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The rules behind breaking creative rules /

The thought patterns behind award–winning creative ideas / By Yonathan Dominitz /

CREATING INNOVATIVE CAMPAIGNS
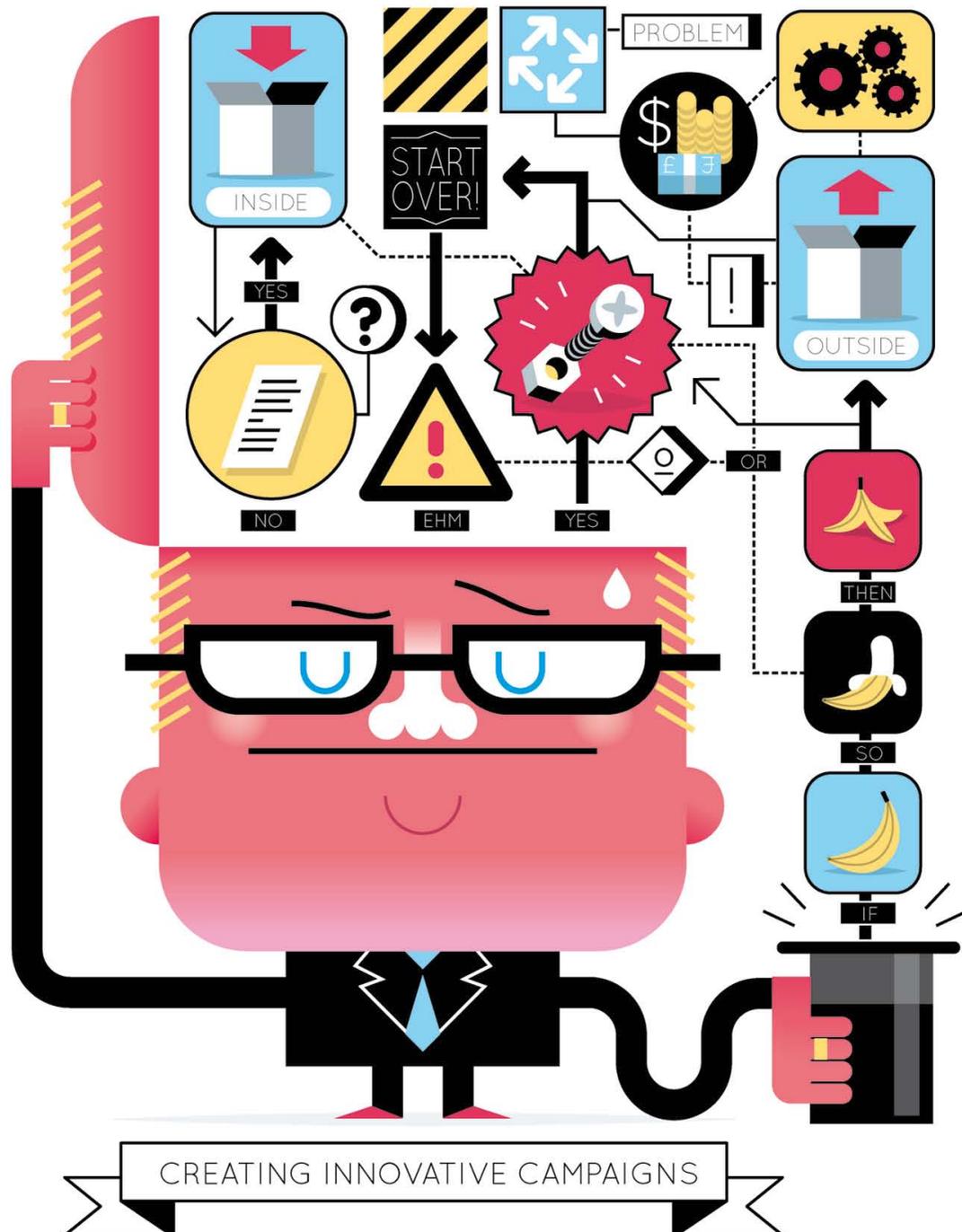
Who says that outstanding creative ideas cannot be organised into a 'system'? It is commonly agreed that the most original and innovative creative ideas are those which break the rules and take an unpredictable approach. However, one could look at the issue from a completely different perspective and see that, underneath the obvious surface, these apparently unique creative ideas share some patterns of thinking. Patterns that paradoxically help one to break the existing common moulds and originate surprising, unexpected ideas.

Reverse engineering

At Mindscapes we examine through reverse engineering the most creative and effective campaigns and identify recurring thought patterns. Based on these patterns, we then create practical thinking tools and train professionals in the creative industry to use these tools, to enhance their scope of creativity, break their own moulds and channel their creative talent to highly fertile new areas.

