

MAF: [00:00:00] Welcome back to behavioral science for brands, a podcast where we go deep on the behavioral science that is powering some of America's most popular brands. Every other week, Richard and I sit down and look at the academics that connects to practical marketing. And today. We're sitting with Sarah Carter.

Sarah, welcome to behavioral science for brands.

SC: Nice to be here. Thank you.

MAF: We're so thrilled to have you today. We're going to be talking about, uh, some ideas and some background that you've brought about how behavioral science has been a part of a lot of the work that you've done. Uh, let's get into it.

Okay. Um, so Sarah, before we start our conversation today, I thought I might give everyone a little bit of your background and your history. Please don't blush while I introduce you.

SC: Try not to.

MAF: Um, currently you're the global planning partner at Adam and Eve DDB, but before you started your [00:01:00] career at DDB and, uh, you has spent a number of years at Unilever.

So you went from brand side to agency side. Yep. I would imagine that had a lot of different, a lot of changes in that world.

SC: It did. Yeah. So I, I just. Do you think it was a really good thing to start in marketing? I mean, I still use that experience a lot now. I think you'd have a lot more credibility with clients if you, you know, seen it from that side of it, but yeah, I started in a, I worked on fish fingers and ice cream with bird's eye walls because they were, they were joined in that stage.

Uh, yeah. And the bits I didn't know about planning, obviously when I got that job at all, but the bits of the job that I liked were all to do with the research and with the advertising agencies, the bit I didn't like so much was negotiating fish finger trade discounts with sort of, uh, Tesco buyers. So I kind of lost, sorry, lost that bit of it and, uh, just, yeah, moved to the bits that I did like.

So, and I was very lucky to get a job at BMP as it was then, uh, which little did I know was the sort of. Home of planning and I, I just really landed on my feet. I got [00:02:00] trained by Paul Feldrick. He was my mentor and I got to work

with John Webster, then probably the greatest creative of the last 40 years who happened to work on all my accounts.

So I was a lucky girl. I landed on my feet big time.

MAF: Well, luck is a part of it. And then also making, making your success from that and very exciting. And so, uh, and so you're doing that in the nineties and early two thousands and then in 2010. You and Les Benet started, uh, co authoring a, uh, editorial series at AdMap.

Yes, that's right. Yeah. And it was called Mythbusters. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

SC: Well, it was a, it was a monthly column that we started with AdMap. I think I was saying earlier, we were commissioned to write it for a year and we thought we'd probably get 12 or 13. Articles and that would be great.

But yeah, little did we know is we did 60 and we were still going strong. Um, and it just all started from, uh, just wanting to kind of expose the, the kind of not the theory, but the [00:03:00] practice of the stuff that we were experiencing that made us annoyed. Really. That's how we started at the coalface of planning and evaluation every day.

Um, and there were an awful lot of myths around. So we wanted to write a column just based on something that had actually happened that month that we felt, um, other people could learn from. Uh, and we also based it on, which I think there's a lot of airbrushing going on with case studies, isn't there? It all seems a very seamless movement from strategy to brilliant ad to it.

And it isn't like that ever. And we just felt. Actually, people learn more from the things that go wrong than the stuff that's kind of airbrushed out to look kind of perfect. So we wanted to, yeah, expose the myths, the cock ups, the misunderstandings that we all make and, uh, and help people to learn from that.

And it seemed to go down really well.

MAF: How helpful for our listeners to hear because we have lots of folks on the agency side that are listening and thinking about how to use behavioral science for their work, but lots of brand side marketers who knowing that [00:04:00] it's not always a seamless as the case studies tell us that's nice

SC: to hear it's never a seamless as the case studies tell right?

Um, but yeah, yeah, we all we all learn I think more from mistakes than. Things that are perfect, don't we? So yeah, that was, that was the basis of it. And then you, you

MAF: and Les decided to combine a lot of these articles into a book, how now what's the right title? Is it how not to plan?

SC: Yes, it's how not to plan with the not crossed out.

Yes, that's why I wasn't

MAF: sure how to, what the final title was.

SC: So this, and we talked about screwing it up, didn't we? Where it was, we were going to have cocky dealt to start with, but we weren't allowed to say that for the American market, apparently. So that's when we had to, there was a lot of discussion on the title and what we'd be allowed to say or not.

Yes, our period in years. Can I, so you published this in 2016, 2017, 2016, I think. Yeah. I mean, we did it in association with the APG, um, thanks to Sarah Newman, who, um, sorted out, you know, the kind of, uh, [00:05:00] production and everything of that. And, uh, she just felt it deserved a wider audience amongst planning, particularly younger planners.

I mean, we're very lucky at our agency. We've got a big planning department that younger planners can learn from, but a lot of planners are on their own or just two or three of them in an agency and, uh, and they're all hungry to learn. So, um, yeah, she thought it would be a great thing to do to disseminate that more widely, because I don't think ADMAP had a huge readership.

So, um, yeah, we never, I think it was, we never set out to write a book. I don't think anyone would be arrogant enough to write a how, how to plan book, but it just, we had all the articles. We found a useful structure that could kind of structure the way that we put them together, put little top tips in it, try and made it more user friendly, and yeah, off we went.

MAF: Well, it's a book Richard and I have known about for some time and, uh, you know, I think not only is it the way that you approached it, but the way that you have bullets at the end of each section that makes it, Supremely readable but also [00:06:00] actionable

SC: thank you and that that is exactly the positioning we had and I think we said in the introduction that you know we've got loads of business books I think we all have haven't we and most of them probably we haven't read to the end some we haven't even started we wanted this to be a useful but that was the positioning and we wanted it to be kind of dog ears and.

Out there on planners desk with coffee stains on it, writing it or whatever, but just use it and find it useful. And it's been really gratifying that we, so many comments we get back saying how useful it is, or, you know, I've always thought all these things, but felt it was only me. And it's just so great to read that, you know, I'm not alone and I'm not being stupid or whatever.

So yeah, it's been very gratifying actually.

