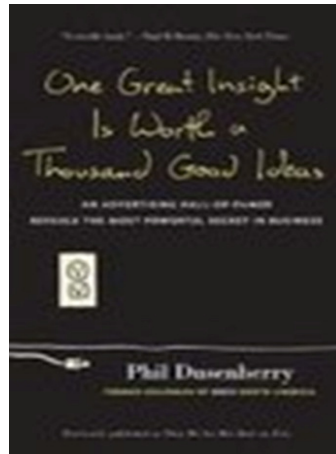


One Great Insight Is Worth a Thousand Good Ideas



Author: Phil Dusenberry
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About the Author



Dusenberry was well-known for his work with one of his major clients, the soft drink giant Pepsi. Dusenberry was overseeing the production of an infamous Pepsi commercial starring Michael Jackson in which Jackson's hair accidentally caught fire when a smoke effect misfired. Dusenberry referred to the incident in the title of his 2005 book, *Then We Set His Hair on Fire: Insights and Accidents from a Hall of Fame Career in Advertising*.

■ The Big Idea

We bring good things to Life.

It's Not TV, It's HBO.

Visa: It's Everywhere You Want To Be

These aren't just advertising slogans; they're game-changing insights. And according to ad industry legend Phil Dusenberry, whose team at BBDO created these and many other brilliant campaigns, one great insight is worth a thousand good ideas. An idea can lead to one clever commercial. But a true insight can define a brand for years and transform an entire industry.

Dusenberry, who turned BBDO/NY into a creative powerhouse, shares his best advice and funniest stories in this entertaining yet practical memoir. Many things have changed since he started writing ad copy, but his insights are as true now as they ever were.

Why You Need This Book

This is a book about insights in business – how we get them, how we recognize them, how we keep them coming.

ALL THINGS BEING EQUAL

The American marketplace is dominated by two giant warring impulses. First, the democratizing urge that seeks to prove that “all men are created equal, that you’re no better than I am and I’m no better than you.

It’s a bedrock American principle – determining how we choose our leaders (one person, one vote) and how we lead our lives (equal rights, equal opportunity). It’s also a paradox: it elevates us as a society while diminishing us slightly as individuals. Then the competitive urge that simultaneously seeks to refute this. We all want to establish ourselves as being a little better than the next guy.

Whether it’s something as trivial as the car we drive or as crucial as the level of professional service we provide, we want to prove that we are not like everybody else, that we’re slightly unique, and therefore slightly more worthy of other people’s honor, trust, tribute, and loyalty.

This is how great organizations, great brands establish themselves.

PUTTING YOUR FAITH IN RESEARCH

Here are five categories you can focus on that can make a difference on your research process:

The first is your product line. Are you offering merchandise that appeal to specific buyers?

The second is your pricing. Are you perceived as high priced, bargain priced, or fairly priced?

The third is your service. If there’s a gap between the servers and the served, that’s worth researching.

The fourth is your environment. Do people like the way you present your wares? Where do they linger? What do they ignore?

The fifth is your competition. What are they doing that you should be doing?

This is hardly an exhaustive list, but isolating just one of these five categories and exploring it will make you smarter. It might even provide an insight. But that's really up to you now.

THE INSIGHT RESUME

Here are twenty-four quick questions to help you compose your own insight resume:

1. What is the first insight you remember?
2. What is your best insight?
3. What made it great?
4. What was the problem it solved?
5. Can you connect the dots that led to this insight?
6. What is your second-best insight?
7. Again, why? What did it solve? How did it come to you?
8. What is your dumbest insight?
9. How would you characterize your ideas?
10. What's your creative signature?
11. Who are insightful people you admire?
12. Who are your creative mentors or role models?
13. What do you have in common with these role models?
14. When all else fails, to whom or what do you turn for inspiration?
15. What criteria do you employ to judge the merits of an insight or idea?

16. Who are your heroes?
17. Have they ever turned up in one of your concepts? If so, how, when, and why?
18. What is your ideal creative activity?
19. What is your greatest fear?
20. Describe your ideal client.
21. What's your favourite year?
22. A year to forget?
23. How do you stay in creative shape?
24. Define luck.

SAUCE ON YOUR SLEEVE

The most salient feature of any insight is that it expresses an incontrovertible truth.

To identify a truth takes hard work, research, and a little luck perhaps.

To express it truthfully requires empathy – with the product, with the consumer, and with the client.

A lot of people in this field dismiss this or take it for granted. In a field guided by hard and fast results, empathy is warm and fuzzy. In a universe reliant on research, empathy is hard to test, even harder to measure.

In a hardscrabble environment where consumers are fickle and clients scrutinize you on every expense, empathy is for sissies. That may be arguable. But why take the chance?

There's no better way to connect with the product you're trying to sell and the people you're trying to reach than by diving into their world and mixing it up with them. That's how you achieve empathy. Not by sitting at your desk and imagining it.

STANDING FOR SOMETHING

Branding is not complicated. A brand is nothing but an expression of the consumer's loyalty and trust. It's a bond, a covenant with the consumer. When you see the brand's name attached to a product, do you trust that the product will deliver a predictable level of satisfaction?

If so, you will be loyal to that brand – so loyal that you will stick with it even when a better product comes along. (That loyalty explains why it takes so much time and so much money to steal customers away from a leader. Leaders generate trust and loyalty – in that order. And loyalty makes them hard to unseat at that top.) So loyal that you will not only stick with that product, but when the brand name is attached to a new product, you will buy that product too.