Different patterns exist for different media channels, although these divisions are becoming less relevant nowadays thanks to greater integration across marketing campaigns. With a certain overlapping, there are specific patterns in 'classic' advertising media (TV, print, outdoor), and yet other patterns in interactive and integrated campaigns. This article will focus on the latter.

Sabotage/reduction

Take, for example: this year's Cannes Lions Titanium-winning 'Whopper Sacrifice' for Burger King (free burgers for those Facebook users who ditched ten of their online friends); the 'Earth Hour/Vote Earth' initiative which urges cities to dim their lights for one symbolic evening; and Crispin Porter's much awarded WhopperFreakout campaign, again for Burger King, which secretly filmed the reactions of customers who were told that the Whopper had been discontinued. Apparently very different campaigns and ideas, yet they all share a pattern of thinking identified as Sabotage/Reduction*.

The basic idea behind this pattern is that in order to create an outstanding idea, instead of adding something new, which is the common approach for creation, here one removes or eliminates an existing component of the product/brand/company/medium, and instead develops a communication idea based on this apparent sabotage. This may result in a highly provocative idea, as we are used to perceiving objects (media, products, brands) in their usual known forms. Thus, our mind is stimulated or attracted when we see a 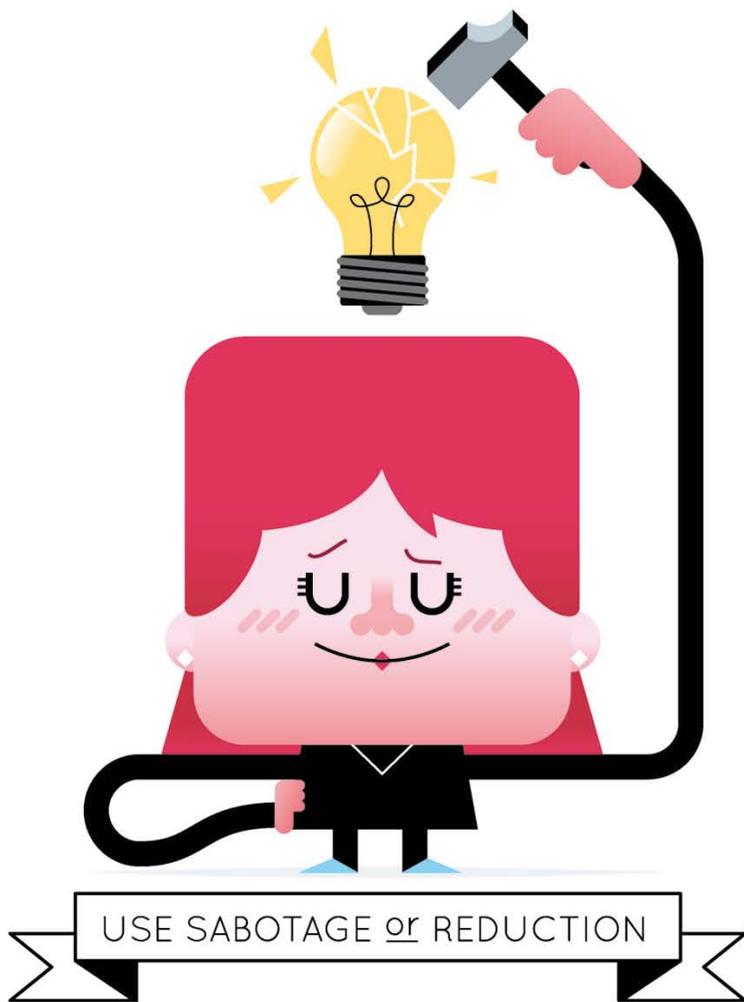form in which one of its normal components has been eliminated or reduced. In this way the success of 'WhopperFreakout', 'Whopper Sacrifice', 'Vote Earth' was due precisely to the removal of the product (the Whopper), or social friends (Whopper Sacrifice) or the lights in your city (Vote Earth).

In the creative process, the power of the Sabotage/Reduction tool is this clear instruction to scan the existing resources inside the product/ brand/ medium/ retail environment and to imagine what kind of provocation could result in sabotaging any of these systems by removing (usually temporarily, for the sake of the campaign) any of its core components.

Fight for a cause

Let's look at a different mould-breaking pattern by focusing on Doritos' 'Bring Slow Dancing Back' campaign out of BBDO Argentina, Gillette's 'To Shave or Not' initiative (a Media Gold Lion this year), the heavily-garlanded 'Campaign for Real Beauty' from Dove, *The Times of India* 'Lead India' campaign and MTV Australia's 'Welcome Snoop', where fans were encouraged to sign a citizenship petition that took a swipe at the Australian government's refusal to grant a visa to rapper Snoop Dogg. What do these ideas all have in common? Instead of putting the brand at the centre of the ad – the common mould – they all share the Fight for a Cause pattern.

