BIZCOMMUNITY

Winged angels with halos? Papacy ditched idea 500 years ago

By Anton Crone

31 Oct 2011

There seem to be two prominent paths in advertising. Where they cross, as with many junctions in life, one can find magic. But one can also find conflict and this might be the reason we often avoid these junctions and carry on our ways.



Still from controversial Axe "Even Angels will Fall" ad.

Catalyst for creation

Throughout the ages, junctions have been the catalyst for creation: The junctions of trade routes have grown into important cities. Artists have been exposed to strange customs inspiring creative revolutions. Languages have intertwined. Nations have been born. Beggars have found hope at the traffic lights.

Yet the same junctions can be dangerous: Beliefs deeply held cannot accommodate one another. Resources become so vital that war results. Discourse fails. Nations fall. Cars collide.

The junction in advertising is where commerce meets art. The results have proven magical before, but as time has moved on and economy has become king, many advertising and marketing folk have found negotiating these crossroads more challenging than ever.

Two prominent paths

Hence, two prominent paths: one, where commerce is pursued in spite of art; the other, where art is pursued in spite of commerce.

On one side, you find lacklustre advertising that encroaches on the public's sensibilities; on the other, illegitimate ideas that are not funded to their full potential, existing almost exclusively on the award circuit and industry network.

It is clear that art and commerce need each as they have through time remembered.

Never have achieved without funding

For example, Michelangelo would never have achieved the prominence he did without funding from the Catholic Church. Yet his relationship with the church was not without incredible strain. In his diary he wrote:

"Already at 16, my mind was a battlefield: my love of pagan beauty, the male nude, at war with my religious faith. A polarity of themes and forms... one spiritual, the other earthly..."

His creations stemmed from an intense devotion to the human form. He was a student of anatomy at a young age, a scientist if you will, and this evolved through his work. Never before had such naturalism been seen and the church benefited in extraordinary ways from Michelangelo's portrayal of the scriptures.

More human and approachable

He did something for the image of the church that had not been achieved before: he made it more human and approachable.

The David, slayer of giants, naked and vulnerable, yet symbolically gigantic - a testament to the power and beauty of man.

The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel where none of the deities wear halos, nor are they born aloft by wings. Even God depends on the power of human forms to carry him through the skies. Thus, it appears to be a heaven more tangible and accessible.

The Pieta where Jesus, removed from the cross, lies spent and lifeless in his mother's arms - not the powerful figure usually regarded in the art of the scripture - he is sinew and cold marble flesh; yet Mary is eternally young, her marble skin glowing somehow.

Can only imagine the power

Standing before the Pieta, it was as close as I have ever come to having a religious experience. But my belief is that this sculpture ignites the raw instincts of maternity, vulnerability and dependency in people. I can only imagine the power that Michelangelo's work would have had on the people of the time.

The intensity of his work comes from his striving to understand the relationship between the spiritual and the physical. His depiction of nude, anatomically realistic humans was too close for comfort for the papacy, and his conflicts with them, particularly Pope Julius 2, were legend. Yet a deep understanding and appreciation of one another's aims was established as the power of his work was revealed.

Today, it might seem paltry to compare this to the relationship between agencies and marketers, but such is the weight of commerce today, and such is the lack of art in advertising.

Resonate with people

The marketer needs to appreciate the talents of the agency. They are constantly looking for what is relevant and fresh in order for the work to resonate with people. If marketers want a proven formula based on analysis of *previous* campaigns, the result will be something consumers feel they've seen before and it will leave less of an impression on them.

Of course, the agency needs to appreciate the marketer and stop exploring their own path of self-interest.

Creating scam work - recruiting penniless clients for the purpose of making "creative" work and begging paying clients to

approve one-off campaigns for award entries - is a misuse of energy and agency money. "Let's win gold on this one," is a strange way to motivate a creative team when the brief and its goals should provide the stimulus.

Less impact

This often leads to a formula based on proven award-winning ads, and they have less impact on award-show judges.

Had he denied the church and carried on his own path, Michelangelo would probably have been carving out of cheap wood and scraps of fissured marble. But, thanks to the free reign and finance granted him by the papacy, he went on to create wonders for the richest families in Italy and became one the most esteemed artists of all time.

Alternatively, if the Catholic Church had denied Michelangelo his yearning to glorify the earthly human form, it would probably not have the esteem it does today.

Between commerce and art, follow just one path and we are in for a rough journey. But where those paths cross, if both parties take on the challenges and work through the conflicts, consumers will be able to relate to, and appreciate advertising so much more.

For more:

- Bizcommunity: The asinine axing of Axe by Chris Moerdyk

ABOUT ANTON CRONE

Anton Crone writes for *Screen Africa* magazine and freelances as a writer and photographer. He is passionate about the people and potential of Africa, as can be seen on his website www.brightcontinent.co.za. Email Anton at ant@brightcontinent.co.za, connect on LinkedIn and follow @antoncrone on Twitter.
- Kuza Mobile - inspired by local entrepreneurs - 13 Sep 2012
- Don't blame traffic - 24 Apr 2012
- [Design Indaba 2012] Invest in people - 5 Mar 2012
- On getting out of the office - 8 Dec 2011
- Winged angels with halos? Papacy ditched idea 500 years ago - 31 Oct 2011

View my profile and articles...

For more, visit: https://www.bizcommunity.com