



FIRE STARTERS

The Future of Digital Storytelling: Firestarters in Australia

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How has digital changed the way advertisers tell stories? What content connects? And how can today's deluge of data influence and even improve our digital storytelling? Two recent Firestarters events in Auckland and Sydney tackled these pressing industry questions.

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From tales around the campfire to dinner theatre to YouTube, humans have always shared stories. Storytelling allows us to connect and explain our place in the world and the best advertising taps into these needs by telling its own compelling stories. Today's always-on digital world has given advertisers countless new ways to disseminate stories, but the market for attention is as crowded as ever.

As part of our ongoing [Firestarters series](#), we gathered creatives and planners from top agencies in Australia to discuss and debate the nature of digital storytelling, focusing on how data and creativity intersect and what we can learn about telling better stories.

[Only Dead Fish's](#) Neil Parkin was on hand to moderate and lead both events.

Great digital stories can grab and hold consumers' attentions

"Stories are models of action in the world," [Faris Jakob](#), founder of Genius Steals and a Firestarters regular, shared at our first event in Sydney. He said that humans are hard-wired to enjoy stories because they help us make sense of the complexity and inherently unpredictable nature of life. A more chaotic and jam-packed digital life is leading to storytelling that is informationally highly dense, with new forms emerging to compete for attention.

At its core, a story's job is simply to hold people's attention. And with more options for media consumption than ever before, consumer attention is becoming an increasingly valuable commodity. The more players there are competing for consumer attention, the more expensive it becomes to obtain it.

Digital marketers should be modern storytellers, not conversation starters or digital disruptors.

What does this mean for marketers? Telling great, creative stories is the best way to break through the competitive attention market. This is something we regularly see in the ads that make our [YouTube Ads Leaderboards](#) as well as our extensive research on [how ads can be unskippable on YouTube](#).

Through his research, Yakob has found a positive linear relationship between the [quality of the content and how long people are willing to pay attention](#).

[Angela Morris](#), Executive Planning Director at JWT, echoed these sentiments and said that storytelling has stood the test of time as one of the most effective ways to communicate information in a way that's understood, remembered, and provokes action. And isn't that what we're all trying to do with our ads? She said that consumers might not always trust what a brand says or necessarily want to engage with a brand, but effective storytelling can stimulate the brain and drive feelings of emotional value.

In short, digital marketers should be modern storytellers, not conversation starters nor digital disruptors.

Auckland panelists [Jane Stanley](#), [Nathan Cooper](#), [James Hurman](#), and [Gavin Becker](#) talk digital storytelling with host Neil Perkin.



“Storydoing” campaigns get shared

What can we learn from campaigns that won top awards for both creativity and effectiveness? [James Hurman](#), author of the upcoming *The Case for Creativity*, asked just that question. He dug into the data on advertising campaigns that won both a gold Cannes Lion for creativity and a gold Effie for effectiveness. By [analysing over 30 campaigns](#), he found that the campaigns that win big are those that are shared socially.

These well-shared campaigns generally fell into two groups: campaigns that position the brand in the service of a cause or social issue (Amex Small Business Saturday and the Always “Like a Girl” campaigns are two great examples) and campaigns that are more storydoing than storytelling. In these storydoing campaigns, brands were focused on actions rather than words. “Smart brands continue to say less and do more,” Hurman posited.

The future of advertising creative is in the numbers

If your agency only uses data to measure the success or failure of a campaign, [Jane Stanley](#) thinks you're doing it wrong. Stanley is the managing director at Accuen & Resolution Media and wants agencies to understand that they can use data for more than just determining the success of campaigns. Data can also help us understand what works and why it works and then allow us to create better campaigns.

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"Forget big data; just think smart data," is Stanley's mantra. Small changes can drive significant results when the data points us in the right direction. Now that data can inform innovation and better user experiences, Stanley thinks it's time for it to stop being a dirty word in the world of creativity.



Sydney panelists [Faris Yakob](#), [Graeme Wood](#), and [Angela Morris](#) discuss and debate the future of the industry with Neil Perkin.

M2M's Head of Strategy [Graeme Wood](#) had an apt metaphor for where data and creativity intersect. "It isn't enough to drop lots of matches; you also need the right conditions for fire. Creativity gives us the matches and data tells us where to drop them. If you put data at the heart of what you do, you will get gradual change. If you use data to create, to revolutionise, to zig when everyone else zags, to hit a target no one else can see, it can change the world."

Firestarters is a continuing series of events to bring the media strategy and planning community together to discuss and debate the most interesting and challenging issues facing the industry. To learn more check out our [recaps of past events and conversations](#).