount of printed information in the world has been doubling every four years. And, hold on, from 2000 it's expected to double every two years.

We're all besieged by an almost constant barrage of messages and news and noise and signs and music and signals. And yet, somehow, advertisers need their story to sweep through this confusion and chaos, clearly and irresistibly. The 'somehow' must be ideas.

Survive with ideas

Let's start by looking at ideas in the e-world. A place I imagine where many of you see your future and your fortune:

IDEAS ARE THE KEY TO *SURVIVING* IN THE E-WORLD.

A world which is adding hugely to the babble and clutter demanding our attention.

To the one edition of the New York Times' estimate, and the doubling of printed information calculation, you can add all the stuff on the internet. If every website contained just 100 words, there'd be the same amount to read as almost 10,000 complete works of Shakespeare. But one estimate says the web is growing by 2 million pages a day, so my calculation is already out-of-

date.

Without doubt, dot-coms are at the very heart of the attention economy. Moreover, dot coms are forcing a commercial revolution. Our friend the New York Times again, was even moved to predict the demise of traditional advertising agencies, as *their* off-line revenue shot across to become on-line expenditure. Its vision had agencies toppled by e-revolutionaries brandishing their URLs.

But the New York Times missed one important factor in its "ad agency doomsday" scenario. The need for on-line companies to establish their names – their brands - in the minds of e-consumers. And what's the only real option if you wish to become a mass market success fast? Right. Off-line media. And TV in particular. By far, the most effective tool ever developed for selling stuff, has been the television commercial.

Little wonder then that it's reckoned that last year on-line companies spent U. S.\$3.1 billion in off-line media. But the question has to be asked – is all this money being rewarded with the attention it sets out to buy?

The American Super Bowl 2000 was the most concentrated demonstration of the ironic marriage between on-line companies, and off-line advertising.

Three years ago, just one on-line company advertised during the Super Bowl. Autobytel.com. This year, 23 dot-com commercials interrupted America's favourite sporting ritual.

As Autobytel.com's CEO Mark Lorimer puts it: "When we first did it, it was cool for a little dot-com to be on the Super Bowl. Now it's not cool at all".

Here's someone who gets it. Someone who understands the attention economy. Someone who didn't return to Super Bowl dot-com advertising. For so many others though, the thinking seems to have been, "if you can't be first, at least you can be there".

Not a great strategy in the most hyped, most expensive piece of time-estate you can spend your money on anywhere on this planet. The Super Bowl costs a little under \$US 38,889 a second. One dot-com spent 60 percent of its seed capital in less time than it takes to soft boil an egg.

And just think about the context in which all 23 dot-coms' messages were appearing. America's favourite television programme of the year. Watched by 100 million members of the attention economy, whose attention is pretty much focused on one thing: American football.

If anyone's *advertising* message is to stand more than a snowball's chance of coming through *this* viewing *inferno*, here are three fundamental guidelines:

One: be interesting.

Two: be *more* interesting than anyone else advertising.

Three: be more interesting than the next six-pack, or the leak, the previous six-pack brought about the need for.

Have an original idea

In short, because you're operating in the attention economy, have an *original* idea.

In a survey one month after, only 17 percent of respondents, could name a single dot-com Super Bowl advertiser. E-Trade.com was the big winner. A whole six percent remembered seeing their ad. Normally, a brand manager would fall on the corporate sword if he didn't see a recall at least three times higher than that.

This is how one American advertising CEO summarised the Super Bowl e-frenzy:

"Like everything in advertising, someone does something differently, and it works incredibly well, because *no one else* is doing it, and then *everyone* rushes to copy it, and it stops working, because everyone is doing it".

He's talking about dot-coms and the Super Bowl, but it works as a simple, persuasive argument for originality throughout the attention economy. Original ideas don't stay that way for long. Great ideas have a tendency to turn into bandwagons. And in the attention economy, this metamorphosis is swift. What starts out as a razor-sharp, clutter-cutting device, can soon become very blunt.

Truly original, clutter-cutters, of course, have *no reference points*.

I was reading [Q magazine](#) recently, and it listed (in their opinion) the 100 greatest ever British albums.

Top of the list was "Revolver" by The Beatles.

The magazine described the album's "evocative moment" as the first 13 seconds of "Tomorrow Never Knows". "George Harrison tunes a sitar, Ringo Starr bangs a drum, Paul McCartney's laughter is backwards-looped into a seagull cry, John Lennon sings, 'Turn off your mind, relax and float downstream'. Two and three-quarter minutes later the entire world says, 'what the fuck was that?'."