The amazing thing to me is that loyalty – even when it is attached to the vagaries of emotion – is not a vague, amorphous concept. It's hard, it's real, it can be quantified.

THE PHRASE THAT PAYS

If and when you have the urge to dash off a phrase that pays, you may want to keep in mind what makes a slogan work.

- It has to be memorable – and force the reader to recall the brand name, either by rhyming or spelling it out or employing a pun that works for the brand without eliciting a groan.
- It has to differentiate: Miller Lite's "Everything you always wanted in a beer... and less."
- It has to be strategic about the product's use or benefits: Puppy Chow's "Don't treat your puppy like a dog."
- It has to reflect the brand's personality: Volkswagen's "Think small."
- It has to be original: "Nothing else is a Pepsi." You can't say "Simply the best," even if it happens to be true. A hundred slogans already say that.
- It has to be simple: Nike's "Just do it." Burger King's "Have it your way."
- It has to make you buy: Frito-Lay's "Bet you can't eat just one."

- It has to be extendable into a long campaign, such as the Absolut vodka series, or American Express's "Do you know me?" campaign showing celebrities whose names are more recognizable than their faces (author Stephen King, 1964 vice presidential candidate William Miller).

PROTECTING YOUR INSIGHTS

To protect an insight you have to know the forces that are working against it.

- There are the forces of levelling, the people who try to reduce the insight to something familiar, something that they've heard or seen before. These are the people who judge an insight by its sameness rather than its difference with everything that has gone before.
- There are the forces of copying, the people who want your insight to be the same as what others are doing. "Give me one of those Nike campaigns," they tell you. This is like levelling, only worse. You're not being asked for insights that bear a resemblance to other people's work; you're being asked to imitate other work directly. You might as well be tracing.
- There are the trembling midlevel forces at any organization who have the power to say "no" but not the conviction to say "yes." They can kill an insight simply by not being sufficiently confident in their own judgment to let it move up the chain of command.
- There are the people who don't share your standards. They lack either the experience or intelligence to take a chance with something new.
- Worst of all, there are the forces of mistrust, the people who do not cede insight, judgment, intelligent, or gut instinct to you, but prefer their own. This is the signal of a bad relationship that will end badly. When you do your best and the client doesn't agree, you both have a problem.

BUILDING A FOOLPROOF INSIGHT CREATION MACHINE

Here are some guidelines for inspiring creative directors. They apply to any manager, big business or small, mundane or cutting edge industry, everything and everyone that needs to inspire ideas or generate them.

Cause insights to happen rather than create them. You can't write every commercial yourself, or come up with every theme line, or deliver every great insight. It's not possible if you want your business to grow. You only have so many brain cells and only 24 hours in a day. In other words, you are limited.

Hire people smarter than you are. Despite the slap-on-the-forehead obviousness about choosing great people, a lot of managers still don't do it. Who can say why? Perhaps they don't recognize talent when they see it (in which case they shouldn't be managing anything!). If you hire the best, there's little risk in borrowing against the future; the biggest risk is not doing it at all.

Always gauge a person's passion for an idea. And give it a little more weight than it deserves. All things being equal, a passionate advocate for an insight will trump a dispassionate one. And you want that person on your side in the heat of battle.

Judge an insight on its merits, not on how you would have done it. Easy to say, tough to do, particularly if you have a strong philosophy that's working. Your approach has been validated by success. Shouldn't everyone follow your lead? If you insist that people only do it as you would have done, you are creating lesser versions of you. This is the creative equivalent of hiring people weaker than you are.

Don't be surprised by surprises. In every creative endeavour it makes perfect sense to be open to accidents, messes, failures, and other disasters – and treat them as potential strokes of good luck. Because surprises, good or bad, whether caused by massive natural forces or the tiniest mishap, have a way of surpassing our earthbound imagination and inspiring... magic.

Don't compete with your people. The biggest interpersonal flaw in any creative director's toolkit is the constant overriding need to win. When it matters, we want to win. When it can go either way, we want to win. Even when it doesn't matter at all, we still want to win.

Respond with your gut first, your heart second. Not only because this is how consumers do it, but because it's the most trustworthy meter for an insight's

power. If you laugh, it's funny. When you don't feel in your gut, chances are the notion won't fly.

Add value to an almost-there idea. Forget the also-rans. If you can add 10 or 20 percent of value to a concept or execution – whether it's by changing one word in the headline, tweaking copy, tightening up the edit, or brightening up the sound mix – then you're earning your keep and, in turn, raising rather than dropping the performance bar in your organization.

Always have a reason for your opinion. This lets you attack the work rather than the person who created it.

Once you say yes to a concept, don't backpedal on it. Back your approval all the way. This should be self-evident. You will only confuse people if you hedge on your judgment, question your standards, and cave in at the first instance that a client doesn't share your enthusiasm for the work.

Make your office the quake zone. No matter how pleasant and easygoing your personality, your office – where everyone arrives to show their work – should not be an oasis of comfort and ease for visiting employees.

Never let them hear you both swear and moan. When people hear you complain, they take it as permission to complain too. Whatever misgivings you have about a client or a superior, keep them to yourself. They deflate morale, make you look weak, and create an environment that breeds negativity like a contagion.

Play to their weaknesses, too. If you know your people, you'll also figure out how to convert their weaknesses into strengths.

Get a life outside the office. Or you'll never be able to bring the real world into your work. The richer your life beyond the business, the richer the work within. So, get a life. Before you can move the needle for others, you have to move your own.

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