

Concept is dead



By [Dylan Balkind](#)

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Never mind potholes, rampant crime or corruption, what we really need to expend our energy on is the fact that more and more mediocre pedestrians are being allowed to stumble into roles they have absolutely no clue about. So the scheduling clerk for a bicycle hire shop can become the marketing person for the brand you thought you'd die to work on. And die you will. Bit by bit and a little more each day. (video)

Let me introduce you to Sally. Sally loved to colour during her early school days and was ever so good at staying inside the lines. She wasn't sure what to do after high school so she worked in her father's corner shop weighing butternut and manning the till. Then her uncle poached her to help run the front office of his car repair shop and in just a few mediocre minutes, she was bored of that too. With her eclectic mix of 'FMCG and retail expertise' coupled with being the 'brand custodian' for her uncle's shop, Sally found herself mincing in to the first of many corporates in no time at all.

She hopscotched through half a dozen roles, careful not to stay anywhere long enough to ever actually learn anything of substance, and then - with a stroke of right-place-right-time-luck and enough bullshit to baffle some very distracted brains - she secured herself the role of making some medium-weight marketing decisions on a brand doing itself proud.

There wasn't an agency presentation or creative review where the words *I don't get it* didn't waft from her pouting, lip-glossed lips. Imagine how brilliant this imaginative doyenne was for the conceptual prowess of the creatives whose paths she crossed... No challenge was too big as this fierce game changer would design by numbers and rewrite copy at the drop of a hat - no questions asked... So die they did. More and more each day.

Mindless ads

Sure, "mindless ads" have their place. I once bought a fat busting apparatus from one of those *if-you-dial-now-but-wait-there's-more* places. With a series of battery operated contractions, it promised to work all the unnecessary lard away from my stomach. It did. I lost so much weight I was kidnapped by a helium balloon at the Rand Easter Show.

People have brains and an imagination and despite popular belief (albeit brand specific), aren't completely against having to think. Simple doesn't mean you got smarter. But it may mean Sally gave you a budget of R2.50 with the disproportionate insistence that you address every shopper and consumer group out there. So you did... but at what cost?

The over simplification era

We're living in an era of over simplification. Brands have a wider cross-section of people to talk to while clients shamelessly play agencies against one another for the work. This reduces the creative mettle by people who then have to spend more time tap dancing through ludicrous demands than being conceptually brilliant... And somewhere between the brief and the output, someone convinces everyone to put all their eggs on the semantics of the big idea and none on the magic of the journey that takes you there. Rest in peace, concept.

As much as agency creatives need to learn about strategy and the tangible differences of our audiences, so marketing professionals should be required (and driven) to have a semblance of creative vision. This way, the creative interpretation of a brief can be viewed at any point in its evolution; to be understood in the context of what informed it.

The movement away from waffling is not what I'm on about. I'm on about the unnecessary over simplification for audiences that aren't simple. We get told so often to be sure the box is far away from our thinking yet, time and time again, we end up back inside it anyway.

Makes you wonder what our Sally would say to these four examples:

Okay... so concept isn't completely dead, but it's definitely looking pale. Something needs to be done soon or our dear friend should get its affairs in order and tie up any loose ends.

Let's not forget the thinking man's story... It is the magical vortex of the interpretation of creativity where talkability comes to life.

How's your Sally?

ABOUT DYLAN BALKIND

Even the person who can sell ice to Eskimos needs have a way of letting the world know . Words. They're wonderful warriors with the potential for worry. Use a writer who takes his passion seriously. Here's more about me and mine: <http://goo.gl/68Rsse> | Twitter @DylanBalkind

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