

The Creative

I stopped counting days the moment I started counting nights. The first phone call I make around 7 pm is optimistic, it's the call to say we're leaving the agency. Then comes the 8 pm call, the one to suggest leaving my share of the meal on a plate in the micro-wave ready to be heated up when I get back. Then comes the 10 pm call which puts an end to any hope of getting back home before the graveyard slot TV shows.

My life is running away from me. I can't help but think of all the good times I'm being deprived of. Meals, taken sat down at a real table on a plate, with cutlery. Penalty kicks in the garden with my son who is more excited than if he were playing the World Cup final.

Then come the first meetings with the client. First of a very long series. Each and every point is discussed and debated from the usual "So, is this supposed to be funny?", "How about putting the climax at the beginning?", "I like the idea but where's my product?" to the most minor of details, the color of the sky, the shade of blue of the sky, the actor's smile, the whiteness of the teeth in the smiling actor's mouth. Everything.

As creatives, you get used to being channeled, guided, controlled and even castrated. But the situation is flipped over during the filmmaking process. The creative becomes the reasonable person. The one that prevents the director from having ideas. The one who is too engrossed in his film to even see the free food, courtesy of the production team. He might even be the one reassuring the client.

Late at night I make my way back to the hotel and I fall asleep as soon as my head hits the pillow. Jetlag has me awake a mere 3 hours later. I make the most of this early rise to think about my family life for a moment. Explaining the offside rule to the wife for the umpteenth time while watching a Champion's League game, the guilty satisfaction I feel when she goes off to bed leaving me alone with the Playstation.

Post-production is the perfect opportunity to breathe life into an idea. It's also the best moment to kill it. It's just a matter of days. It's short. So short that we have to make sure to make the most of each minute. So much so that you begin to think that by the time you get home your own children will call you "Sir".

The situation then becomes simply impossible. Far more awful than the hours spent listening to the kids reciting the times table or the talk-shows my wife likes to watch involving paternity tests and STIs, and more often than not, both.

We then reach a compromise. The same as usual. The client gets his voice-over and I get to keep my comedic moment. Now all that remains is to create shorter variations of this 30 second spot.

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The Client

- Most of the time I wonder if we're even talking the same language as this agency. The rest of the time I'm sure we aren't. This brief is crystal clear though. We're launching this new product and we want it to sell. 32 % penetration rate and a 12 % market share the first year. I mean, I'm not speaking a foreign language here. What we need is a creation serving efficiency. I hope they will end up surprising us by coming up with the idea we're expecting. They probably need some time. I gave them 3 days to work on the project again. That should be enough.
- I've been waiting for this moment ever since I graduated from Business School. Maynard chose the moment perfectly. Retiring just when I'm launching my new product is a God sent gift. If this campaign is a success and the sales hit the roof, I'm sure the position will be mine. I've already started to adapt my schedule to hours more suitable for a Vice Chairman-to-be. Nobody leaves the office after me. I'm now also on a first-name basis with the sushi delivery boy, i think he wants me to be his children's Godfather.
- It's always very entertaining to meet creatives. They really work an entirely different trade. It wouldn't even cross my mind to go to work unshaven. But what strikes me most is their carefreeness. I don't think they really understand how important their work is, and what is at stake. It's a bit like putting our 3 year-old children in charge of the nuclear weapon launch button. Nevertheless the changes we've asked them to make to the storyboard are clear: my product is only on the screen for a couple of seconds, the so-called comedic moment lacks any comedy whatsoever and a blue sky would be much more inspirational.
- The set chosen for the film was sunny countryside, but the week-long shooting will take place in South Africa. This solution is supposedly the cheapest option... 10 hour plane flight, 3 hour drive and just one hour's sleep to reach the set and stay sat in front of a TV screen which is smaller than the one I have in my kitchen. Any discussion with the Polish director is impossible and anyway he speaks English with a Finnish accent that is so strong that it sounds like he's speaking an ancient Chinese dialect to me.
- The film is shot. Have I made the right decisions? Was I firm enough? The creative team looks rather satisfied. But have they understood that creativity isn't measured based on the laughs you get from the audience, or how well the idea was executed or even in terms of creative awards? It's measured in boxes. Boxes filled with my products which will be decisive as far as my future is concerned. In the superstores and hypermarkets industry you can't cheat. You sell or you don't. Sink or swim.
- Post-production is a very satisfying moment. The "it won't work" serenade the creative team has been giving me for months is met with a pleasant reality check: it works rather well. The packshot duration has yet to be doubled though, the size of the logo has also to be made 3 times bigger, and a voiceover must be added to the final sequence without forgetting the jingle to enhance memorization. Then the spot will be perfect.
- The closer we get to the end, the more I feel the stress. The quantity and quality tests are finished though, I should relax. After all, the consumer is always right. But my future life depends on the decisions taken by this representative sample of the population. Thanks to them everything can change. A better car park space, carpet in my office, a German company car and the salary that goes with the position.
- The agency finally accepted the modifications. At last. This film represents 72% of my yearly budget, 13 meetings, 359 e-mails and 127 phone calls. It will be on air tomorrow and I have never been so worried in my entire life.

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