

From design to advertising



By [Ilse van den Berg](#)

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At a creative conference you always expect to hear from pros in the industry, but boy, was Marcello Serpa a treat on day two of Design Indaba. (video)

To give you a bit of background, Serpa studied visual and graphic arts in Germany and then worked at agencies GGK and R.G. Wiesmeir. He has been a partner and the creative director of AlmapBBDO in Brazil since 1993 and is the creative genius behind the successful Brazilian brand, Havaianas.

I tend to get bored rather quickly with presentations and found it quite fascinating that I was so captivated by his. It didn't take long to figure out why... It was simple and had loads of good ads. And who (especially at a conference like this) doesn't love good ads?!

Two golden rules

With 30 years of experience in the ad industry Serpa says he remembers only two things:

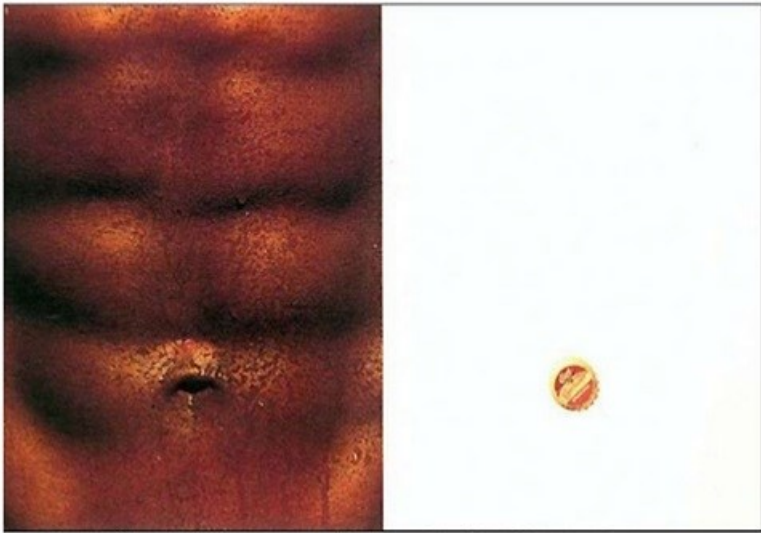
1. Be simple
2. Be unpredictable

Quoting Dave Trott's saying, "Complicated seems clever to stupid people," he says it's important to learn the art of reduction - to reduce everything to one thought, one sentence or one idea.

He shared some of the work the agency has been responsible for over the past few years emphasising his point of keeping things simple. Absolutely brilliant.

Here are a few examples just to give you a taste:

The print ad for Diet Guaraná showing the power visual communication can have. No copy necessary for this one.



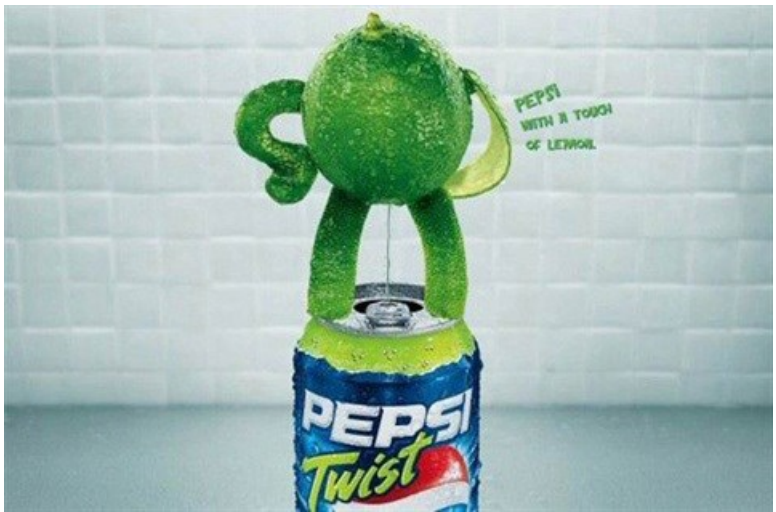
Volkswagen German Precision:

The two sides to every story campaign for Veja magazine in Brazil:





Pepsi with a touch of lemon:



He might look like you but he doesn't have to eat the same food:





About expectations as a creative director

Serpa gave some advice to young creatives entering the agency world as well as senior creatives. He says that in this day and age it seems as though the career path has been shortened with so many young creatives striving to be creative directors before they even know how all the aspects of an agency works. He stresses that one single successful campaign or project doesn't qualify you to be a creative director. And anyway, it shouldn't be about the title - it should be about creating great work. A problem arises when you start rewarding with titles... reward with money and let titles be rewarded on the basis of experience and skills. There's a reason that there aren't any 25-year-old generals!

He advises to never work under someone who is not better than you. Work under someone who you admire, someone who will inspire you to think and create excellent work. On top of that, find yourself a good planning partner that loves advertising. The outcome of good planning is excellent work. And that's kind of the point isn't it?

Working with the team

Regarding the rest of your team, focus on setting up a good, motivated, mixed team - the best money can buy.

Put hierarchy in the bin. Have everyone on the same level and then start developing work. Also, says Serpa, don't ask of your team what clients ask of the agency eg. "I need the new campaign in two days," or "I don't know what I want, just give me something *amazing!*" We all know the feelings that creep up when you have lines like that thrown at you!

He says that it's imperative to know what you want even when you don't. 'How?' you might ask. He suggests two questions to ask in meetings and briefs: 'What do we want to say?' and 'Is this relevant to the consumer?' These questions tie in with another one of his golden rules which is to *always* place the product at the centre - to make the product the hero.

Once agencies start doing that, once it's about making the product the hero and not about making 'just another ad', that's when I think we'll start seeing the real gold.

A perfect example and the one I'm ending off with, is an ad from Volkswagen focusing on one new feature and what it is good for. Clearly making the product the hero. Beware of the old lady on the scooter...

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Ilse is a freelance journalist and editor with a passion for people & their stories (check out Passing Stories). She is also the editor of Go & Travel, a platform connecting all the stakeholders in the travel & tourism industry. You can check out her work here and here. Contact Ilse through her website here.

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