

If I knew then...

We've all heard the saying: 'If I knew then what I know now...' and at some point we have all wallowed in the benefit of hindsight, so this month we ask, what do you wish you had been taught in school about the creative/advertising industry that you know now?



NEALE SKALBERG

Creative director, CPM Australia and New Zealand

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I finished school in the late 80s, escaping with only a few minor scars that I wish someone had taught me to avoid – some bad haircuts that I'm reminded of every birthday and knowing all the lyrics to Bronski Beat – but what I really wish is that my teachers understood how fast the digital world would progress and the impact it would make on our industry. The digital age had not really surfaced its pixelated head by the time I left school, but just imagine if we truly grasped its impact at school – whether it be

The digital age had not really surfaced its pixelated head by the time I left school, but just imagine if we truly grasped its impact at school – whether it be CGI or simply online advertising.

CGI or simply online advertising. I would not only be sitting in the sun relaxing with a few billion in the account, but the whole industry would understand all things digital and develop proactive brand campaigns that take advantage of the technology available.

It was my first director who taught me a lot. He loved to get the best of you and I wish my teachers had taught me that you should always live in fear and you are only as good as your last job. I do, however, always remember him screaming at me to "Get off that f**ing computer" (Mac LC575) or I would no longer have a job. I was only trying to speed up the typesetting process that was in place, but he had a point – ideas don't come from computers.

This leads me nicely onto something else I wish I was taught at school – that an idea is king, but you need to know how to sell it.

KEVIN FERRY

Creative director, Bullseye

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I wish I had developed strong business attributes. In my advertising career, I've had many great ideas and produced campaigns that have made millions for them [clients], which is fine. And that's great. It's what I get paid to do. My problem is I haven't been business

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savvy enough to turn my creative ideas into something that made me millions. I have ideas all the time when I see or read something that needs a solution, but they often have no connection to my clients' brands. So I have the idea and then say, 'Hey! That's a good idea', and then do nothing with it.

Other areas that I wish I studied at school are child psychology and copyright legislation, and I wish I had read the books *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie and *Managing the Professional Service Firm* by David Maister before I started out in the creative industry.

I also wish I'd listened to Sir Ken Robinson's talk, 'Do schools kill creativity?' and to my English teacher when he said: 'Don't wait for tomorrow, as tomorrow never comes'. But I was too busy listening to Pink Floyd's 'Another Brick in the Wall'.



GUY MUNRO

Strategy director, Autumn:01

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If only they had introduced a course educating you on how to read people's minds – in hindsight, this would have been incredibly useful. Call it a psych course, perhaps elements would have been:

- Learning how to read faces
- Body language, and
- Tips on how to sniff out the genuine from the inauthentic.

Ultimately though, school doesn't really scratch the surface and there's nothing more educational than real life experiences. In addition, I don't think there would have been anything that would have prepared us for the current environment. I can't imagine sitting at my desk or in a lecture theatre being told about the technologies that we have become so

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quickly familiar with today. They've entirely changed the way we communicate to an audience. But then again, many of the world's greatest leaders didn't even finish high school. They didn't need good advice to create an empire.



JAMES HACKETT

Director and founder, Hackett Films

<http://hackettfilms.com>

My university days at the Sydney College of the Arts taught me very little except for one big thing, how to think creatively, making the three years in a dusty warehouse with dreadlocks on my head well worth it. At high

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school I wish that there had been a broader philosophical context for understanding and evaluating the media and advertising industry. Years ago when I first spoke to Andrew Denton about creating *The Gruen Transfer* titles, he said: "The fact that we live in a capitalist society is like the elephant in the room that no one wants to discuss", or words to that effect. In the context of media and advertising it is an interesting point, and one that should be discussed and taught as early as the individual's comprehension allows.

After putting the same question out to Desktop readers online, here's what some of you had to say about what you wish you knew then...

RUSSELL TATE

Graphic designer

As a freelance graphic designer in London during the 80s, I practised my craft in the traditional analogue way. Then, in 1991 I moved to Australia when I was invited to art direct a magazine called *TV Hits*. The publication's artists were using computers, but I wasn't immediately impressed. In fact, it put me off using computers for a while. What I didn't know then was the huge impact that personal computers and the internet would have on business. Lucky for me, my attitude to digital design did change, particularly when I started using Illustrator 1.0, which radically influenced my career. I'm glad to say that I have been an early adopter of technology and have been using successive iterations of the software ever since.

I was a graphic designer first and illustration was a hobby, and now it's almost the other way around. I run my own successful business from home, with big brand names including McDonald's, Coca-Cola and Telstra, as well as working with my illustration agent, Drawing Book Studios. For fun I also contribute images to iStockphoto. I create illustrations in pencil first, then trace over my line work in Illustrator; it helps to keep the images a little fluid and not too computer generated.

NICHOLAS TURNER

Senior graphic and web designer at Bitten By Design

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Things that should be taught are: the customer may not pick the best design and may pick the worst. Undercharging hurts not only you, but the industry as a whole, as it drives down what everyone expects to be charged for design services, meaning your potential salary is going to end up being lower.

It would be good to learn client negotiation skills before entering the workforce. Also knowing how to spot bad clients and how to deal with them.

FRAN DERHAM

Marketing producer at C.I. Studios

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I wish that someone taught creatives not to be bitter. There should be a class called 'Bitterness is Poison'. They should warn you about old bitter creatives, and educate you on how to avoid becoming bitter yourself. Content could include:

- 1) No one actually hates your idea – it's because the client doesn't know what they are doing.
- 2) The reason that old creative doesn't like you is because he's jealous that he isn't young, enthusiastic and wrinkle-free anymore.
- 3) 'Water off a duck's back' – this should be a poster that every creative gets (instead of their degree) on their graduation. Because a well-designed sexy poster telling you to let it go is more important and inspirational than your degree.
- 4) Always present a safe option. Write two crackers and one boring one. It will save you a lot of pain and bitterness. No one ever taught me that at uni. All the teachers said was 'Go for creative gold'.

what they said....

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