

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU DO - IT'S WHAT YOU STAND FOR



We looked back over 10 years of records to judge the best message

When we plan client campaigns we evaluate the market, and in the process carefully look at their competitors to confirm the client has a distinctive and compelling message. Our record of the headline messages of many hundreds of UK agencies (of all disciplines) goes back 10 years. To help new clients understand how an agency uses effective messaging in practice, we decided to look at our data with fresh eyes, and then judge what we felt to be the best message deployed during that period, in terms of proactive new business activity.

Of the hundreds we looked at, one stood out. First appearing in our agency message monitor in September 2002, their public message remains essentially the same today (Dec 2009)...

"M&C Saatchi is founded on the principle of Brutal Simplicity. Brutal Simplicity is at the heart of everything we do. From creative thinking to creative work. From how we are structured to the systems we use. Brutal Simplicity runs through the culture of every single one of our offices, all around the world." "As the world gets more complicated communications must become more simple." (Maurice Saatchi).

Firstly, we should stress this company has never been a client of ours and that this piece is not intended as a plea for them to be so. Rather, we wish to be objective. And in this spirit, and although we feel this company probably doesn't have to do much itself in the way of *proactive* new business, this messaging concept ticks all the boxes. Why?

Firstly, there is an uncluttered, central, organising thought; the world is getting more complicated so communications need to be simpler. The presentation to the market is that this is the reason the agency exists - to solve this problem. 'Brutal simplicity' defines how it does this and becomes the message. It's what you are buying. For new business, agencies require compact distillations of longer arguments for why their agency is better than the others in their set. 'Brutal simplicity' also adds character, valuable for establishing a memorable, living and breathing agency brand across audiences.

And critical too is its relevancy. For those buying marketing services in 2002, and especially today, this message is wholly appropriate.

And then there is the activation of the idea. 'Brutal simplicity' informs all the communications M&C make, and there is a sense that it directs every behaviour and action of the business too. As a marketing device, this is not news to you or to us, but it is rare that it is applied within the organisation of an agency with much more than lip service, and especially rare across a network or group.

The application of the concept is consistent over time. They have the confidence of people that know they got it right first time, to continue to stick to the plot (in this case for at least 7 years).

Then notice how they roll this idea out to the delivery. A glance at the inaugural APG Strategy Agency of the Year Award, which they've just won for their work on Lucozade, demonstrates this. It's not nicely presented lip service. It's more than that.

The majority of agencies are essentially breakaways from others. Many appear to struggle to brand their own businesses much differently to those of their former employers. Fixated on what they do, they fail to focus on what they stand for. M&C Saatchi's positioning phrase does not describe their service category or market expertise. Rather it addresses their power to solve any client's problem, and the particular way they go about doing this. It is a universally applicable message that is discipline and specialism neutral. It is also the perfect seed idea for a network or group, as functional for deals and business development purposes, as it is for new business.

In its industry, the 'big idea' has been at the root of most messages. It is refreshing that M&C Saatchi has one for itself as well as for its clients. An agency with the courage to stand for something empowers not only its new business staff, but also every stakeholder to understand it and be able to promote it.