

INTRODUCTION: WHY LEAP?

This is a book about Creative Business Ideas™.

These words do not necessarily trip off the tongue. And there are those who might suggest that “creative” and “business” are as unnatural a combination as “business” and “ideas.” I can understand that. Most often, business thinking is based only in numbers, research, analysis, and logic. These are comfortable staples of predictability for business-trained minds and corporate decision makers. And for risk avoidance in general. Creativity is for the artists and dreamers, poets and ad people. It is fine to support business decisions with creative advertising, but not to have creativity be core to business thinking and business strategy.

This book is going to show you that there is another way. Before you have turned the last page, I think you will not only be surprised by the excitement and potential of creative thinking about business strategy, you will also be determined to borrow some of the solutions we have developed and learned from others and try them within your own organization.

These may sound like the words of a proverbial ad man. They are not. They are not because I am not.

What I may be is a 1960s idealist who found himself in a business—advertising—where outsiders believe ideals do not matter. They could not be more wrong. Over the years, I have found myself surrounded by like-minded people who have a passion for finding out deep truths about superior products and businesses and presenting them to the public in the most creative of ways for the good of all. Our frustrations stemmed not from a disbelief in the worth of our work, but from the limitations of our knowledge. We were like gifted physicians who were hired for our first-aid skills (in our case, making funny or emotional TV commercials). Certainly important, but it did not let us get down to the basics of the problem. Then we had a breakthrough: We needed to become our clients’ partners in the deepest

sense. We needed to dive into business strategy in the most creative of ways, not simply respond to whatever symptoms were deemed in need of immediate care. Only after we were sure we understood what our clients—not just our clients’ consumers—were about would we set off to create solutions.

The difference is enormous. It is like investigative journalism . . . when the subject wants you to know everything. It is like medicine . . . when the patient cooperates completely. It is like detective work . . . when no one is standing in your way.

It is, in short, the most exciting and productive and honorable (and, okay, profitable) way I know to spend my waking hours. It is about wisdom and magic and the leap in between. It engages my left brain, my right brain, and my life experience. It demands that I set aside all the pat answers and approach new problems with humility, an open mind, and an insatiable appetite for knowledge.

And, on a regular basis, it delivers the thrill of discovery. It is about taking research, instinct, and originality and watching them come together with such force that the room practically vibrates. It is about hoping to get from A to B . . . and leaping miles ahead, to M.

If you are up for that kind of challenge, engagement, and achievement, you are in the right place. Because in these pages, I have laid out the practical experience and the tools that we need to transform our businesses and to transform the relationships between ourselves as clients and agencies.

Fifty-three percent of the companies on the Fortune 500 list in 1980 are no longer in business.¹

Creative business thinking and Creative Business Ideas—let’s call them CBIs—might have saved lots of them. Because the whole point of CBIs is to jump-start groundbreaking ideas—ideas that not only sell products and establish brands, but, more important, transform entire companies and categories. It is a tall order. It is not something you see every day—at least not yet. But look hard and you will find CBIs alive and well around the world. For example,

- In Argentina, a real estate developer wanted an ad campaign to promote a new project. Creative thinkers at an ad agency thought it would be a better creative business idea to build a bridge with the millions budgeted for advertising. Not a figurative bridge—a literal one. Imagine the reaction.
- Volvo had built its automobile business on a single idea: safety. How to announce to the world that the carmaker had added new values to its brand and was not the same old boringly safe Volvo? Not an ad campaign. Instead, a “Revolvolution” in its business and marketing strategy.
- Until Frank Perdue came along, the chicken business was a commodity business. Now it’s a branded business. His.
- A South American confectioner was watching sales drop. So it launched an ongoing contest that gave children the opportunity to create their own business ideas in the form of candy. Sweet success.
- A Swedish paint consortium wanted to increase sales. It did . . . but not with an ad campaign—with a hit TV show.
- Nokia wanted to broaden its appeal to mobile users in Europe beyond its ad campaign. The answer was the first pan-European interactive multimedia game.

Though some of these CBIs were the work of our global agency, Euro RSCG Worldwide, we are not the only ones focused on creating ideas that take a company’s business strategy light-years beyond its CEO’s dreams. Some brilliantly led companies have done it.

What makes Euro RSCG different is that CBIs are now our global focus for our clients. They are what we shoot for. And, more often than not, what we deliver.

Some might suggest that writing a book in which I lay bare the essence of my business philosophy is insanely shortsighted. After all, if Creative Business Ideas are my agency’s “secret sauce,” why am I putting the formula out there for all to see?

Partly because, after more than 30 years in the advertising business, I am convinced that the best ideas in advertising and communication have never been produced—they were killed either internally or externally because they were looked at as mere advertising ideas, not business ideas. I would like to help reduce the number of fatalities. That would be good for us all.

It is also partly because all the clients I have ever known have started by saying they want great creative thinking. If everyone wants creative thinking, why are they not getting it? Within these pages lies the answer.

I also believe that the people in the advertising industry, the people who get paid to think creatively about communications and advertising, are better equipped than anyone else to bring creative thinking to business strategy. Favoritism, yes, but it is based in fact.

Finally, I plead guilty to having a strong vision of where our industry needs to go. Not only do I log a quarter of a million miles annually talking passionately to the people within our network, I went public years ago. I have repeatedly spoken out, pleading with both our clients and others within our industry to ignite a revolution in creative thinking, to find the twenty-first-century version of the creative “book” of ads and “reel” of TV commercials, and to redefine the agency/client relationship for the times in which we live. Connect the creative and business worlds, instill the magic of creativity into the very fabric and nature of business itself, and we can create the future. And what an exciting and rewarding future it will be.

What you are about to read is based in theory—theory that is richly supported by success story after success story. The theory, I promise you, is written in plain English. There will be no business school mumbo jumbo here. The success stories? They are, I think, irresistible. And compelling. Because if there is one thing on which everyone in business can agree, it is that there is nothing quite as satisfying as success and the wonder of creating it.