



# Creativity For The Rest Of Us

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## Creativity for the rest of us.

My fellow creative directors are going to hate me for this article....

Because I am going to give away their secrets. And the most important one is that the best creative ideas rarely come out of the creative department.

There's a good reason for that, which we will come to in a moment. But before we do I want to dispel some of the myths behind creativity; prove to you that every one of us can come up with creative ideas; and share with you some terrific creative ideas that have nothing to do with words or pictures.

So let's start:

Jordan's Furniture is a huge store in Avon, Massachusetts. In 1992, they attached a large omni-like theatre to their store and created an unusual movie.

The movie includes a roller coaster ride and other stunts. You're strapped into your seat, which rocks back and forth with the movie, so you feel like you are on the ride. There's also a part where you plunge into a river and real droplets of water splash down on you. It's very exciting and great fun.

Jordan's calls the experience M.O.M. which stands for Motion Odyssey Movie, and since it opened, it has attracted over 1 million riders (the town of Avon has only 9,000 people). The profits all go to charity—and since they opened they've raised \$750,000 for the Aids Action Committee, the Red Cross and other worthy causes.

Now why would a furniture store want to go into the entertainment business—particularly when they don't even keep the profits? Well I forgot to mention that one thing. M.O.M. does not have a separate entrance. In order to get to the ride you have to walk through approximately 40 rooms of Jordan's furniture, with over 250 different displays.

Was it smart to increase store traffic by over a million people?

Did they come up with a creative idea? Do you think they could have accomplished this with a really clever headline or TV spot?

As you can see, thinking creatively is the job of everyone involved in business, and creativity can be an important part of every direct marketing program.

Fortunately, we're all superbly equipped to do it.

Are you a creative person?

Most people shudder, shake their heads and say "No I'm the least creative person in the world!". But let me ask you a few questions...



Have you ever solved a problem in your business?

The best creative people don't come up with ideas in abstract (if that's even possible). They come up with ways to solve problems. And they don't always have to be new ways.

Thomas Edison said "Your ideal only has to be original in it's application to the problem you are working on." and Murray Raphael says "Steal the best. Forget the rest".

Have you ever changed or challenged or broken a rule? One of the simplest—but most creative ideas—I ever had was for Edgar's Department Stores.

When I started working on the account, they would do one full-page advertisement every time they opened a new store. Their headline, always the same since they had found a winning formula—read "Come to Edgar's Grand Opening Day".

This advertisement worked well, and they generally attracted a few thousand people to each opening. However, the place was crowded, people waited on long lines, and some swore never to come to the store again.

I recommended that they change one word in the headline.

What I did was change the word 'day' into the word 'week'.

The result was that people could come into the store when they wanted to—not on some arbitrary day we picked. Plus; when they did come, they were delighted that it wasn't crowded. There weren't long lines. And Edgar's did almost four times as much business.

Show me the rule that says Opening Day has to be a day.

Have you ever had to come up with an excuse? Maybe you forgot your spouses birthday, or maybe you left some important papers at home. But if you've ever had to explain your actions to another person—you were probably creative.

The reason for this is simple: most people are only creative as they have to be. So if you decide that you will have to be more creative at your job, you absolutely will be. And, chances are, you'll be much more effective at it.

You are a creative person, but it's not your fault.

You were born that way.

As Pablo Picasso said, "Every child is an artist. The problem is to remain an artist after you grow up."

Many people think they're not creative. But, in fact, every person is creative if given the right opportunity (and you can give it to yourself).



But before we go any further, lets define our terms. What is this thing called creativity?

What is this mysterious process that had led to the greatest advances in art, science and literature and yes even advertising and direct mail? I think you will agree that 'creativity' involves ideas, right? Okay, one question...

What's an idea?

I believe that an idea is a change. Nobody ever said, "I've got a great idea. Let's do things the way we have always done them!". An idea is a change. And you could argue the bigger the change, the bigger the idea.

Cabletelevision is one of the largest "pay-per-view" companies in the U.S. They were putting on the first Mike Tyson / Evander Holyfield Heavy Weight Championship Fight, but "pay-per-view" sales were down. The reason was that Mike Tyson's last two out of three fights were over in the first round. Most people weren't prepared to pay \$29.95 for three minutes of boxing.

So Cabletelevision brought creativity into pricing. Instead of charging \$29.95 for the fight, they priced it at \$9.95 per round. Their advertising said "You're going to get your money's worth. Guaranteed!"

