

Droga: Make advertising that people give a shit about

 By [Terry Levin](#)

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Three days of Design Indaba inspiration, described by someone as requiring the same amount of time to come down from as from the best kind of hangover, culminated in headline act David Droga, whose career in advertising traverses Saatchi & Saatchi in London, Publicis, NYC, to starting his own New York-based agency, Droga5 in 2006.



Design Indaba CEO and founder Ravi Naidoo with David Droga, founder and creative chairman, Droga5. © [Ann Nurock](#)

He admits to having started his agency “with no business plan, but a belief system to make advertising that people give a shit about”. This cut-to-the-chase Aussie-ness has ensured Droga5 is regarded as one of the most creative and effective ad agencies in the world today.



#DesignIndaba2019: "Find the emotional connection in a pure, authentic way" - David Droga

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Commenting that “it takes the same amount of energy to do something great as it does to justify something mediocre”, can be seen in the case studies such as “There’s nothing like Australia”, *The New York Times*, HBO (*Game of Thrones*), Nordstrom and Under Armour. Brands which are imbued with instantaneous cred by the Droga5 touch.

If you haven’t already and even if you have, watch “There’s nothing like Australia” ads, featuring Australian household names such as Russell Crowe, the Hemsworths, Hugh Jackman and others starring in the “Crocodile Dundee Son of Legend Returns Home” made for Superbowl lighting in 2018, which apparently succeeded in generated a \$6bn increase in revenue from US tourists visiting Oz.

The truth is worth it

On a much more serious note, the insight that journalism is under threat, provides the key to the creative positioning in another must-watch campaign, “The truth is worth it” for clients with the eminent pedigree of *The New York Times*.

David shares that, “Nothing we do as agency can compete with what they do”, referring to campaigns celebrating the intelligence, grit, danger and determination required of journalists to break news stories such as ISIS, families separated at the US border and more. Now showing as justification for action on the [New York Times website subscription page](#) in a seamless cycle of integration.

The blockbuster style of these ads about what it takes to get the truth of a story has seen print and digital subscriptions up for the first time in years, proving that the thirst for a proper “no fear or favour” style of journalism should be bigger than any political agendas.

David offers the advice to “interrogate a brand until you know what it is” with the caveat that advertisers have the responsibility to sell platforms that are “bigger than an execution” or a technology.

Work from the 600-strong agency for HBO *Game of Thrones* SuperBowl, demonstrate the ultimate marketing *chutzpah*, which sees the Budweiser super brand infiltrating the House of Lannister and a fatal joust with iconic Bud Light Knight character, embedded within the much anticipated Season 8 preview.

Opportunities for marketing to do good

Identifying the brand truth that everybody in *Game of Thrones* spills blood, provides another opportunity for marketing to do good, by inviting fans to “Bleed for the Throne”, a nationwide drive for blood donation in partnership with American Red Cross that offers the incentive for volunteers to get to go to a party with the show’s stars.

Unlike the popular marketing aspiration, David says he has no desire to be a “disruptor or interrupter”, and would rather have people seek out and appreciate our work because it adds value in their lives, advising us to “make something at stake, not superficial... so much of advertising is patronising.”

For example, instead of superficial fashion platforms for client Nordstrom, Droga5’s “An open mind is the Best Look” campaign, celebrates really real people of every diversity, and in so doing claiming the ultimate value positioning for the brand.

Also, instead of spin, ads showing supermodel Gisele Bündchen working out as real-time commentary is projected onto the walls around her showing comments from trolls such as “she’s old”, “stick to modelling” etc brilliantly reinforce Under Armour’s Cannes Lions-winning empowerment positioning ‘I Will What I Want’ while giving credit to viewer intelligence.

Pick what you stand for

Taking David’s advice that “Most brands don’t have a point of view, everyone wants to be popular, pick what you stand for”, should be a no-brainer for business and brands who want to achieve the above type of outcomes.

Like many over the course of the Indaba, Droga touches on people’s fear of diminishing jobs due to AI automation, adding that “the creative thinker is the one job that’s going to be hardest to get rid of... linear and logic make the world go around but it’s the creative people that make it worth living in”.

Fitting words at the closure of the 24th Design Indaba Festival and to justify the importance of future attendance.

It is 14 years since Design Indaba Conference was voted the EIBTM Best Conference in the World and the standards not only hold, but may be more relevant than ever in pursuit of delivering on the promises of a better world.

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ABOUT TERRY LEVIN

Brand and Culture Strategy consulting | Bizcommunity.com COO at large. Email terry@offtheshelf.co.za, Twitter [@terrylevin](https://twitter.com/terrylevin), Instagram, LinkedIn.

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