

Death. Or a brave new world



By [Suhana Gordhan](#)

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"We've either got to be brave and curious or fearful and suspicious," said comedian, actor and political activist Eddie Izzard in an interview with Trevor Noah on *The Daily Show*. Izzard was speaking about creating a fair world, a world that embraces difference to recognise human.



Suhana Gordhan, Executive Creative Director at FCB Joburg.

This is how I feel about the future of advertising and marketing. When all is thrown into the pot, I hope that what survives is the human.

I believe that we're in the era of "The death of agency". This is about many things: The death of the old-format agency and the birth of a new kind of agency that marketers want – a lean, agile, collaborative little shop, in-house talent and super digital smarts, big data and insights, brand-dedicated creatives and smart package-able work that travels across markets.

But I'm also talking about the death of agency, *sans* the definite article. I'm referring to the loss of independent thinking and the extinction of that special and powerful thing creatives have – freedom of will, instinct and gut, sensibility and that intangible ability to translate simple human insights into unique storytelling.

Now we have a problem of growing distrust in ad agencies and an eroded credibility. Client and agency sleep with their backs to each other and there's a gaping hole in the middle of the bed.

“ *The agency model has to break and be born again, but change does not belong solely on the laps of advertisers. Marketers and CMOs need to be more accountable in this journey.* ”

The trend of fear and suspicion must be uprooted on both sides and for the brave and curious future we need the following:

No more lack of conscience

I loathe the brands that pretend to have a concrete interest in social investment when behind closed doors, self-serving purposes are revealed.



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People are demanding more of brands. Those brands that behave in more human ways thrive and those that remain on the cold outskirts of good intent will fade away. It's brave to stand for something and to do that, a brand has to know itself intimately.

The job of the agency is not to stand by and comply but to help a brand find its core values. Like Australian adman and founder of Droga5 David Droga said: "Interrogate a brand until it confesses what it is."



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No more ignorance

Agencies need to speak 'business' and marketers need to speak 'creative'. The marketer who only knows how to dish out briefs and tick boxes is the most inadequate marketer. And the creative who only cares about the pretty pictures is outdated and shortsighted.



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We have to stand in each other's shoes and discard comfort. True collaboration means both parties levelling up on knowledge and truly co-parenting the brand.

No more key visuals

If I have to be asked to do one more key visual for a campaign, I might spontaneously combust and have my ashes sent to the Ganges river. There is nothing more limiting and tick-boxy than a key visual. Stop asking for them.

They're a silly crutch used by marketers to show their global counterparts that they're falling in line. In client feedback, I have seen entire decks of creative executions completely ignored in favour of this question:

“ Where's the key visual? ”

In all seriousness, campaigns these days are so different and complex, yet we're still relying on a one-dimensional, archaic way of summarising creative thinking.

We need a new campaign-idea cheat sheet. Let's step into a more advanced future, where we're prototyping, inventing or experimenting instead of staring at an A4 layout.

More human diversity

If you want an interesting solve to a problem, have more interesting people in the room. Have multiple perspectives and lived experiences.



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This goes for both boardrooms – the marketing and the creative. Be brave about the minds you choose for the work you want to make.

Be curious about the people missing in your organisation. Think about gender, race, sexual orientation, culture, age and language. Diversity is not about quotas, it's about representation and inclusivity.



#FairnessFirst: Understand true diversity to become more inclusively creative

Leigh Andrews 2 Sep 2019



More representation means no blind spots, deeper insights, better ideas, more considered products and a more knowledgeable path to consumers.

More human hours

I've had a client say "I don't want my agency performing heroic acts." Yet, here we are, dressed like Florence Nightingale holding up a lamp, for the confused core creative idea.

“ For agencies to stop attempting heroic acts, marketers have to stop operating in crisis mode. More planning, more decisiveness, more realistic deadlines. The entire industry needs an overhaul of its working conditions. It's long been a sweat shop and we're all too afraid to change it. ”

I'm curious about a future where wellness is truly honoured, where humanity is just part of business and where we behave more like humans in order to talk to the ones we call consumers.



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More human instinct

Marketing has evolved so much that there's a model a minute. We've so obsessed with the science of marketing that we've forgotten that a significant part of what we do is *not* scientific.



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Measurement and data analytics company Nielsen describes neuroscience research in this way: "By studying people at their most fundamental level — by measuring brainwaves — we provide a real-time view of their subconscious reactions." Funny, that's what creatives call 'gut' or 'instinct' — the thing that lets us know we have a sparkly nugget of an idea.

“ In our pursuit of methodology and models of understanding the mind of the consumer, we're in danger of losing their hearts. To reach the heart of another human, we don't need another algorithm. ”

It's the year 2020 - the year that sci-fi movies once referenced as the 'future'. And we're all staring into the unknown. My hope for this industry is that we can leap into this unknown, in true Eddie Izzard style.

ABOUT SUHANA GORDHAN

Suhana Gordhan is the Executive Creative Director of the DUKE Group and has over 15 years' experience in the advertising industry.

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