MAF: And not only for. Advertising side but brand side marketers will find this just as useful

SC: well i hope so yes i mean the um clients who have read it have said yeah a lot of them have bought it for their teams as well i think maybe that's where my background in marketing came is what i mean a lot of people seemed a bit surprised that we. [00:07:00]

Haven't just written about ads that we've written about pricing and, you know, distribution and things like, but obviously that's all part of it. You've got to look at the other piece to work out the role for the advertising piece. So I hope it has a, a, yeah, a broader readership than just. Planners in advertising agencies and it seems like it is doing that because, you know, as we all know, there's so much more information and science and brilliant stuff being done by, you know, Orlando and yourself and Peterfield and Les or whatever there's, but it's still not being used as much as it should be.

So. To try and bridge that gap, you know, we will need to kind of lean in and help that to happen. I think

MAF: And is it the purpose for you of writing the book is the same purpose for us of doing this podcast? To take the academic insights and bring them to practical use to have them actually used in commercial

SC: application Yeah, and I think you know over my long career That's probably one of the things that's changed the most really when I started out there was You know, the kind of academic theory [00:08:00] stuff going on in universities really.

And then the kind of practical every day, often based on common sense, usually wrong and kind of near the twain shall meet really, you know, people actually doing the stuff really sniffed at people, you know, we didn't, we positively discriminated against people who'd done marketing degrees when we started, which was terrible.

It was, you know, it seemed like you have to learn it on the job and the academics. Had never worked in the real world. So, um, and that's really changing now. I think, yeah,

RS: why do you think that was, why was there such a division?

SC: I just, I don't know, really. I think a lot of the academic work just wasn't made user friendly, really.

Um, I mean, Mark Ritson has done the most fantastic job in sort of bridging that gap, I think, and beating the drum for proper training. And I think the big companies did always do proper training. I had a lot of training at Unilever, but there were a lot of companies that didn't. So I don't know. I can't think of many fields where there would be that gap [00:09:00] between theory and practice, but, but I mean,

RS: Bridge builders had a reasonable knowledge.

Yes, exactly. Yes. You don't get sort of

SC: how not to plumb books or anything, do you? But it's, um, but actually happily for Les and I in that gap, then lay the book really, because we were trying to kind of bring the theory into often misplaced common sense. Um, uh, yeah. And, and then you're right. I don't think you would write that book about many other subjects.

It's just, it. Continually fascinated us. What is it about marketing where they're, I mean, all. Fields have a certain sort of nonsense and that needs debugging, but it does feel like marketing and advertising has more than most. And, uh, yeah,

MAF: we've talked about how in a creative field, there is, at least in the American market, this idea that we will like Don Draper, allow someone to go away for a weekend, lock themselves in a room and then.

There's the magic idea that unlocks a new brand and loads of [00:10:00] sales, but when really it's a team effort and a lot of science and academics can give

you a much better chance of it working than just hoping that someone defines it from above.

SC: No, absolutely. And, and they're just that, that tension between knowing what the kind of rules are and the ones that, um, that are the sort of timeless rules, penetration, loyalty, all that stuff, which doesn't change.

And then the bits that you can change, that's, and people get those very muddled up. So, um, again, that provided a lot of material for the book. Absolutely.

RS: Now,

SC: on

RS: the theme of practicality, uh, you've brought some examples of brilliant work that maybe has some psychological underpinning. Do you want to take us through one of these campaigns that has been particularly successful?

We can look at some of the lessons that underlie that.

SC: Okay, well, uh, well, the one I wanted to start with was, um, uh, a campaign, well, it was. When I first started in the [00:11:00] business, this is the late 80s and 90s, one of the first, what we would now call a behavior change campaign, but we didn't in those days, was for what was called the Health Education Authority, and it was on public information work we did on HIV and AIDS, and for people, probably a lot of the people listening to this actually wouldn't So, It wasn't even born then, so don't appreciate quite a horrific time it was.

So this was a new disease, very little known about it, uh, no cure, uh, no treatment and was fatal. Um, so in, you know, some parallels with the kind of Pandemic, I guess recently with what's been going on, but two very important differences. One that it was mostly but not entirely sexually transmitted, which this was a time when there was a huge amount of embarrassment and ignorance and shame around sex generally, and the other thing it was largely, but again, not entirely, um, focused amongst the gay community to start with.

And this was a [00:12:00] time of horrific prejudice and discrimination against the gay communities. So it was, um, It was a fascinating kind of communication, uh, exercise, but an awful lot going on to sort of unpick in terms of behavior change, but the, the ads that I was focused on, which I think you're going to be able to put in the

MAF: show notes so everybody can watch them after

SC: our two, um, called Mrs.

Dawson and Mr. Brewster, uh, and they both had the, uh, so there were lots of different bits, strands of communication, as you can imagine at this time, As knowledge about, uh, HIV and AIDS grew, so we had to tell people, you know, how it was spread, how you would know someone who had it, you know, Latest sort of information, lots and lots of public information, so, but these two ads were part of a, uh, a campaign which was targeted at young adults, uh, sexually active.

But all young adults, not just the gay community. Uh, and it had a very clear behavioral [00:13:00] objective to get them to buy and use condoms. And this was a very different time. Again, people would find this hard to understand now how much kind of shame and embarrassment there was around condoms then. Nobody even said the word very much.

I mean, in groups people would say, I don't really know how to say it. Um, no one talked about it. Uh, it was very, sort of, condom usage generally was kind of metaphorically and literally hidden. You had to ask chemists to sort of get it off the shelf at, at the back. So, there was just an enormous amount of embarrassment around it.

That was one of the issues, but the other issue was, um, perceptions and well, and a little bit of reality of kind of reduced experience as a result of it. So two pretty big barriers to usage and I chose it because I think it's a really good example of a campaign that tells you, as we all know, but sometimes forget just finding a problem, telling people what the solution is and just expecting them to do something about it just ain't how it works.

Really. You've got to work out the barriers and how [00:14:00] you overcome them. So, um,

MAF: the rational side of this is, If you use a condom, you will have less transmission. Yes. And there will be, it will start job done.

SC: Right Off you go. Right. But that wasn't gonna happen. So, so we, these two ads tackled two sort of different things really.

The first one, and we'll talk about the behavioral in the economics principles, but I was just saying earlier, we never used that word. We didn't think of it like

that at all. But Mrs. Dawson, just to explain what happened. So this was about removing or try to normalize. Condom usage and behavior really, um, but I just think it did it in such a smart way.