By creating a cause outside of the product/brand's up-till-now world, the brand initiates a fight or a wider public movement, and by promoting this particular social or political cause the brand gains the engagement and emotional bonding of people who are empathic or engage with the subject. The fight can sometimes take the form of a social movement, as in the case of the 'Lead India' campaign or a cultural movement like Doritos' 'Bring Slow Dancing Back'. Unlike traditional 'Cause Marketing', in this pattern the cause can be a controversial one, such as the 'Welcome Snoop' campaign and Dove's questioning of the definition of female beauty in modern society, or a consensus one, either serious or humour-based (e.g. 'The Great Schlep'). It all depends on the brand, the insight and the target audience. Sometimes, again as a result of the insight, the 'fight for the cause' can take the form of provoking a public or social debate. A masterfully orchestrated example of this is the 'To Shave or Not' PR campaign from MediaCom in India which saw the Gillette razors brand sparking a national debate about whether men who shave are perceived as more successful than those who remain bearded.

USE SABOTAGE or REDUCTION

one, yet demonstrates the power of using the problem as the solution. This is exactly what CumminsNitro, Brisbane did. By offering 'The Best Job in The World' to candidates willing to audition for the role of caretaker of an island on Australia's Great Barrier Reef, the idea spread like wildfire and generated US$100m worth of PR awareness for tourism in Queensland.

Equipped with the 'Creative use of a problem' tool, the team at Beacon Communications in Tokyo (trained by Mindscapes in 2007) came up with the concept of 'Yubari - No Money but Love', collecting this year's Cannes Lions Promo Grand Prix. By admitting the problem – the huge debt of a bankrupt city – in the advertising communication, the agency created a strong contrast between the lack of money and the abundance of love (Yubari is the city with the lowest rate of divorce in Japan), creatively symbolised by the 'Yubari-Fusai' term (Fusai means both 'debt' and 'spouse' in Japanese), thus creating a peculiarly attractive new tourist destination for happy couples. The campaign generated US$1.5m of free media exposure and attracted $31m of new tourism income into the troubled city.

'Becoming aware of the existence of mould-breaking patterns can have far-reaching consequences for anyone involved in the creation of new ideas in today's seemingly chaotic marketing landscape and hyper-interactive social media space.'

One of the more interesting findings of the Mindscapes analysis of creative patterns is that in highly effective ideas one can see a fusion of two patterns. In 'The Best Job in the World' the creators not only Use the Problem – fear of losing jobs – to create the solution (offer a new job) but also follow the Create a Challenge pattern by requiring candidates to submit a personal video application in order to be considered for the job. In the Portuguese Red Cross 'Sell Hope' campaign by Leo Burnett, Lisbon one can see both the Create a Product pattern by making 'Hope' a real product, and the Sabotage/Reduction pattern by selling empty shopping bags with nothing inside. (Consumers must make a donation to the charity in order to receive a bag). The campaign for Yellow New Zealand was crafted through Creating a Challenge of building the country's first tree-house restaurant using only suppliers found in the Yellow directory, and Create a Product or a service: the tree-house is a genuine restaurant where the public can dine in a spectacular surrounding.

Creative use of a problem

The current economic crisis offers those who dare to think in non-conventional ways new horizons for potential creative ideas, some of which couldn't even exist without the downturn. Why did the 'The Best Job in The World' for Queensland Tourism and 'A Trillion Dollar Campaign' for *The Zimbabwean* newspaper collect so many awards this year, and what do they have in common? Again, looking beyond the surface one may see that both campaigns make a 'Creative use of a problem'.

Usually when brands face a problem, the instinctive reaction is either to avoid the problem (i.e. not to mention it in any communication), or to look for a solution outside of the problem. Yet a creative approach would suggest using the problem itself as the source of a solution. The brilliance of the Trillion Dollar campaign comes from the use on public billboards of millions of valueless Zimbabwean dollar bills (part of the problem) as the media itself for the campaign. In a period when the tourist industry is adversely affected by the universal fear of people losing their jobs, the idea of basing a campaign on the creation of a new job is indeed a counterintuitive

Practical thinking tools

What could be the practical application of these rule-breaking patterns? For those who are reluctant to follow any kind of 'menus' or forms, it can serve simply as a list of schemes to be avoided or 'not to be followed'… The truth is that 33% of award winning works cannot be categorised into any of these patterns.

