

13.

Don't expect a creative idea to pop out of your computer.

I've witnessed a myriad of creative "professionals" (as well as *all* design students) fishing on the computer, frantically looking, searching, praying, for an idea. Look deeply, deeply, into the screen—there's nothing there! Without a creative idea in your head, the computer is a mindless speed machine, producing tricks without substance, form without relevant content, or content without meaningful form. The capability of a computer to produce bells and whistles can *never* inspire the conception of a Big Idea.

So don't sit down at your computer until you've grasped a big concept, without a computer in sight.

You can't run until you can walk.

"Duh!"

14.

A trend is always a trap.

Because advertising and marketing is an art, the solution to each new problem or challenge should begin with a blank canvas and an open mind, not with the nervous borrowings of other people's mediocrities. That's precisely what "trends" are—a search for something "safe"—and why a reliance on them leads to oblivion.

At the start of each new year, as the press scans the horizon for newsworthy departures from the past, I'm usually asked by reporters from America's news weeklies: "What do you think the trends in advertising will be in the coming year?"

My answer is always identical to what I said the previous year:

"Beats the shit out of me. I'll know it when I do it."

Trends can tyrannize; trends are traps. In any creative industry, the fact that others are moving in a certain direction is always proof positive, at least to me, that

a new direction is the *only* direction.



15.

**Creativity is not *created*,
it is there for us to find – it is an
act of *discovery*.**

Great advertising comes down to The Big Idea, but I never create the ideas that characterize my work. I discover them – snared from the air as they float by me. (Michelangelo said that a sculpture is imprisoned in a block of marble, and only a great sculptor can set it free.) Sounds mystical, perhaps, but after doing the requisite homework to understand a product, its competitors, etc., ideas in advertising are ignited by the sparks and sounds of an understanding of 7,000 years of the history of mankind. Plato defined “Idea” (*eidōs*) as a mental image. I don’t create that mental image in my head. I somehow see it in my mind’s eye, floating by me, and I reach out and grab it. So if you’re trying to achieve greatness in *any* creative industry, go out into the

world and sail the ocean blue
and live a life of discovery.



CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS
SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO, 1520

16.

**Why just be a *Creative Thinker* –
when you can be
a *Cultural Provocateur*!**

Great graphic and verbal communication depends on understanding and adapting to the culture, anticipating the culture, criticizing changes in the culture, and helping to *change* the culture. Any entrepreneur, inventor, artist, graphic designer, adman, fashion designer, architect, editor, doctor, lawyer, politician – anyone who instinctively feels the way to go is against a conservative, indoctrinated society and bucks the trend, and who understands the zeitgeist of the time – has the passion and capability to become a *cultural provocateur*. So if you’re a young person with an entrepreneurial spirit who aspires to succeed, not only in business, but in life, your mission is not to sedate, but to awaken, to disturb, to communicate, to command, to instigate, and even to *provoke*.



VINCENT VAN GOGH'S
PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST, 1889
BY GEORGE LOIS, 2011

17.

A Big Idea can change world culture.

MTV, now regarded as a “sure thing from the start,” was an abject failure after its first full year of operation. But in 1982 I got rock fans to phone their local cable operators and yell, *I want my MTV*. Overwhelmed, the operators called the Warner Amex cable-TV network and begged them to stop running my commercials because they didn't have an army of telephone operators to answer the calls, and Warner Amex immediately surrendered. MTV was alive and rockin'.

A few weeks before, when I had presented my campaign idea to their execs, they insisted that no rock star would assist MTV because music publishers feared the MTV concept would kill their business, record companies swore they would never produce music videos, advertisers considered it a joke, ad agency experts snickered, and cable operators scoffed. But with one pleading phone call to London, I convinced Mick Jagger to help (for no dough), and 20 years before the bad boy of rock became a knight of the realm, I anointed Sir Mick the patron saint of MTV. Within a few weeks of the premiere of Jagger picking up the phone and saying *I want my MTV*, every rock star in America was calling me, begging to scream *I want my MTV* to the world.

The lesson (which most ad agencies have never understood) is that **great advertising can perform a marketing miracle!**

“I want my



”

18.

“There’s a great solution, a Big Idea, buried in every assignment, whether for a new ad campaign, poster, brand name, letterhead, matchbook cover – even a number slapped on a building.”

I once emphatically stated this to a class I was teaching. A week later a real estate firm asked me to design a logo for 20 Times Square. It was as if God was telling me to put up or shut up. A multitude of handsome logos have been designed over the centuries, but they are what they are, certainly not a Big Idea. Omigosh – how do you get a stunning idea for a logo for 20 Times Square?! I got it – a 20, a multiplication sign, and a square!

I’ve always maintained that I never “create” an idea.

Getting a Big Idea is not an act of inspiration, but rather one of discovery (see 15).

My logo for 20 Times Square proved me right.