So you would perhaps nowadays think you would take an influencer, you know, uh, who in their influency way talks to Gen Z about condom use, but this was a I think she was in, she was in her 60s, so this was a real woman who worked on a, in a condom factory in North London. Um, she was called Mrs. Dawson. Uh, and you see her on the production line, so she's got her, you know, [00:15:00] factory coat and a hat on, you know, a cap thing.

And she's very perfunctorily I'm pulling condoms off the production line as they come along and which takes a few seconds to real. I don't know if it's just me. I think it takes a few seconds to realize they're condoms. They look very strange. So kind of visually quite interesting. And there's the noise of the factory going on in the background.

And she's saying, um, you know, we're the first to know here when there are changes in behavior. Um, young people now, you know, they've got their head screwed on. They know, they obviously realize that, uh, if they wear a condom, it protects them at age where I've never been so busy. Um, and then at the end, it finishes with keep Mrs.

Dawson busy, use a condom. So, I mean, we can go on to talk about the, uh, the principles behind that, but just, uh, if you think about how normalizing. That was, uh, in terms of the, just the routineness of it being talked about in that way by that sort of person, very relatable. [00:16:00] She looked like your nan, really, um, presumably social proof.

I think you, you tell me is the, is the kind of main way that works. Like this is normal. Everyone's doing it. People are doing it more and more. Um,

RS: I certainly agree. I think there's a really strong element of social proof. This idea of if you. Say something's happening a lot. People at least consider whether it's the right behavior.

I mean, it's more likely to occur. What's fascinating is most campaigns that use social proof do it in a very little minded, perfunctory way. I can imagine another agency might just put up a line saying, you know, condom sales are up by 7.5 percent or 300,000 condoms get sold every hour. Talking about Mrs.

Yes. Brewster

SC: and the production line change, Missy was a, is a, is a very smart way of saying the sales are high, isn't it? It's, um, yeah. Much more distinctive and yes. And notable. Yes. Yes. And, and just, I mean, is that, so I know you talk about the messenger effect at all. Is that a, a [00:17:00] relatable one or a, a neutral one?

I dunno. Quite works. So it's quite interesting why that works as an old. So the messenger effect is

RS: essentially this idea like the first days were done back in the 1950s by Hovland and Weiss which essentially show that who says something is as important as what's said. And later work seems to suggest there tend to be three types of messenger.

SC: Yeah,

RS: the work. Well, someone who has expertise.

SC: Yeah. So

RS: you can imagine an ad using a doctor.

SC: Yes.

RS: Um, someone who is neutral, right? So it's not a government spokesperson. This had fulfilled that or someone who is. Relatable.

SC: Yeah.

RS: Um, so those three tend to be the most, uh, normally used messages.

SC: Would you call her neutral or relatable?

Because she is a bit like your nan, isn't she? But she's also kind of neutral as well. Yeah, I

RS: think she's, she's neutral. Relatable is a fascinating one because most people who try to apply [00:18:00] relatability, the immediate thing you would jump to would be someone who Looks like me. Yeah, is a, is a 25 year old.

Very sexually active person. Yes, but often the first answer you leap to isn't not the best one Yeah, I think so you say if your nan can be comfortable talking about condoms and sex Yeah,

SC: yeah,

RS: why the hell is am I is it?

SC: Yeah, I

RS: brought a 30 year old. Yes embarrassed about it

SC: Yeah,

RS: so it takes a but I think it takes these biases which could be applied in a successful way and Yes, maximizes the through the creativity

SC: because you could have had a young girl on the production line equally and it wouldn't have been the same with it because she would have been relatable as you say to the audience, but I don't know.

It just certainly didn't feel like it would have the normalizing effect. The the

RS: the the the the the why is that I think that the single most powerful bias I think and this differentiated it very much from the other ads at the [00:19:00] time and again it's worth emphasizing how. HIV AIDS was so different in the 1980s in that it was a death sentence, not a manageable disease was it would have been very easy for an agency to tell people, wear a condom or you're going to die.

To fear, and we have many of those fear adverts. Yeah. But the danger from behavioral science perspective is there's a series of studies. Into what's called the the ostrich effect.

SC: Yes. Yes.

RS: So the original study was that done by, um, George Lowenstein, where he was given access by a financial company to anonymize data on how often people check their stock portfolios.

And what he basically found was that when the stock market rises, and if people check into their portfolios, they get good news. People were checking regularly. When the stock market's plummeting, people check in a lot less. And he said, this is a mistake because the information about your wealth is equally useful in both circumstances, but he said, [00:20:00] people don't behave logically, they have a rule of thumb, which is if something causes me pain or discomfort, I'll either ignore that problem.

Or I'll go through intellectual gymnastics to explain why it doesn't apply to me.

SC (2): Yeah.

RS: So he called it the ostrich effect. And I think much health advertising normally falls victim

SC: to it. And the preceding campaigns very much did that, as you know, the infamous iceberg. Do you remember that? Which was literally crashing, kind of lightning and an enormous kind of, um, gravestone and sort of yeah, don't die of ignorance and all.

I mean, absolutely terrified, sort of little grannys who got no chance of catching this at all, but it was indiscriminate fear, really. I, a 12-year-old boy, I think when that Right. Do you remember that came out, I think remember ended on a, a

RS: tombstone. Yes, it did. It was absolutely, yes, it did. Horrifying.

SC: Yeah. Yeah.

RS: But the. Often what happens with those ads, even though they're very well meaning, is people will just stop thinking about the issue at all.

SC: Yes.

RS: And, [00:21:00] uh, because it caused them, you know, discomfort.

SC: Yeah.

RS: So, introducing condoms and AIDS with a dash of Levity and lightheartedness humor.

SC: Yes. Yes.

RS: Encourages people to engage with the problem. Yes. And change their, it's far more likely it'll change their Yes. Their behavior. And this

MAF: underscores the second ad that you brought in, uh, in the same, uh, creative. It's Mr. Brewster. Yes. Yeah. And, and in the same way. It's a who's delivering it almost more than what they say.

SC: Absolutely. Can you explain that one a little bit? Well, it's another one you think you wouldn't naturally put an 81 year old man like your grandpa into this kind of campaign. But yeah, so this was Mr. Brewster. He was a real person. He was 81. Uh, he was sitting in his. in his, his old brown armchair at home.

