



Straddling design and advertising

Interview Louise Lawton

1 \ Richard Unsworth (left) and John Shepherd believe there will be increasing pride in the differences between advertising and design.

Graphic designers John Shepherd and Richard Unsworth of brand strategy and design firm Studio Alexander have worked on both sides of blurred line where design and advertising meet. Their previous roles were as creatives in advertising agencies.

Q. Having worked on both sides of the divide, are there any striking resemblances or differences?

J. The resemblances are the creatives. Ideas rule and no matter what the assignment, the idea or story behind what it is you are creating should be resolved. One of the biggest differences for me going into my first art direction role was presenting all work as sketches. I once asked my studio manager if there was a spare laptop about. He handed me an A4 layout pad and told me "that'll fit on your lap" so I was sketching all concepts, images, briefs, layouts and type styles and then directing a retoucher or Mac operator. It meant really knowing what your goal was because there were other team members who would be part of creating the work.

R. Yes, I'd agree. In all the companies I've worked across in both areas, ideas are the key followed by great implementation. It's no good having

an Audi with a Suzuki engine! One other thing I've noticed is that in some design studios there seems to be a reluctance to use outside creative. This should not be a sign of weakness, but a chance for fresh solutions still reliant on great direction. The advertising world is not afraid to ship in talent when needed and, in fact, they rely on it. The best result for the client is the best result for the studio.

Q. Do either of you think that the two mediums are likely to merge in the future, considering the ever-impending presence of future technologies and interactivity?

J. No, there will always be a strong difference between how an advertising agency delivers their brand of creativity versus how a design studio want to do things. Technology only helps to get the idea out there better. If anything, there will be an increasing pride in the differences and approach. Design agencies will always be able to create an amazing theme for an ad campaign and an ad agency crafts beautiful type. In the end if it's not what they usually apply their time to, they won't hit the mark as often.

R. As creatives we are no longer confined to one or two mediums.

The armoury of both disciplines continues to increase to stay in line with technologies, trends, social habits etc. The need for generalists involving specialists will lead to a blurring of the lines but there will always be a sway to the intrinsic strengths of a company.

Q. Do you think that a senior designer would also benefit from additional study in marketing or is collaboration the key?

J. Yes, a designer would definitely benefit from experience in advertising and marketing – of course, they have to be the right kind of designer. There is an honesty in the way advertising creatives look at what they are trying to achieve in terms of reach and recognition. As a designer (again), I am trying to look more critically at my work. I am better at taking on board criticisms and feedback. As an art director I am always interested in crafting and details... advertising is not as brash as some designers might think.

R. Knowledge is power, keeping up to date on what is current in marketing and every other area you may come across is the only way to be able to communicate with people outside your core skill areas and recognise good versus bad. **pd**

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