

Why should all digital marketers care about creativity?

 By [Stephen Sandmann](#)

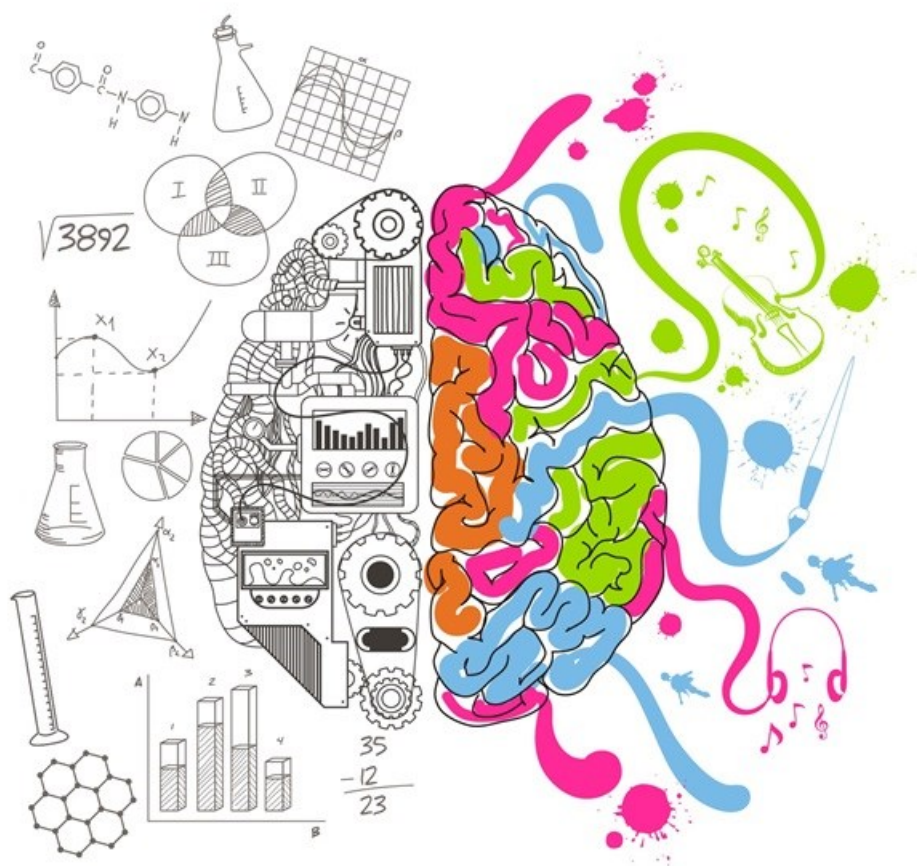
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Creativity plays a central role in digital marketing. I must confess that I'm not a creative, a person who works in an agency's creative department. However, I have the privilege of working with leading creatives that have been recognised on a global level.

Fran Luckin, the group executive creative director at Quirk (she has judged at Cannes and many creatives have won Cannes Lions awards under her leadership, including Gold) has influenced my understanding of creativity in a big way. Collaborating and co-operating with her has lead to my best work output as a digital marketer.

What is creativity?

Fran has helped me understand what creativity is all about by introducing me to leading research, as well as her own ideas and thoughts on the matter. One thing that stood out for me is that many people argue that judgements about what's creatively excellent and what isn't are purely subjective.



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She gave me this useful insight into what is creative, "Academics like Theresa Amabile and Robert Sternberg argue that, although we can probably never achieve an 'objective' definition of what's creative and what's not, nonetheless qualified experts in a domain [digital marketing discipline] can reach reasonable agreement over which work in that domain is more creative and which is less creative. That's what awards juries like the Cannes judges do. Those judgement calls inform a global creative code [the advertising industry's, agencies' or individual's internal system of evaluating if an idea is creative or not], the judges literally curate a winners' showreel of work for the world to see. Such award-winning work then filters

down into individual agencies and helps them to make judgement calls regarding their own work."

Fran expands further on creative codes, "The predominant values common to most creative codes are that the work has to be relevant and original. Creativity isn't entirely subjective, different domains can have different experts with slightly different interpretations of what's novel and original."

Forward-thinking campaign mechanic or creative idea?

Being an early adopter (with reference to Moore's Technology Adoption Curve) of the latest technology can lead to forward-thinking digital marketing campaigns. But are they creative or not, especially if they are relevant and original?

The best way to express my thoughts on this is through an example. The McDonald's campaign I worked on recently relied on the application of the relatively new "OK Google" (voice activated) voice search technology, not to be confused with 'traditional' voice search technology of the past.

Google promoted their "OK Google" voice search technology for the first time in late 2014 via an exceptional campaign by the 72andSunny agency. So, we were early adopters of "OK Google" voice search technology, by launching our campaign on 8 May 2015, but were we being creative? From an SEO specialist's perspective, we were creative because what we applied to SEO had not potentially been done before for a third party brand and its application was relevant to the campaign. SEO (search engine optimisation) usually revolves around only improving websites' visibility in 'traditional' forms of Google search, not "OK Google" voice search. This [video](#) will explain what I mean. From a creative's perspective, this McDonald's campaign may not be seen as creative but rather only as a forward-thinking digital marketing mechanic.

Interestingly, the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity gave a creative 'hat tip' to a digital campaign's application of Google search technology in the past. The ['Romanians are Smart' campaign](#) won a silver Cannes Lion in 2012.

Why should you care about creativity?

I feel that we, as non-creatives (not working in agencies' creative departments) can understand what it means to be creative in our own right and how to strive to produce work that we deem is creative too. So, we can all be creative in our own way through applying fresh thinking to solving clients' business problems. While our definition of creativity may differ somewhat, two things are important to all digital marketers. First, imaginative thinking is important when it comes to problem-solving.

Second, creative work is important, as it is arguably the type that breaks through competing clutter to provide client with the best ROI. Non-creatives can help build effective mechanics or frameworks for creatives to flesh-out to become one-of-a-kind, successful campaigns. Creatives have strong creative skills because they exercise them often and are not scared to push what is possible too.

With the above in mind, we, as digital marketers need to embrace this ideal; to exercise our creative abilities in terms of our different digital marketing disciplines, without letting the fear of failure stop us from producing excellent work as a cross-

discipline team.

ABOUT STEPHEN SANDMANN

I have a keen interest in innovative, digital marketing-lead advertising and search marketing (SEO and paid search), which I've developed through my award-winning agency and corporate career at Ogilvy, Quirk (now Mrum), Vodacom and now a specialist digital marketing consultant at Sandmann Digital.

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