And he was talking about his trusty friend, Geronimo, who it turns out was his reusable condom that he used to use when he was a lad. So he's got a real twinkle in his eye, Mr. Brewster. And he's saying, Oh, I don't know why young people nowadays complain about using a condom. [00:22:00] Look what I had to use. Uh, it was like the inside of a bicycle.

And there's not much exaggeration. Matchbox thing. And it's a it. Yeah. Yes. It's, uh, it does look like an inner tube, doesn't it? And then he says, and they weren't disposable in those days. You had to take your, when you, when you finished using it, I think he said yes. You had to kind of wash it down, dust it off, and put it away for another day.

And he does a little sort of chuckle and he said, never stop me there, or, you know, so it was all very kind of, and then it finished, like, if Mr. Brewster can wear this condom, you can wear. Yeah. So I guess. And a huge reframing exercise, presumably. Absolutely, absolutely.

RS: Because I think the danger is, if, uh, if things are left as they are, the comparison is wearing a condom, not wearing a condom.

Yes. And there might be some, uh, loss of sensation.

SC: Yes.

RS: But if you shift the comparison from wearing a condom to wearing a A tube of a yes. Yes. Um, a bicycle tie. Yes. Suddenly. Yeah, it reframe. It was like having a bath with

MAF: [00:23:00] your socks on . Uh, and this connects to something Sarah, we were talking about before, the episodes, before we started filming, which is sometimes great strategists and great creatives.

Intuitively use these behavioral science techniques without them being named or without knowing what they are That doesn't make them any less impactful And in fact it it helps those of us who may not have that strike of genius. Yes To have a better chance at our messaging connecting or ideas working when we base it on that, but you were commenting on this.

SC: Yes, I mean, I've, I mean, I've worked on these. We never used any of these sorts of names or principles. They were very much kind of intuitive. I mean, we would talk about the need to normalize condoms and we would talk about, um, Yeah, trying to, I don't, I don't actually even remember how the Mr. Brewster thing, I mean, I'm not sure we even knew about the, I have no idea.

I think I must have come from the creative teams, but they're often the best kind of strategies. Anyway, they come up with this stuff intuitively. Um, the other thing [00:24:00] we haven't talked about was the media plan, because this, these went out in cinema and national primetime TV, which again, even just that context of.

Putting condoms and being talked about in public by that, uh, again, took them off the kind of metaphorical back shelf and got them out into the open.

RS: Yes, it would have had a completely different effect in a piece of direct mail or a magazine where it's privately read. There's something very powerful about.

Yeah. Being in a communal environment and seeing other people maybe laugh at the end as well. And

SC: in cinemas, particularly when people are on dates and probably are going to go home and have sex afterwards anyway, it was a brilliant bit of, so the whole thing, it was, um, yeah, it was just a fascinating, and it did, well, we did actually won an effectiveness paper, so people can read about it on WAC, it won a silver effectiveness paper, well the whole of our HIV comms kind of work did, but it did, when we tracked it, it did significantly change.

Attitudes to condoms and behavior. So, I mean, it was a [00:25:00] game changing generational change, really, and how people felt, I mean, and, you know, and it also led to condoms being sold on the shelves in supermarkets,

which, you know, people now toss them in with your kind of potatoes and carrots, don't they? So, it's just, I'm sure people listening will just can't believe it wasn't always like this, but it really wasn't.

And I'm just really proud of that work. I think it's really, Much appreciated. Really interesting. I'm very interested in old people in ads generally as well, because we talked about it a lot in the book. There's just that one of the big myths is that people need to see literally themselves in ads. And it's just a brilliant example of how you don't need to do that.

You need to feel yourself in ads, but not see yourself literally. So it's a brilliant example of how you talk to young people with people who are over 70 and 80, which is not where you'd normally go. I

RS: think it's a John Hegarty phrase that says success of an ad is 80 percent strategy and 80 percent execution.

SC: Yes.

RS: And it does feel like there was, uh, a [00:26:00] brilliant element of casting. Yes. You go through the same strategy of a, uh, using a 60, 70 year old, using social proof, using the ostrich effect, and still not have the same effect. Absolutely. It feels like there's a bit of magic in that.

SC: Definitely. Yeah. Because you could have played that so much more safe, couldn't you?

You could have gone with a 40 year old woman or a kind of, you know, a, a grandson talking to his grandpa about, you know, you could have played it safe, but, but we really lent into it and it, and it made it stand out as well. And they're, they're very joyful ads, aren't they? They're very life affirming. And, uh, um, there's, there's a kind of positivity and a sense of hope about them as well.

Which is stark contrast to that gravestone thing we were talking earlier. Absolutely.

MAF: I've heard you talk, Sarah, in other, uh, interviews about how casting and music plays a outsized role in the effectiveness. Just for the listeners who may have not heard your point of view on this, can you just share a little [00:27:00] bit about your thinking on this?

SC: Well, I mean, it's, it's not just my thinking is it all Orlando's work at the moment on, um, and you know, the system one work generally on, uh, right brain, uh, the importance of emotion, the, the sense of character setting story. I mean, these ads are brilliant examples of that on there. There's just such a sense of, we all know these people.

You can imagine the home Mr. Brewster lives in, or you could, you could write a story about Mrs. Dawson and you know where she lives in her family, you know, you get a sense of these people. So there's a sort of specificity in that and a narrative that engages all the bits of our brain that we know work to get attention and make us feel things and make us remember things.

And yeah, if you think of the other ways you could have done it with scientists with, you know, blackboards or whatever, and pipettes and things like that,

MAF: but rational side is not going to get the job done. Not at all. So

SC: it's um, It's wonderful, um, [00:28:00] character, yeah, character and storytelling, really, isn't it?

And, um, playing to those bits of our brain that work, but, but they're so easy to get ironed out, isn't it? I talk a lot about the best ads, I think, have what I call little birds. You know, those things when you walk through fields and they stick on your feet. You know, those little, little bits that stick out, that kind of catch you.

I think the best work has those, and they're That's where the magic happens, but it's so easy to iron those out. You could have said, ooh, condoms, they look a bit funny on that production line. We won't really show them, or, you know, Mr. Brewster, I'm not sure we really want to see one of those. Or, you could just, you could iron so much out of all that, couldn't you?