However, becoming aware of the existence of mould-breaking patterns can have far-reaching consequences for anyone involved in the creation of new ideas in today's seemingly chaotic marketing landscape and hyper-interactive social media space. It sets practical thinking tools that enable creators to direct their minds and imaginations in clear directions, fertile with new opportunities.

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Illustration: Loulou & Tummie

FIGHT FOR A CAUSE
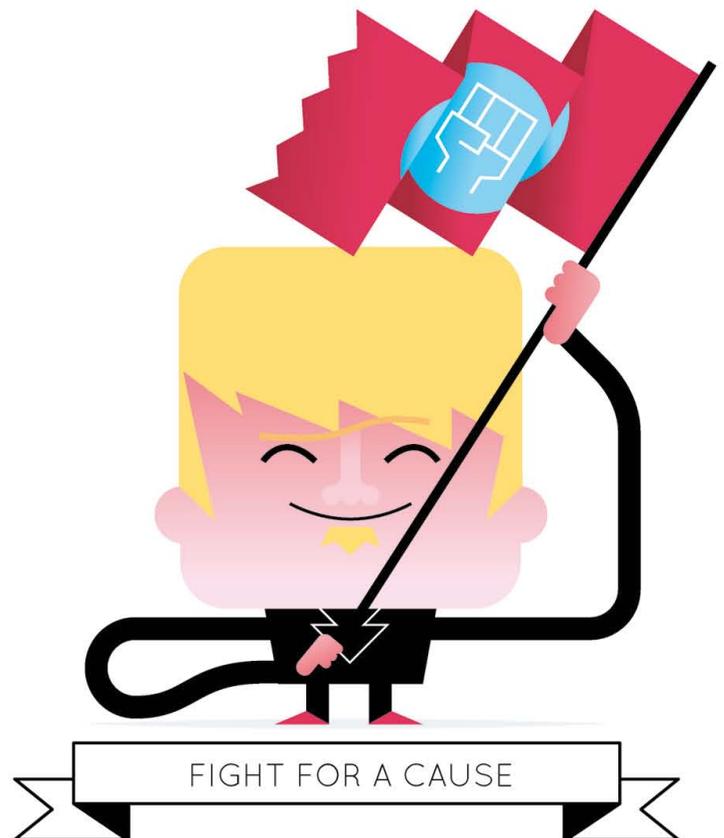
THE PATTERNS BEHIND CANNES LIONS 2009 WINNERS

A Mindscapes analysis of the 2009 Cannes Lions winners in the following categories: Titanium & Integrated, Promo, Direct and PR, reveals that 66% of the 127 lions in these categories were given to works in which one or more of the six following patterns were identified. Moreover, among the Grand Prix and the Gold Lions the rate is 81%.

The six Mindscapes mould-breaking thinking tools:

Fight for a Cause / Create a cause and make the brand initiate a wider social / public / cultural movement to promote the cause. Examples: 'The Great Schlep'; Doritos 'Bring Slow Dancing Back'; Gillette 'To Shave or Not'.

Sabotage/Reduction*/ Remove or eliminate one of the existing components of the product / brand / company / medium, and develop a communication idea based on this apparent sabotage. Examples: Whopper Sacrifice – a Facebook app through which friends were dropped; 'Heidies' for Diesel – a kidnapped Diesel salesman is the starting step of a 24 hour online interactive and provocative 'sabotage' of the 'poor' lad.

Create a Product / Instead of focusing on the existing product/brand, invent and create a new product/service, and promote it in order to promote the core brand.

Examples: Zuji Beans for Zuji travel booking website; Portuguese Red Cross 'Sell Hope' store; Four'n'Twenty Pies 'Magic Salad Plate'.

Creative use of a problem / Use the problem itself as the solution, identify a solution within the problem. Examples: 'A Trillion Dollar Campaign' for *The Zimbabwean*; 'Best Job in the World' for Queensland Tourism; Yubari Resort, Japan.

Create a Challenge / Create a challenge that will inspire your target market to take part in, and/or to watch it. Through the active and passive participation in the challenge, the brand experience, image and awareness are reinforced. Examples: 'Love Distance' for Sagami condoms, Japan; 'Best Job In the World'; 'Treehouse' (restaurant) for Yellow, New Zealand; 'Baby Made on Board' - Dodge, Belgium.

Media Happening / Transform a static medium into a space for a live happening or event. Examples: 'Banner Concerts' for Axion Bank, Belgium – transforming regular web banners into a space for live concerts; 'When Will the Fruit Burst?' billboard for Pascall fruit-flavoured sweets, New Zealand.

*Reduction is a tool developed by SIT
(Systematic Inventive Thinking)