

Take a walk on the wild side

The opportunity to create memorable and effective advertising has never been greater, says Chris Thomas, chair and CEO of the BBDO network in Asia, the Middle East and Africa...

With a well-tailored bespoke suit and shirt and highly polished shoes, Chris Thomas hardly looks like the person you'd expect to be calling for more sex and drugs and rock 'n roll in advertising.

But he is, metaphorically speaking, suggesting brands and their agencies need to inject more risk and possibly even danger into their communication.

Brands, says Thomas, need to rely on creative thinking to design breakthrough business products and he's intimating that maybe at times a little Elvis can help.



Chris Thomas, chair and CEO of the BBDO network in Asia, the Middle East and Africa: Culture always eats strategy for breakfast. (Image extracted from the [BBDO Asia](#) website)

In a swing-through visit to SA, Thomas said the opportunity to create memorable and effective advertising has never been greater, as spoilt-for-choice consumers are accessing more content from a greater variety of platforms than ever before, and it's up to brands to allow their agencies to find expressive and strategic ways of using them.

The value of video

Thomas is particularly bullish about video, as sharing and liking content has become critical to brand growth. He says television naysayers are wrong as TV remains a vital part of the burgeoning screen experience, as does the rapid migration of print onto tablets and phones.

He is cynical, though, about the media buzz-phrase "branded content", correctly suggesting that at its heart all commercial communication is content and should be branded.

Thomas says great brand building agencies need to rely on two simple components: determining the right consumer insights are found and used; and making sure the right people are in place.

It's the latter on which he places the greatest emphasis, stressing ad agencies are nothing but a collection of brilliant people. Culture, he says, always eats strategy for breakfast because without the right constructive environment, only poor strategy will emerge.

"Those people need a culture in the agency which is based on a common vision around great work and making sure the right leadership is in place," he says. Brand managers who are having a problematic relationship with their agencies could do well to interrogate those two aspects.

Thomas also rejects the notion of prescriptive advertising from on high. The best work, he suggests, is that which resonate with "cultural moments in time in a particular market".

Go local, stay global

For global brands operating in multiple markets, that notion is even more crucial, he adds. "You have to tap into local insight while still demonstrating a common, universal idea." In that respect, says Thomas, successful agency networks will have to leverage talent across borders.

He talks of creative hubs where talent sits and develops single big ideas from which cultural relevance and local insight can be extrapolated.

While Thomas remains a huge fan of SA advertising output, he contends this country will have to work to reassert itself as the continental leader, as work from Nigeria, Kenya and North African markets has improved significantly in recent years.

Source: *Financial Mail*, via I-Net Bridge

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