And you'd lose all them, or you would put some music in the background or something. I don't know, but just, it's the little things. Often that have the biggest influence on us, I think in comms, and it's the stuff that's very easy to lose, um, in terms of the magic put in the, in the wrong hand. So that's what great directors bring to ads as well.

I think a lot of clients think, you know, you've got a validated [00:29:00] storyboard, you just shoot the storyboard and off you go, but it's just, it's the magic that that all that other stuff that's brought to it. That's just the start point, really the storyboard, the magic happens after that. Um, and so that was.

RS: You first said that you were thinking of. The second one that you were bringing was, uh, Eat Them to Defeat. Talk about what the ad was to begin with and then why you think it was so effective.

SC: Yeah. Um, well, the reason I chose this as well, I mean, generally speaking, the, uh, The decisions that we try to influence with our comms are pretty inconsequential, really, aren't they?

Whether, you know, whether you're going to eat a kind of raspberry yoghurt or a vanilla one or whatever, you know, they're not really great. But I chose these because clearly wearing a condom at that time was an extraordinary, you know, life saving sort of behavioural changes. And this one, uh, Eat them to defeat them was another, uh, really important behavioral influencing campaign.

And it was about trying to get kids in the UK to eat more veg. [00:30:00] Um, because obesity levels here in the States are rising. Yes. Really worryingly rising amongst young kids as well. And huge percentage are obese by the time they leave primary school. Lots of data on the fact that, you know, they only eat baked beans and they won't eat any veg at all.

Years and years of public health campaigns trying to get kids to eat more veg using all the, you know, kind of most immediate ways that you think of, you know, you'll be more, you'll grow stronger. If you eat veg, you'll be better at sports. If you eat veg, you'll be kind of healthier. If you eat veg, they don't taste so bad.

Really, if you mince them up and put none of it works, none of it works. So something different had to happen. Um, and this was a campaign that was brought about by, um, Uh, campaigning kind of food organization in association with ITV. Um, and I, I mean, the, the creative work is lovely, but I think the strategy is the most interesting bit of it.

Because it feels to me, you're the expert, [00:31:00] it's like the mother of all reframing exercises really. So it says, kids hate veg, they don't like the taste of it. You're not going to change that, so let's just go with it. And we're not, we're, we're not going to try and sell it, say to you that it. These are good things.

We're actually going to say veg are evil. Um, they're villains and we need you to, to defeat them. So the ad you'll, you'll be able to have a look at it, but it says they, they come from deep in the earth. You know, they're, they're fueled by, uh, water and sunlight. And it talks about how the adults have been trying to

defeat these evil things, but they've kind of lost control and we need you kids to help out.

So you need to eat them to defeat them. And then you've got lots of shots of kids like. You're going down, P, and things like that, trying to sort of defeat these evil villains. And to me, it's just a wonderful bit of creative strategy, really. Um, you, you, you go with what, I think you call it the pleasure versus duty thing, do you?

It feels like it's that, but you go with what kids like. [00:32:00] So they like feeling in control and having a sense of agency. They love games and feeling that they're winning and they're, you know, they're competing against villains and losers and they like having fun. So you apply all that to. Eating veg, and you say veg you can conquer them, we need you, and you do it with a load of fun.

And it worked, and it's just the most wonderful strategy, I think.

RS: I think, I think, I certainly think that the behavioral science argument would be, as you say, and I've phrased some of those, is appeal over duty.

SC: Yes.

RS: That sometimes when people have a social good cause, or an ethical cause, They focus on the, the moral reasons to change behavior or, or the, the duty, uh, reasons for changing behavior.

There's an awful lot of experimentations that suggest that's not ideal. So in the world of, um, veg eating, there's a lovely study from Bradley Turnwald at Stanford. So back in 2017, worked for the [00:33:00] cafe for six or seven weeks and they alternate the labels of the vegetables. So sometimes it's all about healthiness in a restricted way.

low calorie beets. Other occasions he labels them in an indulgent way, you know, sizzling beets in a tangy citrus sauce. And what he shows is that when they alternate week on week off. When those vegetables are labelled in that indulgent way, they sell about 41

SC (2): percent more.

RS: So, his argument is just because they're good for you, you don't have to lead with the goodness message.

Just like with any other product, like a lager or a trainer, focus on that. That's that fun aspect. And it's, but it's rare when you look at actual, um, communications that that lesson is applied. And what's so interesting about the Eden to Defeat Them, is again, it feels like this principle of appeal over duty has been pushed even further.[00:34:00]

It's not just talking about their indulgence and their taste, it's turning it into a game, it's making it even more fun than I think any experiment would have

SC: tested. And there were other elements that, I mean, there were, um, there were sort of charts, because kids love charts, don't they, and stickers, and there'd be a badge of the week that you had to sort of defeat that week, and so the, the thing was sort of gamified really as well, and I guess that's, there's also this messenger effect going on, isn't it, that, you know, there's no authority in there at all, it's kids.

Saying we need you other kids to help us defeat them. Um, and I love the idea of getting people to do the right things for the wrong reasons. I think this is a really good example of that. It's a strategy and we don't do it half enough. Um, you know, in the whole world of purpose, and we're not really going to get into that as well, but it just feels like, you know, it came at it the wrong way.

And this is just a lovely example of, yeah. You're not, yeah, they might be not eating it because it's good for them, but they are eating it more. That's all that matters, isn't it? So

RS: [00:35:00] there's a lovely quote from Mike Cesario who founded Liquid Dex. Yes. And he, he talks about how he found it strange that the devil has all the good tunes, that it's lagers and it's crisps and it's sweets, which have the fun characters and the, and the wit.

And his thought was simply, well, why can't we do this for healthy, environmentally friendly products? Yes. They took all those lessons that beer and. Uh, Chris Snow so well would apply them to, to water.

SC: Yeah, really good example.

RS: Why don't more brands who have a ethical purpose or a, um, a health benefit.

SC: Yes.

RS: Keep that as their reason internally. Yes. But when it comes to communicating with the public.

SC: Yes.

RS: Make it fun. Make it amusing. Make it.

