

Where are all the Producers?

A great man named Bruce McKinnon, ex-head of Marketing at 3 Mobile recently said to me... 'Good ideas are two a penny. Producing a good idea into something great, is one in a million'. Call me biased but I couldn't agree more. It's hard to make an idea work in this business if you don't maximise the production of it.

And yet if you were asked to name five good producers I bet you couldn't. This is not because there aren't good producers around but more because they tend to be overshadowed by the creatives or directors who are usually the ones in the spotlight. Why is this?

Producers are essentially problem solvers with a wide range of other qualities to boot. We have the imagination to work with creatives, the vision to ride with the strategy, the aptitude to communicate with everyone and the ability to read the minds of clients, directors or photographers and that's without even touching on the budgetary miracles which occur on the spreadsheet. When a curve ball is thrown into the plan, we need to think fast and work out how to take advantage of it.

My background training was in film and TV production before moving into commercials production in London and Cape Town to really develop my skills. I still stand by my early realisation that the best training any producer can have is in film production – commercials particularly. It's tough, hard and tiring but is offset by the magical moments of creativity and passion. The training is rigorous because mistakes are costly.

Production, whether it's film, radio or events is all the same thing. The difference is in the attitude and aptitude that sets production up as a major role in any creative job. The process is managed in the same way.

Producers need to be involved from the outset – to support in the creation of an idea. I love a challenge as much as the next producer. Sometimes I sit in a brainstorm and want to slip under the table and disappear. While we know the brainstorm process is all about not holding back, of course, as a producer, your brain whizzes as each idea lands. You've got to keep smiling and keep everyone at that table full of passion, possibility and integrity to the client and brand even if you're also thinking about pound signs and safety ropes.

It's about making the vision a reality – in my mind at the very beginning, this is almost as exciting as the actual event, recording or shoot.

Recently I produced a radio campaign for Sky News with BMB. The idea was cutting edge stuff, to record, mix, playout and have on air within a 3 hour timeframe, reaching over 200 stations on a daily basis, which will play for a matter of hours to target specific Sky News programmes. It's never happened before on this scale. All entities had to work together and trust one another which included the RACC who were fantastic along with Adstream to manage the content and the stations. This is a classic example of a producer's role being fundamental to getting a great idea on the air. Someone to take the idea, knock it into shape and make it work with a superb team.

In contrast, a completely different experience last year was producing an large scale event for Cafédirect, the Fairtrade coffee company, hiring the London Eye for a one-off arts festival – ‘Flight 5065’ - to celebrate Africa. We staged over 100 live performances to a ticket-buying public. It was timed so perfectly – two weeks before the G8 summit and one week before Live 8. All the content, much of which was developed in-house had an African slant whether with new theatre pieces, comedy or music or with performers with strong connections to the continent. You can imagine the enormity of it – with a client who laid everything on the line in order to create a storm – the PR value of that project alone was valued at between £5-6 million.

A great idea? Absolutely. But without a producer to pull it off it would have remained just that.

Whether it’s something as truly unique and vast as Flight 5065 or whether it’s creating a ground breaking campaign for a client willing to try something out of the ordinary is such a privilege. And what sends me back to sleep at 5am with a few more problems cracked is the thought of how exciting it is to be a producer.

So move over creatives and make some room. We need a share of the spotlight too if we are to encourage future production talent to this business.

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Fresh Air Radio www.freshairradio.com
And named a ‘2006 Face to Watch’ by Trevor Beattie