Not only did they attract more viewers, but since the fight went 8 rounds, people actually paid more (the price was capped at \$49.95) than if they had bought the entire fight,

Is creativity really important in direct marketing?

Today, we all have access to the same lists, the same formats, the same techniques, and the same premiums. The only real leverage you can bring to your direct marketing program is creativity.

So not only is it important—it is becoming more important every single day. The reason why is twofold. First, we live in times of rapid change.

In years past a product or a service could have a significant advantage over its competition and sustain that for many years. These days, it is harder and harder to stay abreast of the competition, much less keep ahead of them.

Sure I know the old Rudyard Kipling poem:

"They copied all they could copy, but they could not copy my mind so, I left them sweating and swearing half a year behind!"

But that was before technology. Less than 45 days after Princess Diana died in that terrible crash, there were commemorative stamps, plates and two new books about it.

Think about it. Is there anything your company or product does that your



competitors could not do? How about in six months time?

The second reason why is that we live in an information age. It's possible, even easy to see what every single one of your competitors is doing.

Have you ever heard of the Direct Marketing Archive? Denny Hatch, editor of Target Marketing and Who's Mailing What, started this several years ago. What they do is collect and archive virtually every single new piece of direct mail sent out in the United States.

Let's suppose you're the direct marketing manager of a bank and you want to see how other banks have handled promoting their auto loans. You can simply call up the Direct Marketing Archive and get live samples or copies sent to you. (Denny will also sent things internationally).

Tweeter is a large chain of audio video stores. But they had a problem. Most customers tend to shop around and even wait for a sale before they buy a new CD-player or walkman. How could they get people to buy the first time?

They introduced Tweeter's Automatic Price Protection—the way it works is this: if you buy something and it goes on sale, at Tweeter or anyplace else, the difference will be refunded to you. But you don't have to come into the store, or even call them. It's all done automatically. Do you think their sales went up?

So if we're all creative, how can we be more creative? Are there any rules about creative thinking?

Funnily enough there are. There's not really rules, of course, because creative thinking may take any form and go in any direction. But the following may be a good place to start.

And in the spirit of creativity I have called them....

## **The 10 Commandments of Creativity**

### **1. Thou shalt be creative.**

It's everyone's job, not just the job of the creative department.

From now on, why not add the word 'creative' to your title? So instead of being just the Direct Marketing Manager, you can be the Creative Direct Marketing Manager.

I did a similar thing with one of my Art Directors. He had done an excellent job for me on a project and I wanted to reward him in some way. I had just given him a raise, and I couldn't give him a bonus, so here's what I did. I made him a new set of business cards. Instead of reading "Mark Davis, Art Director" the new cards read "Mark Davis, Brilliant Art Director", he was inspired.



## The 10 Commandments of Creativity (cont)

### 2. Ask and ye shall receive

One dumb question is worth a hundred brilliant answers. I used to work on the Steinway piano account. I wanted to do a testimonial ad because almost all the world's great pianists use a Steinway piano. The client said, "You can't do that".

I asked why. The client said, "Nobody has ever been paid to play or endorse a Steinway. Not even Vladimir Horowitz".

So my next ad had this headline... "Nobody has ever been paid to play or endorse a Steinway. Not even Vladimir Horowitz".

### 3. Be fruitful and multiply

Most people stop thinking too soon in the process. As double Nobel-Prize winner Linus Pauling said, "The best way to have a good idea is to have a lot of ideas".

Tom McElliot, one of the founders of Fall McElliot, a very successful agency, does 400 to 500 roughs for every advertisement he creates. Even if only one out of 100 ideas is great—he'll have four or five of them.

As someone once said, "many people have the talent to become great. Few have the energy".

### 4. Thou shalt not settle for good-enough

The worst enemy of a great idea is a good-enough idea. There's very useful tool that I call "The Second Best Idea" what this means is that after you've solved your problem—don't stop thinking. Because the pressure is off. And the next idea you come up with may be even better or simpler or a more elegant solution.

### 5. If you don't have an idea, you don't have enough information

Have you ever been stuck for an idea, and then you found out just one more little bit of information and then the idea came? I've found that the best way to come up with new ideas is to learn new things.

Interleaf is a software company that specialises in document management. While looking for an idea, I kept coming up with more and more fascinating information. (For example, did you know that the paperwork involved in building a battleship actually weighs more than the battleship?).

There was so much of it, that became our offer: "Free. The 50 Most Often Asked Questions About Document Management And The Answers" and we won a Gold Echo.