SC: No, absolutely. And that, I mean, that's another whole discussion why that happens, but it does feel like a lot of the purpose kind of misstep was it was, it was a very performative strategy, I think for a lot of.

Brands and clients [00:36:00] and it was more important almost to be seen to be doing these things than the effect Discussed but yeah, but it's the effect That's the important bit you can get to it or by any means that you want to in my mind And if you're getting kids eating more veg who cares how you get them doing it doesn't matter does it for me?

MAF: This commercial and the last ones were new as an American I have not been exposed to them the thing that sticks with me from these that this veg commercial is The decision to make it almost cinematic when you brought it to creative. Yes, that stuck with me I watched these last week when you originally sent them and it stuck with me today Maybe you could talk a little bit about how the choice of making it more of like an action movie.

Yes Underscores the strategy that you laid out what you thought

SC: it was all part of that appeal versus duty. I think to kids, wasn't it? You, you draw on sort of gaming, you know, uh, computer game terminology that, as you say, the kind of cinematic kind of they came from, uh, it just, it couldn't be [00:37:00] further away from a kind of eat your greens cause they're good for you guys have it was, it was entirely in, um, in kids kind of language, which is interesting for an advertiser.

Cause obviously usually. We, we're not allowed to talk directly to kids and you're not allowed to do things that because for various, very good reasons, you know, you're not, you're not targeting them with your particular product, but this was like lean right into what kids like, and you can let rip. I mean, some of the other ideas were earlier ones we had were about, you know, veggies make people fart and kids love farting.

And yeah, we were doing all that because again, probably would have. Probably would have worked quite well, really, because, but we were very much coming

from what we wanted them to do. And then, as you said, you could get them to do that for whatever reason you like, as long as it worked. So, um, but yeah, you're right.

All that system one type stuff was all super important. We didn't want any whiff of authority or coercion or all that sense. It had to be pure fun, uh, and on their level and giving them control [00:38:00] and a sense of agency. Because we've all got awful memories, haven't we, being told, you can't leave the table until you've eaten your way out, all that stuff, until you get completely

RS: away from it.

And I think that's a really interesting area I hadn't quite thought of. One of my favourite studies ever was by a Harvard psychologist called Ellen Langer. So back in 1975, she goes around an office block in America and sells people lottery tickets for a dollar. And the twist in the experiment is some people pick their numbers.

And some are given their numbers. She then waits a week. And then just before the lottery is going to be drawn, she tries to buy those tickets back and what she finds is people that were given the numbers with no choice, they will sell the back for 1.96 on average. But the people who got to choose their numbers.

They won 8.60, 8.70 to sell their tickets back. Now that is a massive fourfold variation in valuation of what is a [00:39:00] commodity. You know, the lottery ticket is no more valuable if you've got to pick the number. But Lange's argument is, just as you say, retaining a sense of agency and a sense of control is one of the fundamentals of human nature.

And the ad is a lovely example of giving children something they rarely are allowed to exercise. So, yeah, removing the authoritarian voice is a brilliant point.

SC: I want to think. The way that you're, or we're taught to try and get children to do things is pretty good training for human nature generally, isn't it?

I mean, I know, you know, we were always with our kids to say like, give them a choice, like you can have a pea or a carrot or You know, you can put this coat on or this coat. You're going to wear a coat, but you're actually got the feeling that you're choosing that. And they're more likely to do it, aren't they?

Then just put your coat on and before we go out. So I think we probably all should study kids a bit more. And that's a brilliant

RS: idea. And how we deal with children as [00:40:00] parents, I think, uh, things to do as advertisers, but also. Even coming down to how we teach people to, to read, think about children's books, they'll use things like rhyme and repetition.

Yes, yeah. Um, fluent devices. Yes. You know, all, all, all these. Uh, tactics that feel too simplistic in advertising. The evidence suggests they are very good at creating memorable messages.

SC: I've never thought that before. But yeah, all the stuff that you do with kids is actually, yeah, getting them on board and making it easy.

And we don't talk enough in advertising about making it. Easy for people to remember things, easy for things to come to mind and, uh, you know, people aren't going to work at any of this stuff, they don't care enough, but you're right, and it's unfashionable, isn't it? Jingles and slogans and all that, but it's, uh, but they work, they, um, it's a bit of a thing, I don't know whether people know Peter Kay, do they, in the US, he's a very famous comedian in this country, I [00:41:00] He fills kind of stadiums with people.

And I went to one of his performances at the O2 a few months ago, and the first quarter an hour of his set was him singing commercials from 40 years ago, probably, uh, and. The whole audience, tens of thousands of people were singing these ads back to them because they were all kind of jingles and slogans and everybody knew them.

There was no prompting or anything, but just people knew the word. And you think, how, how often is that going to happen now in 40 years time that people are singing back the stuff we do? But making these easy to remember is a really important. Yeah,

RS: I guess the other one that, um, children's books do is they don't try and convey abstract concepts directly.

Yeah. They create figures that embody those concepts and absolutely one of the biggest learnings in memory research is vision is the most powerful of our senses. And if we can visualize language, it's very sticky. Whereas if we [00:42:00] can't visualize a word, it's very easy to forget. So there's some lovely work from Ian Begg where he reads out a list of phrases.

So some will be visualizable phrases like a white horse. Others will be abstract phrases like basic truth, and when you ask people later on to remember as much as they can, 36 percent remember the concrete words, 0 percent remember the abstractions. So there's this massive fourfold variation that is too rarely applied by advertisers.

Advertisers will often talk about things like quality or trustworthiness. But then if you think about Aesop's Fables or children's books, they have a fox or the three bears and they have gold locks. They demonstrate these values that you want of, um, you know, maybe extreme, avoiding extremes and risk.

They don't talk about those abstract concepts directly.

SC: I think there's

RS: something there for

SC: Yeah, no, there are a pair of characters and it's so interesting, isn't it? The crossovers between all these little various, I [00:43:00] hadn't really thought through these children things so much before, but it is, it's really useful and they seem, again, people, people like to complicate things, don't they?

I think, as you said, there's a sort of sniffiness about slogans and. You know, jingles, it all sounds and it just feels a bit like kind of below everybody really. But it's, it's incredibly sophisticated communication that, um, as you say, repetition works, simplifying things. We can have another whole debate over Trump, but you know, he's pretty good communicator in terms of his sleepy Joe and all this kind of stuff.

