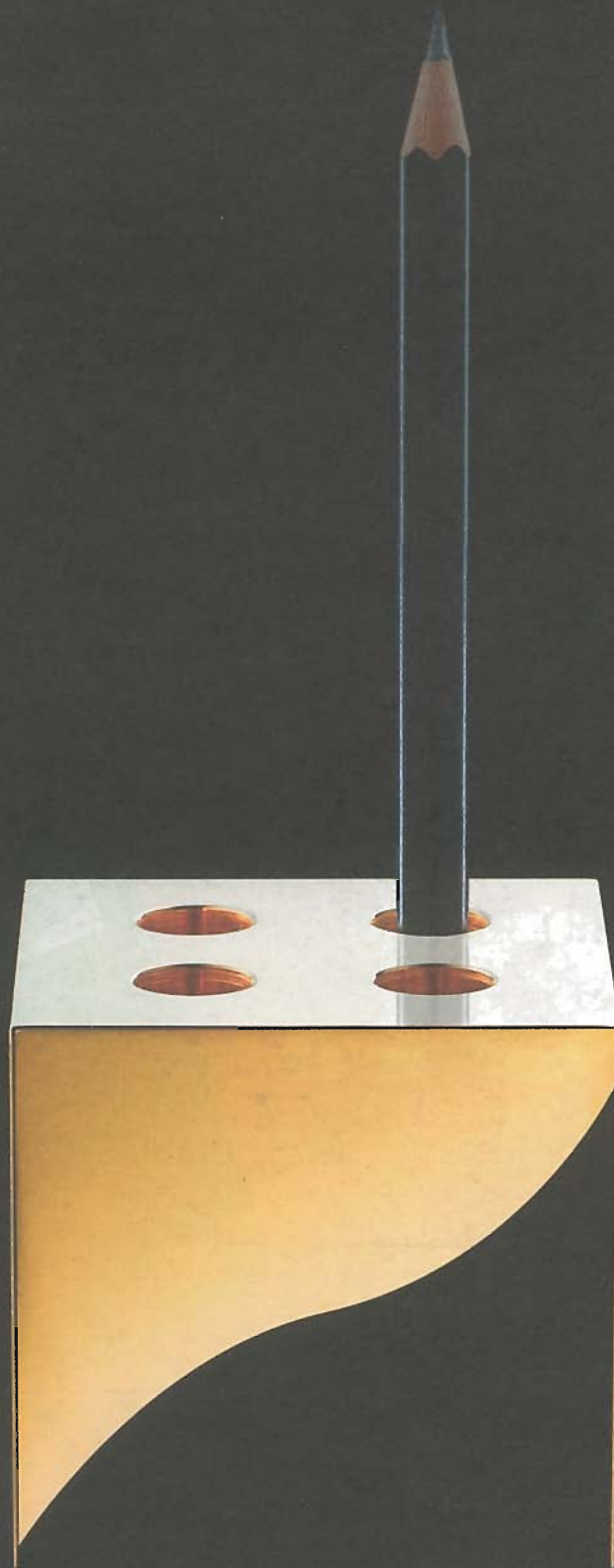


design WEEK

TfL design boss leaves amid roster shake-up
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Minimal luxury
Mark Holmes spots a trend

Respect for clients is best way to nurture growth, says **Ardill**

By Emily Pacey

Designers must quell their desire to 'always be right' and start focusing on existing clients rather than seeking new business if they want to nurture long-term growth, according to Ralph Ardill, chief executive of The Brand Experience Consultancy.

Branding groups in particular were singled out as having 'an unhealthy disrespect' for clients, at the Designers' Breakfast at which Ardill presided last week.

'Client-designer relationships break down when designers are abusive, defensive, critical, right, selfish, superior and controlling,' said Ardill.

He added, 'Calling the client's baby ugly and the client stupid in the interests of being a panoramic thinker actually equates to being abusive.'

'Designers need to rein in their obsession with being right, and with the creative output being all their idea. This attitude is particularly prevalent in corporate branding.'

However, Ardill's remarks provoked disagreement from Mike Abrahams, founder of branding consultancy Abrahams.