If the response to any idea is something along these lines, it's almost certainly a mould-breaker. Having no reference points can be a problem for us as creators though. We're asking clients to step into the unknown. Clients, on the other hand, often seek the security of the familiar.

"Please give me something like so-and-so" is a dumb request because when the first "so-and-so" was done, there was no "like." In the attention economy, "*nothing like*" is key.

"E" is for emotion

Original ideas of course are of no value if they don't connect with people.

People are people are people -- whether they're on the way to work, on holiday, on a ship, on a course, on a night-out, on a sofa, on a date. Or on-line.

The e-world is still just the world. At Saatchi & Saatchi we've taken back the 'E' into real life, and it stands for Emotion. Jerry Yang, the CEO of Yahoo, understands this dynamic very clearly.

"People attach an emotion to our service. If we don't have that emotion, we're just like every other service. We don't get people to come to the site by saying we have ten million web sites and our competitor has nine million. We're not going to get them here by saying our response time, is one *nano* second faster, than our competitors. We're going to get them, based on an *emotion*".

The question is: can you get emotion into the narrow one-to-one band of the internet? The answer is yes. Check out the work we did it for our client HP and download a virtual version of Mopy [here](#).

People's emotions and needs mean they're just as capable of being *bored*, as they are of being excited and inspired. And the border that *separates* these two states is, again, originality.

The big attraction of on-line brands, from a creative point of view, is that they have no baggage. Nor do they have any clothes for that matter. Nor any personality. They're new-borns. Which gives us the perfect creative challenge. To create a brand from scratch. To take shapeless, raw material, and turn it into a dynamic, unmistakable entity no one can ignore.

Advertising and communications help to build the bridge between the burgeoning brand, and the indifferent consumer. It's a bridge where the two-way traffic includes information, desire, interest, passion, revenue and profits. And bridge-building is easy.... to get wrong.

Sometimes inexperienced on-line companies have asked their website designers to do their off-line advertising for them. It's like asking a plumber, however brilliant he is at plumbing, to cut your hair. (Look what happened to mine!)

We need ideas that trigger a positive emotional response in people. *On-line communities* could be a manifestation of this positive emotional response.

Yahoo's Jerry Yang again:

"We're going to have a million small communities. I'd rather have a million small communities, than five large ones, and I think that's really the next step for being able to make the Internet, even more relevant. Companies, that help people form those communities, are going to be a lot more successful, than those that don't".

You could see this as a merging of a visionary future with humanity's pre-

historic urges. You could also see this as a way of saying that if our ideas don't touch people, they won't touch our product. You need simple, clear ideas.

Make it simple

One of our major clients around the world is [Toyota](#). Toyota are the world's most *valuable* vehicle producer and we've helped them get there. They now exceed the *combined value* of General Motors, Ford and Daimler Chrysler.

When you're advertising a car there's a lot you could talk about. After all, a typical model is made up of around 11,800 different parts. But we crystallise *our* thinking down to *one word*, per model. A word that captures the very essence of what that vehicle stands for, and what it offers the would-be owner.

In the case of the Toyota Hilux, the word is "powerful". A single-minded simple idea.

We also kept it simple when we launched a [website](#), for the luxury brand, Lexus focussing on safety.

In the attention economy, *simplicity* is vital.

My friend Edward de Bono explores this thought, in his book called, appropriately, "[Simplicity](#)".

Research, he notes, has shown "that 95 percent of people do not use 90 percent of the features on their video recorders – because they are too complicated Simplicity is easy to use but can be hard to design. You may need some creativity".

Here's a simple example of the advantages of simplicity – or single mindedness. I throw one thing at you: you catch it. I throw five thoughts at the same time: you miss them all.

Sell more stuff

We've looked at originality, we've looked at simplicity. It's also essential to have a clear purpose.

The clear purpose of advertising is to sell more stuff. Advertising is *not* a marketing expense. It's a mistake to put 'advertising' in the marketing budget. Its rightful place is right in the middle of the *sales* budget.

At Saatchi & Saatchi we've put this radical theory into practice by developing with our client, Procter & Gamble, a new model for remuneration, based on NOS – Net Outside Sales. In other words, we've chosen to be paid by results.

Let me explain just how radical this development is because it turns 100 years of tradition on its head.

Advertising agencies began life as people who bought space, for clients, from media owners, and made their living from the commission paid by the media owners. Our creative role began almost by default. Clients started asking their

agencies how they should fill the space they'd bought for them, and the agencies, eager to keep their business, sprang back immediately with the offer to perform this space-filling function themselves!

No wonder the clients were grateful. The stuff that could actually affect sales, was now being offered pretty much, for free. The medium is nothing without the message. Our predecessors somehow failed to spot the commercial negligence in the wholesale handing over of golden-egg-laying geese.