It's, uh, it's, um, it works.

MAF: Yes. So let's, so before we move on to our next topic, let's underscore a few. Key things from this conversation number one Just because they were old tactics in the past like jingles like fluent devices characters The challenge for modern marketers is maybe not to not use them, but how do you use them incredibly?

Well, yes, right And and that is something Um, you know, we can [00:44:00] all agree on is a good message for people to get. And then I think that the second big takeaway is to say, what can we do to make these things more visual, more concrete, so that you can remember them when you come back to them, whether that's sight, like you said, or in jingles that are repeatable and memorable.

SC: Yep, absolutely. Very cool.

RS: So on to your third and final, what were you, what were you thinking here?

SC: So my third and final ad was a, uh, quite a long, I mean, there aren't many long running campaigns around now, which is another issue we could talk about, the issue of consistency, but we have one for something called GWR, which stands for Great Western Railway, which is one of our railway companies here, and we have a long running campaign, which actually, uh, apparently is, is One of the highest ads of system one of our output as an agency, and it's a long running campaign based on a children's book from the [00:45:00] 50s in this country called The Famous Five, but it, I'm sure you have similar sorts of things.

Four children and a dog, and they have a lot of sort of escapades, and it has a very distinctive sort of visual style, sort of sun dackled, sort of countryside hand drawn animation. So our campaign for this railway, and the railway, uh, I should say, goes down to the western country of of England. So for your American listeners, it's where it's Cornwall, Devon.

So it's beautiful, um, seaside sort of holiday locations. And it's the main train line that goes down there. And the famous five books in the UK were, um, the, the family, they used to go to boarding school, the kids, and every holiday they'd go off and have an adventure and stay by the seaside with their auntie and uncle.

So there's a whole brand world that's incredibly evocative around, um, that particular countryside where this. Train goes to, um, and this animated world has been, uh, basis of a campaign we've run for a number of years, but the ad I've chosen it, it said is [00:46:00] called train versus car, and basically it's to encourage people to take the train down to the West country when they go on holidays rather than drive, um, and again, I think it's another example of, you know, you could, uh, do quite a rational sustainability, um, Message on that talking about how it's much more sustainable to travel by train and cars, but it's another example of possibly getting people to do the right thing for the wrong reasons, because it's a it's a wonderful storytelling, again, narrative story, you know, characters setting story, the story of how the four kids and their dogs go down on the trains their holiday, while their auntie and uncle who look after them decide they're going to go by car.

And it's like, who gets there first. And it's a kind of, um, A sort of harem scare and trip with the car. Hilarity ensues. The car gets sort of stuck behind tractors

and fumes belch into them and, uh, anyway, the kids and the dog get their first on there, so they're all having a lovely picnic on the beach by [00:47:00] the time auntie and uncle arrive, uh, with the car, but again, it's, uh, it's another of your kind of.

Don't go down the duty. Um, what was it? Not pleasure as duty. Yeah. So make the train feel appealing. There's no mention of sustainability or anything in there. Um, and just, and it's wonderful system. One storytelling. It's a, if you look at the comments on YouTube, people love this world, it's incredibly evocative to them.

Um, uh, just simple stories, but it's incredibly effective.

MAF: And, you know, as a person that did not have a connection to the books or to the railway, I didn't know it was auntie or uncle or mom or dad, but I didn't know that there was a history of world built, but I did care that the kids got there and, and I was laughing that the adults did not.

And you can feel at the end when they all finally meet on the beach. It always, always ends well, but that's it, but that just proves it taps into the [00:48:00] emotional nature of the connection rather than the rational argument of sustainable

SC: railways. And a lot of these examples I think are really good, you know, if you think, well, what, how else could you have done that, um, you know, you could have used younger people on a factory production line, you could have talked about sustainability message, you could have said vegetables are good for you, but.

They wouldn't have worked. And so, uh, they look very obvious in retrospect, don't they? But I think there's just, um, very smart strategies behind them. It's not necessarily intentionally done with behavioral economics at principles at heart, but that you learn an awful lot about them from when they do work.

RS: I think the other really striking thing, this Differentiate it from so many ads is within a second or two, uh, you immediately recognize it for being GWR has a completely distinctive visual style. Um, you know, if it's a print out, you cover up the logo, people would recognize it straight away. That's a very.

[00:49:00] Rare feature of a campaign, but one that's phenomenally powerful.

SC: And has been built over the years, I suppose, and that's the sort of consistency principle, isn't it? Which again, I think, people have, uh, have actually finally come around to. I remember when Les and I wrote the article about There isn't any such thing as wear out in the book, which was probably, could even have been about nine years ago now.

I mean, that felt really radical then. No one was saying that, but, uh, System One have done huge amounts of work, haven't they, on Coke trucks and LB carrots, and I think everybody now is Realizing the power of consistency, but fresh consistency. I mean, no one's saying show the same ad literally year and year, but keeping your, uh, keeping your, um, things that make you distinctively you in a very intentional way, uh, rather than feeling you need to kind of deliberately kind of be disruptive every year, which, uh, has been a mantra in the past.

And

RS: it certainly fits with, um, experimental [00:50:00] evidence. Classic study going back to the late 60s by a Polish American psychologist called Zion where he recruits people and he does the experiment in three different occasions. So on one occasion. It's a group of Americans don't speak Chinese at all. And he shows them pictures of Chinese characters.

There's this big book, they flip through, they look at these Chinese characters. And the twist in the experiment is sometimes the characters are just shown to them once, sometimes twice, sometimes five times, sometimes 25 times. And then after they flip through the book, they are shown the characters one more time and asked to say what they think the characters mean.

And what he shows is that the more people have been exposed to the characters, the more positive word they attribute to that. Uh, a bit of writing. Now, the key thing is there's no information given about these characters. Uh, so he calls it the mere exposure effect. It's the fact that it's repeated that builds this preference, not extra information being given.

So [00:51:00] he argues familiarity breeds contentment, not contempt. Uh, and I think that is an area that could be applied for far more bright, broadly seeing this consistency and repetition as a positive, not as a, as a, as a negative.

MAF: Yeah, absolutely. The other build on this is that, you know, when we work with brands, they looking for what their distinctive assets could be.