'As a designer, you do sometimes have to employ brutal honesty,' said Abrahams. 'Like many designers, I have a tendency to think I'm right, because I often am. It is our job to be right about design.' Nevertheless, he conceded that, 'You should say it as nicely as you can.'

Ardill suggested that poor client relationships could benefit from recategorising the client as a customer.

'Designers are rarely clients, but they are often customers.'

It is a concept that everyone can understand, as we all know when we are getting bad service,' said Ardill.

'We talk about customer insights all the time with our clients, but we don't do the same when thinking about our clients,' he added.

Michael Wolff and Company founder Michael Wolff supports Ardill's standpoint. 'The problem with the words client and consultant is that they conjure up prejudices of one sort or another, getting in the way of talking to the person,' he says.

However, Tatham Design director Amanda Tatham said at the breakfast meeting that, 'Sometimes, you just don't get on with someone, no matter how hard you try. There is one client who I find difficult, so I tend to send my partner to work with them, and that seems to work well.'

Some design groups' 'masculine' culture of 'hunting' for new business also came under fire from Ardill.

He said, 'I find it bizarre that design groups will give massive bonuses to new business managers, when you usually get your lowest fee from a first job. The real money is



Ralph Ardill, chief executive of The Brand Experience Consultancy

coming in through those who are maintaining good relationships with old clients, so reward them.'

Ardill's ideas, despite being intended to help design groups weather the recession by nurturing long-term client relationships, still met some

resistance from Clifford Boobyer, creative director at branding group Firedog.

'Clients are chopping relationships at the moment, no matter how hard-working you are and how well you are nurturing your relationships with them,' said Boobyer.



Michael Wolff, founder of Michael Wolff and Company

RELATIONSHIP COUNSELLING

- By 2010, the average length of relationships between design consultancies and clients is predicted to be four years, down from 5.3 years in 1997 and 7.2 years in 1984
- 70% of roster reviews could be avoided
- 31% of consultancy/client relationships are underperforming
- There is a 60% rate of success selling to current clients, 5-10% success selling to new clients and 40% selling to lapsed clients

Sources: HBR, PriceWaterhouseCoopers and Andersen Consulting



Rally of Scotland

Stockport-based Origin has created the branding for the motorsport event Rally of Scotland, which will take place later this year, on 19-21 November, and form the final round of the Intercontinental Rally Challenge. The consultancy's creative director Mark Bottomley says that the branding aims 'to reflect the heritage and excitement of Scottish rallying in a contemporary way'. Origin will be working with the Edinburgh office of parent company APS to implement the work.

Jam design duo to front BBC Two home improvement show



BBC Two is set to air a new home interior design TV series this summer, fronted by Jam directors Jamie Anley and Phil Nutley.

Currently using working title Brand New Home, the show will see Anley and Nutley travel the UK meeting British homeowners who hope to improve their homes rather than moving.

To differentiate it from other interior design shows, Anley and Nutley aim to 'release the creative imaginations' of their subjects, rather than feeding them instant interior design solutions, according to Anley.

Production company Maverick approached Jam following a lengthy search for designers to not only front the show but also to help develop it. Both Maverick and Jam claim that the consultancy has had a

significant input into the programme concept.

'Maverick came to us with no format or idea, so our usual consultancy working practices have heavily influenced the programme,' says Anley.

The series comprises six hour-long episodes in which the design duo meet a family at a location outside their home, before embarking on a series of exercises including habit-breaking, walkabouts, looking through forgotten belongings, and creating a 'mood wall' of ideas. Some homes will undergo structural changes.

'We take families out to places they like to go, and ask them to bring inspiration back from those places.' Jam claims to routinely employ the same approach with its clients.

Anley's TV ambitions stretch

beyond the show. 'There are other format ideas that we are really keen to develop which we are incubating at the moment. We want to reach as many people as possible with our ideas.' This, says Anley,

could include working on a bigger community scale.

Due to air in August, Anley reports that they are struggling to name the programme before marketing begins. 'I don't like the working title at all,' he says.



Italian design company Domodinamica will launch Brodie Neill's furniture piece Scuba at this year's Salone Internazionale del Mobile. The product is made from leather and glass fibre, and is more than 2m wide. Scuba will be the focal point for Domodinamica's booth at the fair, which runs from 22-27 April.