By the way, this is the reason that the best creative ideas often come from clients and account people rather than the creative's. You know more about your business.



## The 10 Commandments of Creativity (cont)

### 6. Thou shalt covet they neighbour's ideas

What works in one business can often work in another. Tom Monahan, a Creative Director in Providence, Rhode Island, has an excellent example.

According to Tom, the gravel industry has been revolutionized by new selling technology. Now you drive your truck up under a machine, you press a few buttons as to the amount of gravel you require, and the size or grade. It then pours out of the machine right into your truck, and you drive away.

You never have to leave your seat.

Sound familiar? Maybe not in the gravel business. However in the fast food business—drive up service has been around for years. So the next time you're trying to come up with an idea, think how an entirely different business would do it.

### 7. Thou shalt not be judgmental. At first.

Don't let the Editor get ahead of the muse. List all your ideas. Don't evaluate them until the very, very end.

Nothing kills creative thinking like saying "That's a terrible idea!" Even if you say it to yourself. What I recommend is that you give yourself some time in between creating and evaluating. Take a walk or even a nap. Then come back and look at your ideas. You may have an entirely new perspective.

### 8. Think beyond boundaries

This has also been described as "out of the box" thinking. Imagine if you had all the money in the world to solve your problem. What would you do? What if you had no money, and had to solve it for free? How would a child solve it?

What if the problem were reversed?

Let's take the idea of negative option. As you may know, negative option is the technique that the book, CD and video club options use. The idea is that you have to tell them that you don't want this month's selection, or else it gets sent to you automatically. And a lot of people invariably forget to, and accept it when it arrives.

You may not enjoy negative option, but it's sold a lot of products. And it came about because someone said "Instead of trying to get them to request our product, how about making them request not getting the product?"

### 9. Remember there's strength in numbers.

All of us are more creative than any of us, with very few exceptions. Even Isaac Newton wrote, "If I have managed to see far, it is only because I have stood on the shoulders of giants".



## The 10 Commandments of Creativity (cont)

You may not be surrounded by giant thinkers, but try holding brainstorming sessions and getting as many different people involved as possible. Ideas can come from anyone, as long as they are in an environment where creative thinking is recognized and rewarded.

### 10. Think Big

David Ogilvy said "Unless your advertising is based on a big idea, it will pass like a ship in the night".

In direct marketing the ship will sink.

Dunkin' Donuts recently changed their advertising campaign. After 17 years, they finally retired "Fred the Baker". Most companies change campaigns quietly. Dunkin' Donuts gave Fred a giant retirement party, gave away free donuts and coffee all day long at every one of their locations.

As someone once said "Make no little plans. They don't have the power to stir men's souls" or to get a response.

My final example is a program we did for Kibbles & Bits. When we started working, we found out that dog owners fall into three general categories. If you have a dog, I'm curious to see if you agree.

Category one is "The dog's a dog". People who fall into this category generally feed their dogs from big bags of dry dog food.

Category two is "The dog is a member of the family". People in this category feed their dogs table scraps, canned dog food, special treats.

Then there is category three. Here the dog is not only a member of the family, it's the most important member of the family. These folks are called "dotters".

They are people who say "I don't know what's wrong, I cooked him liver and onions the way he always likes it, but he only ate half".

"Maybe he's mad at me".

Now this was our target market. But we wanted to reach them in an innovative way. So our big idea was to create a club, but not for them, for their dogs.

We called it "The Good Doggy Club", and we sent out a newsletter, directed to the dogs. It included a letter to the editor column—we called it Speak!

It even had horoscopes. Not only was it very successful in selling Kibble & Bits, but we got dozens of letters—not from people, of course, but from their dogs.



## The 10 Commandments of Creativity (cont)

There was one person who wrote us a letter “behind her dogs back”. She explained that rusty was very upset that we spelt her name with a ‘y’ instead of an ‘i.e.’.

### The Wizard of Creativity

I hope by now I’ve convinced you that you are a creative person; and that creative thinking is fun and easy. So don’t be intimidated by your creative department.

In the movie, “The Wizard of Oz”, Dorothy and her friends are trembling in front of the great and powerful Oz. At that point, her little dog Toto runs around a curtain to reveal that the wizard is actually an ordinary little man who is using special effects to terrify them. It was all just a façade.

Caught, he bellows, “Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain!”

It’s my favorite scene in the movie. It’s also my favorite story about working with the creative department.