

The anatomy of a creative concept

By Peter Barnard

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The human body does not live in isolation. It is a well-oiled machine, consisting of intense streams of information relayed between muscles, veins, and nerves. A densely designed system, whether by the hand of science or a higher spiritual being, it is always moving forward in a perpetual flux of progress. Growth, procreation and survival are its main reasons for existence. It is designed to exist. It is designed to serve a purpose. It is designed to be unique and functional.



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Meanwhile, outside of these intricacies, a brief comes in from a client. The heart races because of the excitement of the negotiated amount being paid into the business account. The mind thinks about how the business will grow, and the pure victory of the account won. The palms get sweaty, weighed down by the anxiety of having to deliver. The pressure of having to excel. Will you be able to execute what has been asked for? Will your body survive the exasperating demands of a client? Weighed down by what the immediate future holds for this project, your hand picks up a pen. It starts writing furiously, lacing the page with what seems like a million different light bulbs, sporadic thoughts serving little-to-no purpose – aimless. lost.

It sneaks in, ever so quietly. The thief in the night. It cautiously traipses over the threshold. You don't see it coming. It starts spewing. A million light bulbs turn into bricks, bricks are bonded with cement, something begins to take shape. A structure forms, it intimidates you, a halcyon castle growing on the horizon. What is this? Is this it? The final destination. Any well-travelled person knows, true gems require some homework and legwork. So, no, this is not the final destination.

Adrenalin and inspiration

The body needs adrenaline and inspiration. Countless cat videos, a meme about Donald Trump, a well written piece about the head designer at Balmain, the design on a chocolate wrapper. Your brain stores these titbits. It relishes triviality. It is the ultimate hoarder. Among the archives you go searching, neural highways leading you to the drawer containing the right subset of information, fitting the brief. You feel a slight build-up of moisture on your forehead. Your armpits suffer as well. The search initially proves fruitless. Brain, where have you hidden it? Nothing. You take a break. The body needs rest too. Coffee.

As the pot brews and your mouth spews the latest, most relevant gossip/idea/frustration/boast to your colleagues, your mind reminds you: "I'm still searching." The first sip hits your mouth and suddenly you believe this elixir was the one. This will help. The caffeine will invoke an adrenaline rush, the fuel kickstarting the brain, the body. You'll make it.

To the page, to the easel, to the conversation with your fellow creative. You start believing. It will come. The deadline looms, as your eye catches the clock in the corner of the computer screen. You write some more. It is a slight comfort. You know you've been here before. Many sleepless nights and darkened eyes that result therefrom.

Back to basics

You go back to the basics. Who is your client? Why is this making you anxious? Is it purely because you don't understand their business or is it the scope or difficulty of the work? If you don't understand the work, you pull from what you know, or the lack of what you do know. From your lack of knowledge, you might start asking the right questions. You might start unpacking it. By constantly asking questions you begin unravelling the great mystery. The veil is pierced and the magician's secret is eventually released.

The palace on the horizon comes closer as though someone redrew the map to eliminate the scenic routes. You clearly start seeing the texture of the bricks, you can smell the paint. It towers in front of you, startling and intimidating. Your heart pounds. Your mind has found it. The archives are littered with sheets upon sheets of memory, but you've found it. It has found you. You start unpacking it and you allocate your ideas to the different requirements of the brief. Sometimes they sit properly, beautifully even. Sometimes they stick out ever so slightly. The concept gets refined over time, through patience. Like a body, it can be shaped. Whether by persistent exercise, defining muscles - or lack thereof. Flabby body. Flabby body of work. But the idea is built. It stands on its own two feet. It has yet to learn how to walk, but it will get there. It will have to learn to speak, but the language has been written and, like all the best things, need practice. But it exists. For now, that is all that matters.

ABOUT PETER BARNARD

Peter Barnard is an art director at Flume, a digital marketing agency in Johannesburg, South Africa. During his career, he has worked with high profile clients such as Universal Music Group, Warner Bros, Samsung, Guess Jeans, Sage, Cisco, and Nedbank. In his spare time, he is also a musician, co-founder of a theatre production company called The House of Creatives, and an avid action figure collector.

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