

BSSP's John Butler on why the “anti-conference approach” works

By Leigh Andrews

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The One Club Executive Creative Summit Berlin kicks off on Wednesday, 11 October at Soho House, Berlin. While it's a closed-door meeting, we checked in with a few of the creative *crème de la crème* speakers on what they're most looking forward to and plan on sharing - John Butler is next on the list.



Kevin Swanepoel.

In order to foster frank conversation among these very top-level industry leaders, the Executive Creative Summit Berlin is set to be a full-day, interruption-free, closed-door meeting, with all discussions confidential.

That's because an Executive Creative Summit is not your typical conference, with hundreds of people attending.

Instead, it's a gathering of carefully curated groups of top agency leaders and founders from around the world, with strict 'anti-conference' rules of engagement.

Kevin Swanepoel, CEO of The One Club for Creativity explains:

“ No live streaming, no recordings, no press, no pitches, no tweets, snaps, grams or posts will be allowed. No tweets or social media posts, no hashtags, no recording, no phones, no podiums. Just open dialogue between creative leaders. ”

Better than this, John Butler, CCO of Butler Shine Stern & Partners (BSSP), says the One Club has the clout to get the people he respects in the room.

Here, Butler lets us in on the importance of sharing and learning from peers across the globe, as well as what he's personally looking to get out of the Summit...

■ **Why is it important to attend this type of international creative summit where you can share and learn from peers across the globe?**

The web has certainly made it a lot easier to see current work, and there's no shortage of award shows and industry publications— but I can't think of another place where creative people are there without press or media, not to be seen on the circuit, or drum up press for their company, but to roll up their sleeves and talk about issues that we all face every day.

It's a safe place where I feel like I can say what's on my mind, without really being judged (OK, maybe judged a little) and see how my peers would address some of the things that are going on in my “bubble.”

■ **Elaborate please on the confidential/closed-door aspect of the Summit and how this frees up the conversation.**

I'm pretty frank. I really don't mind sharing, but I'd probably be less inclined to talk about some things if I found out it was going to be the basis of an article in *AdAge*. I have a business to run, and while I don't mind sharing some things that I've found challenging, there has to be some confidentiality to it. I don't even make my presentation in the agency studio, I bang it together on my laptop, because it's stuff I wouldn't be completely comfortable sharing within the place. I don't trash clients, or ex-clients even... it's not about that. But I talk about decisions we've made in the past that I'm not

necessarily proud of (and some that I am, but that's never as fun) to hear honest opinions from people who are facing some of the same issues, or potentially will be.

■ **Can you let us in on what you'll be discussing in your summit presentation?**

I may have already! I like to talk about stuff that challenged us. I joking tell everyone "it's stuff we completely f'd up", but it's really just examining decisions we've made over the past 23 years. It's kind of like atonement for me. I go through 10 scenarios, or however many I can get through, that we've faced. Many are art vs. commerce things, but some deal with interpersonal relationships— things we've done because we needed to pay the electric bill. It's fascinating to hear what others would have done. I even show a few ads that seemed like a pretty good idea at the time. It's generally a pretty good dialogue, and everyone gets a laugh at my expense.



■ **What are you personally looking to get out of the Executive Creative Summit Berlin?**

I would hope that people are honest. I'm generally less interested in some pithy, chest-pounding creative presentation. I want to know what everyone is doing to stay ahead of the curve, do great work, and still cash cheques. Because it gets harder and harder every year.



Susan Credle: "Process - not the death of creative brilliance"

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That it does. [Visit Twitter](#) for more from Butler, [click here](#) for more from the One Club, and visit their [Twitter feed](#) for the latest updates.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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