

Advertising. A restaurant without a kitchen

 By [Damon Stapleton](#)

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When I was growing up I never lived in a house. I lived in many hotels because my father was a hotel manager. This gave me a unique perspective on the chaos that is needed to create order and desirability. I would watch coffee-fuelled staff rush to clean rooms before the next guests arrived. Every weekend there were sweaty porters stumbling up stairs with mountains of luggage desperately trying to get the suitcases in the rooms before the guests got there. The chaos needed for the illusion of order. The effort needed to create the illusion of effortlessness.



However, there were two parts of every hotel that especially fascinated me. Kitchens and restaurants. Restaurants. The white table cloths. The dulcet tones of the maitre d'. Clinking glasses, soft music and even softer lighting. A feeling of tranquility perfumed the air.

Walk twenty steps through a swinging door that was designed to knock plates out of every waiter's hands and you reached the kitchen. Let me paint you a rosy picture. Welcome to hell. Smoke, steam and shouting. Plates breaking. There always seemed to be a mad German head chef throwing something at somebody. A waiter crying because their order was lost. Somebody hiding in the cold room because of the stress. A heated conversation about a menu change because somebody forgot to order fucking asparagus. A feeling of unreasonable effort singed the nostrils. But the food made it all worth it.

I used to see the customers taste the food and look at each other with a knowing look. In that moment, the taste, the smell, the lighting, the sound, the service and all the ingredients swirled into a type of fleeting perfection. In short, a moment that is memorable. A moment you would remember. I have always understood that to create this kind of perfection some chaos, effort, blood, sweat and tears is required. There is no shortcut.

But, when it comes to advertising I am not sure everybody agrees with me.

After all chaos is unpleasant. It would be nice if we could eliminate it. It would be great if you could just get to the perfection part without the making, sweating, bleeding part. No more innovation or creation. I mean how important is the food? The taste. What if the restaurant was just about the restaurant and the kitchen did not matter? What if the kitchen was just one guy in the back with a microwave oven. Three minutes every time. Perfection, right?

Lately, there are quite a few stories circulating about global brands realising they have wasted a hundred million dollars or so on ads that nobody saw. Many of them have started looking at brand advertising again. I am sure we will see a lot more of this. Now, I know a lot of the arguments are about where these ads were placed and should they have used different channels. However, what nobody talks about is the creativity and quality of the ads that are pumped out. Most of them look like they were made in the 1950's. Pack-shot. Headline. They look cheap. They look like nobody gave a fuck. Think about what a cheap looking ad says about a product to the consumer. Thousands of microwave meals spewing into the dining room spoiling a great night out. There is no caring or specialness here. Nothing distinctive. People are going to notice how bad or bland these ads are. Or, ironically, in the case of these global brands, consumers didn't notice thousands of them at all. Oh well, 100 million dollars down the drain.

To extend my cooking theme, the saying goes the proof is in the pudding. Our industry should remember that. You have to give the consumer something for their time. Let's not pretend a microwave meal is the same thing as a Michelin star meal. There is nothing wrong with wanting either option. But there is something wrong with pretending they are the same thing. Maybe some reading this think craft or caring is just a nice to have. Or, it isn't that important. Just do lots of stuff and everything will be fine. The product doesn't matter just the amount of product.

To those people, let me ask you three questions. How many times would you go to a restaurant where the meal wasn't special or memorable in any way. I would venture not very often.

Or, how about a restaurant that has no caring, passionate chef and just serves thousands of bland, monotonous microwave meals over and over?

Finally, how excited would you feel about a restaurant with superb service, fantastic menu's and no kitchen or food at all?

Why would your answers be any different for advertising?

Bon appetit.

To eat is a necessity, but to eat intelligently is an art. – Francois De La Rochefoucauld

ABOUT DAMON STAPLETON

Damon is regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia. Before that, ECD at Saatchi and Saatchi Australia, before that, group ECD of TBWA Hunt Lascaris and global ECD of Standard Bank. He has won over 500 awards internationally, including a D&AD Black Pencil, Cannes Grand Prix, Grand Clio, ADC Black Cube and most effective ad in the world by Warc 100. Damon is now regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia...

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