

campaign



THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO **PRODUCTION**



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WITNESS THE REBIRTH

The future of digital production may just lie in the past: the age-old television production model

I recall one late night, on my way back from yet another stressful webdelivery. I was driving through the deserted streets of central London and made a mental connection to the film *28 Days Later*.

I realised that it would have been far easier for me to literally lock down half of the city, fly helicopters through and blow up zombies, than build the latest freaking website. "In all honesty," I thought, "this is ridiculous."

It seems that one of the biggest problems the ad industry has faced in the past ten years is "The Digital Question". This translates as: "How do I produce digital effectively and sustainably?" I think there is a way that's reliable, familiar, efficient, collaborative, professional, enjoyable and highly creative. And, funnily enough, it's been right under our noses.

It's the TV production model, the familiar relationship between agency, film director and the many independent professionals, that has consistently delivered so much good work, brand value, profit, relationships and, ultimately, dreams. Only now it's digital, it's new and it's a bit harder.

Let's rewind. We may feel old, but digital is a very young industry. Its pioneers are still young. A generation that came out of basements and bedroom studios. For me, digital represented an alternative: the revenge of the nerds against the traditional media establishment, against the royalty that ruled unshaken for more than 60 years. Embracing digital was like joining a group of anarchic idealists seizing the opportunity to overturn the system. I loved it. The digital pioneers did it all differently. We were driven by sheer passion. It was a lifestyle, a social statement, not a job. Ultimately, we had to break the rules and invent new ones in order to fix what, in retrospect, did not need mending, just upgrading.

The digital industry is now out of its teenage tantrums and it has done bloody well. Now the driving force behind the ad market, the digital pioneers are faced with a big challenge: delivering on a growing brand demand within a global infrastructure that smells of gunpowder, tastes of chewed tobacco and reminds me of Howard Hawks' *Rio Bravo*. You've seen companies buy digital businesses as colorfully named and priced as Fannie Mae and have no idea what they do.

You've seen your agency set up digital production in-house and, like a virtual team of Premiership football players, who are undoubtedly talented, they follow their own version of



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fantasy digital, following Champions League work and ever higher Champions League prices. All of which could leave you creatively relegated.

You've seen outsourcing to either pseudo digital agencies that dress up as sheep but are ready to bite the hand that feeds them, or freelancers who are "bloody good value" but disappear like the Iraqi police force when it's time to walk down client RPG Alley.

I have seen it too. As we broke away from tradition, there was no model to follow, no Yoda to show us the way. The digital pioneer broke all ties with tradition and headed for the unknown.

Yet, the alternative is more ingrained in tradition that we may think. Ironically, it was right in front of our face; invisible to us, as we thought it was dead or too old to walk. May we have deceived ourselves in growing too quickly and thinking we did not need our past? The usual mistake of youth.

Let's face it; with more than 50 years' experience, the TV production model is the wise old man from whom we can all learn. Patronising and pedantic, I agree, but it still holds the key to the best professionals in the industry.

It has established processes and

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trusted code of conducts. With great educational programs and an established career path, it provides solid ground for sustainability. It has already done for TV what we are trying to do for digital. It will need a few tweaks and adjustments, for sure, but the basic DNA is the same.

Let's consider the following. You are a creative working at an agency, or an agency employing great creatives. Your loyalty is with the brand on which you are working. You live it, you believe in it. You work day in, day out to create value for it: providing concepts, presentations, strategy and success measures. You are the ideas machine and you cannot be distracted from it. So it was, at least for print and TV.

Not for digital, it seems. Or perhaps it's just a lot harder. I see colleagues at agencies spending too much valuable time sitting behind a flash developer or pushing pixels themselves. Their creative energy is being spent on actual production issues. A big chunk of an agency's infrastructure consists of in-house technicians or specialists.

To me, life seemed simpler when it was all about TV. You used to sell in a script, then lure in the best director,

production and post company that money could afford. Shoot in South Africa with international talent, do the post in London, score the music in Japan and party in Cannes.

We were so very good at finding specialised services. Why do we feel the need to control it all in-house and have a studio mentality? Sure, the lack of a new service infrastructure and the slow adjustment of the traditional one are definitely culpable. But that's changing now. Changing quickly.

So let's fast-forward. You have a concept. It requires sensibility towards comedy and performance. It needs an eccentric camera motion. It connects with million of users simultaneously through their phones. Or maybe tracks dogs around town - no need to limit what you can do. It is now second nature for you to turn to your favorite interactive director and their production company. It produces 100 projects a year, giving it an enormous creative and technical expertise on crafting digital. You can trust it to add value to your concept and bring it to life. The global wealth of production knowledge and services, both creative and technical, stretches much farther than your or your agency's internal know-how.

Somewhere, someone, somehow can make it possible, and wants to. It's that simple. Trust them to do their job, and you can deliver your brand concept. Then party in Cannes again.

Pause. I agree. Now it still may be early days, but there is already a great deal of creative and technical talent out there that is looking for an alternative lifestyle as we speak. People who want to focus on the craft, and not on the brand, are now moving away from agencies and forming the new production companies.

They are moving away from a closed studio mentality and are rebuilding the golden relationship between agency creatives and interactive directors with their production companies and affiliates. They are settling in a space where we don't argue about credits, but share the responsibilities to create great pieces. Hopefully, we change the way people feel and see things.

From the ashes of TV processes, mentality and relationships, I believe we will see the rebirth of an infrastructure that will service agencies, as it has always done. This time, for digital too.

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