So the remuneration structure we've developed with Procter & Gamble establishes a landmark in agency/client relationships. Our ideas are now inextricably linked to our clients' bottom-line, and to our own.

From a pure business perspective, it's completely appropriate. From a creative point of view it's fantastically liberating. Now that we don't rely on media commission for our income, our ideas can extend to whatever is most appropriate to drive sales. This is a perfect world for an *ideas company*, with a reputation for thinking beyond the obvious and the usual.

Enter the Internet

The simple truth is that e-business and traditional business are both parts of the attention economy. In fact to describe them as separate parts is to flatter them. They're just part of *our* world. The reason we tend to think they might be different is perhaps because of how we view the internet.

I agree with the advice of Bradley Johnson from Advertising Age in the United States.

http://adage.com/ifuture/just_future.html "Let's stop being awe-struck by 'Internet' (think: 'electricity'). It's a tool. It will be ubiquitous. By 2005, marketing types will be talking about marketing, not about technology. ... Most important, let's stop being overly impressed with 'interactive marketing'. It's a tool. It will be ubiquitous. By 2005, marketing types will be talking about marketing, not about things interactive."

Those who get it – that the internet is a *tool* – are the ones who are simply finding more and more uses for it.

Let's look at some developments.

In email marketing a recent campaign for the movie "American Psycho" [link to www.americanpsycho.com] resulted in 35,000 people asking for the daily emails supposedly written by the lead character of the movie.

Email promotions, guided 63 percent of consumers to on-line retailers, according to a December 99 survey by E-BuyersGuide.com to on-line retailers.

But there's no room for complacency.

Issues of privacy, the risk of spam and the potential of opt-in or permission marketing are presenting email marketers with *their* next challenges.

Innovative applications are being found – and launched – all the time with

tools and domains, such as MP3s from 1st Music Shop, and on-line calculators from Financentre.

Then there's [Blue Mountain Arts](#) and their major electronic greeting card business.

And now there's StellaCam from beer.com and brewer Stella Artois giving me the option of buying the people I'm watching online a Stella Artois beer, and then chatting with them for 15 minutes! All for \$7 on your credit card, from any place on earth.

But ideas in dot-com land, are no more *wear-out proof* than they are anywhere else. According to a survey by Stanford University published in today's "Independent" fewer than two in every 1,000 web surfers click onto banner ads to follow them through to the advertised product.

The hope of many on-line campaigns, that they'll stimulate a *viral dimension* with consumers spreading the message willingly, *is* working, but could be short-lived. The effectiveness of viral marketing will be under-cut in direct proportion to its over-use.

But those who *understand* wear-out, revel in the limitless possibilities of innovation and experiment. They're happily operating in an environment that's crackling and flashing with a creativity that has probably not been seen since the industrial revolution and, before that, the renaissance.

Forget the rules

In this environment, the most *aimless* thing for anyone to do is to look for easy rules and formulas. Because there aren't any. At the same time, the most dangerous thing to do in the attention economy, is to *conform*.

In Silicon Valley, the attention economy is seriously overheating. And I'm not just referring to every inch of outdoor space being saturated with advertising. Autowraps.com is currently hard at work pasting ads on to private vehicles, for up to \$400 bucks a week – depending on the advertiser – and the kind of car!

This kind of over-exposure, is bullying, not communicating.

Hardly surprising that www.blowthedotoutyourass.com, has mounted a campaign to subvert dot-com ads with their own stickers and posters.

People don't have time, for advertisers that just create clutter. But I'm wearing this blow the dot out of your ass.com T-shirt for a different reason.

It's a piece of advice: The dot-com world isn't a separate world. It's *part* of the attention economy.

And the same communication skills apply. Don't fall into the trap that there is a dot-com world or a dot-com consumer – there are only dot-com marketing people who will soon wither and die. We're already seeing that pure e-commerce brands have a limited sell-by date, whether it's clicks to bricks or bricks to clicks, the new brands will be on, and off-line. Amazon is looking at setting up bricks and mortar outlets now. Narrowband will move to

broadband; PC will move to Digital TV; true convergence will confine the internet to an *enabler*, albeit an incredibly powerful one, but not an end in itself.

The e-economy is an incredible revolution. New communities are being created. Geography has been killed. But, but, but.... however fast to market, however technically brilliant, however inspiring the business model, eventually all these things will become generic. Only those dot-coms that become real brands, brands that inspire and provoke passionate loyalty, will build a real, long-term, defensible customer franchise.

So stop focusing on a little dot. Blow it out your ass and focus on ideas. That's where the money lies.

Thank you very much. For your attention.