

Risk and reward

Designers know that creativity not only underpins projects that win awards, but that it also contributes to commercial success. Clients, however, still need convincing. We ask six leading industry figures how they would convince brand-owners to go beyond the safe design option



JON TURNER
Head of design, Boots

Sometimes, there's a narrow path for a pitching design team: on one side lies the accusation of being crass marketers with no aesthetic understanding, and on the other a charge of being purist designers with no commercial sense.

Unfairly, I sometimes use design awards as the antithesis of what we are seeking – unjustified, I know, but a way of really emphasising that the outcome is not aimed at a picture in an awards book or a Park Lane dinner, but at a cost-effective, commercial solution that customers understand.

Of course, the desired outcome is naturally the middle ground, giving credible evidence of the ability to deliver positive financial effect through fantastic design.



DAVID KIMPTON
Co-founder, Hat-Trick Design

We at Hat-Trick are strong believers in producing award-winning work, not for the accolades or peer respect (or otherwise), but because we believe this is the sign of a solution that works its hardest to communicate on behalf of our clients. We have been lucky enough to have been included in the Creative Survey table, which has brought about an interest in us from organisations we are also interested in. The joy of this is that they are already like-minded – brave organisations with an intent to stand out from their competitors with a clear and distinct voice. They don't need much convincing.



TIM MOLLOY
Creative director, Science Museum

First thought: this will be my third recession and they're beginning to feel like naturally recurring, cyclical events, their job being to stop us in our tracks and think again about direction, attitude and so on. In this way, does a recession provide a healthy context for the encouragement of new thinking – a kind of cultural detox?

Second thought: I'm pretty frustrated by the vogue for scratching at the navel of creativity, trying to unpick it, so as to synthesise it as a panacea. I wouldn't go anywhere near the 'taking a risk' ingredient of the creative spirit at the moment, as (one could argue) this is the very attitude at the root of our sub-prime 'creative' accounting. Instead, let's use startling, expansive, perceptive intelligence to see our world differently and to move forward, into the light.

Third thought: how about art schools developing courses that produce visually intelligent thinkers, rather than practising artists, designers and so on. A post-graduate foundation course aligned to a business management institution, creating visually intelligent and inspiring business managers/clients?



SARAH PAGE
Creative director, Household

At this point, brands need to stand out more than ever from their competitors in the market. Connecting to customer need, and turning that need into desire, is a key driver of success – benefit, inspiration, flexibility and changeability are critical. As we all know, customers are savvy, and price is no longer everything – they want the personal touch, to feel they are being listened to, and to trust in a brand. Customers need more than simply value for money, and brands need to give a true reason for being – to be able to react quickly to change, and satisfy customers' needs and mindsets at any given time.

For any consultancy right now, inspiring clients should be about giving ideas, insights and strategic solutions that spark interest around current client issues. Issues that, as a design or branding consultancy, we know could be improved, helping develop the customer experience and connection with a client's brand. Clients need thoughtful and flexible design that is responsive to the current climate – the risk for them, at this time, is to not move forward. They need to be right here, right now, and so do we.



KEREN HOUSE
Creative director, Aricot Vert

In a perverse way, an economic squeeze can be good for creativity. With diminishing budgets, and more competition for what's left, people, companies and products need to be distinctive, and to dare to be different. Difference for its own sake is not enough, but if it is expressing a fundamental truth or honesty, then it can be compelling – whereas safe and risk-averse means blending/blanding in with the rest. Then, how will clients get noticed? They won't. Full stop. Lead by example. Look at how you present yourself. It can be telling.



PAUL PORRAL
Head of creative services, John Lewis

As someone who has worked on both sides of the client/consultancy divide, I have always recognised the critical role that creative design has to play as a highly effective tool for business.

Newly returned client-side, I aim to champion creative design throughout the business. I firmly believe – now, more than ever – that design must act as a catalyst to reinforce distinctiveness, personality and presence, driving recognition and preference, and thereby supporting the bottom line.

We must develop and present work in an objective manner that supports this argument, and not allow the best creative design to be misunderstood or merely considered by subjective aesthetic preference.