I think they often look to their packaging, to their logo. And what you've done brilliantly here is you've associated this world. And as you say, If you blocked out the logo, you would still know it's a, it's the railway. It's a distinctive asset that you can reuse over and over again to build that association.

So you think as much about the kids and the dogs. As you do about the logo. Yes. To make, to make that world and to make that Yes. Distinctive asset, the distinctive asset reusable over and over again.

SC: Yeah, no, it's a good point. It is very much a brown world, isn't it? There's, it is not just a, it's not, and to animate a train [00:52:00] is quite a brave thing.

I mean, it'd be, you know, you could, or you could imagine a lot of people would actually like to show there. Actual train real life. And, uh, but to, to animate everything is, uh, is brave, but it is distinct. Is it upon rest off of that? It just, the fact that just, it's, it does really stand out. As you say, you've probably seen the posters at stations and things as well.

It is an on trains. They use it. It's, it is a, just a, it's an incredibly distinctive thing. That animated world with that lovely dappled sort of sunlight. It's just very evocative, isn't it? Yeah,

RS: absolutely. I think I love the word evocative because he's evocative of childhood as well. Yeah. The style plus the, uh.

SC: Yes.

RS: Did you say he was Ian O'Brien's famous father? I think it was. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Um, and there he There is some really interesting work from people like Lassalita that suggests if you remind people of childhood, they become less price sensitive.

SC: So that's interesting.

RS: Yeah, I think the argument being, if we think about now, money is very important and you know, has a huge impact on our [00:53:00] lives.

But if you think back to your childhood memories, it's often other attributes of life that loom large. So she's shown that by. Getting people to think back to their childhood, they become less, uh, price sensitive. So I think there might be another benefit, potentially, to creating that part, that past world, that nostalgic world.

Yes, yes.

SC: And interestingly, talking, we're not, we're not talking sustainability, but actually positioning it in a world gone by rather than a kind of future, a future fit world as well. Lots of, uh, yeah, I hadn't thought about that, but I'm sure that that helps hugely as well. That's amazing.

MAF: Sarah, as we come to a close, we ask every guest this question.

Uh, our listeners are always on the lookout for things that are interesting, things that are provocative. Or just things that we all are finding interesting and exciting. Something that you're reading, something that you're watching. It does not have to be related to behavioral science. But is there [00:54:00] something in Sarah Carter's life that you're finding interesting, engaging right now?

SC: Oh my god, I wasn't expecting that, actually. Um, something funny, interesting, expecting.

MAF: Something that's taking your time up that you're enjoying right now

SC: going completely blank. I dunno what I'm gonna say on that. You can take your mo take a moment. We're whole

MAF: people and so we're, and so it's interesting to hear about what other interesting people are interested in.

SC: Anything comes to mind? Well, no, not really, but I mean, only that I, I suppose what I would finish with is just, um, my thing that it, it's a, it's, um. It's an interesting thing that I've said in the past and probably the only thing I've said that just circulates on social media more than anything, which is this idea about the post it note that marketers should have by their desk saying that people really don't give a shit and that consumer indifference is the sort of start point of everything that we, um, that we should do and so [00:55:00] much flows from that if you get that start point right.

And, and, uh, I just think it's such, um, It's such an easy thing to forget for everybody and just, just, you know, everyday things go, crop up that make you think actually that, that really isn't the right start point and the, the things that we've talked about today are, are very much, um, uh, illustrative of that as, as well, I think that you don't need to pump rational messages about people, you, you know, you can get people to do the right things for the wrong reasons, but as long as you start from the point of what really matters to people and look at it

from that side of the telescope rather than our side, then, That's where the magic and the potency and the effectiveness comes from.

And, uh, uh, it's just a timeless lesson. I think that we. I find very easy to forget and it isn't really important that we remind ourselves of.

MAF: This is the statement when you hear people say advertising is a weak force. That is the science or whatever That's the abstract way to say what you're saying.[00:56:00]

SC: Yeah. Yes It's just it just it just look at it from the right end of the telescope really that things that matter a lot to us uh are important to us, um Seem like really big differences to us Uh Don't impute them on to other people. It goes back to what we were saying about how not to plumb, I mean, there's this sort of weird imbalance in our job, isn't there, between the level of interest and, uh, nuance and sort of potency we put on things, compared with people at the other end, who are going about their lives.

If I'm, if my loo's broken, I get you in to mend it. I'm as vested in that as you are, but if I'm making an ad for you, you know, it, it, it's such a little, little thing in your life, that brand and that ad, but it's such a massive thing in my life. And it's, if you lose that sense of that, there's a difference there, then sort of everything goes wrong, really.

So, um,

RS: see that in the. Add to that you've [00:57:00] been talking about the very first one, the Mrs. Brewster ad, if you assume the audience was attentive, well then it might be a sensible decision to replace the six year old character with someone a bit blander, it might be a sensible decision not to show the condoms being bizarrely stretched out.

if you assume the audience is indifferent and not paying attention, suddenly those quirks and unique piece of specificity, they're crucially important. I think that's a lovely. Likes to end.

SC: Specificity is a really important thing. General, I think it's, um, that the idea that there is, there are general, there is general appeal in specificity is something again that people find really hard to get.

You know, and that's the reason you get such a lot of kind of bland, lowest common denomin. You just think, oh, you know, it's only gonna be old people

who can relate to an old person. Yeah. But, but that's not how it works at all. There is, you have to be specific. To get the general kind of [00:58:00] appeal from it, if you come in the other way around and just make it all kind of blandly appealing to everybody, then you lose the character, the setting, the story.

You can't tell, you can't tell stories in general ways. They demand specificity, don't they?

RS: Yeah, I think that's fascinating because you could argue maybe it's a danger of kind of a Byron Sharp approach to the world or a misinterpretation that there is an argument that brands need to target. The whole market.

Yes. But when it comes to the message of the creative that you use, if you try and be that general and that bland, you lose relevance to anyone. Absolutely.

SC: Yeah. So yeah, I think

RS: there's a real

SC: interesting tension. And Hollywood film, you know, they, they get that. I mean, some, you know, Slumdog Millionaire, we don't, we don't live in slums.

We don't, we don't have any, but we all relate to the story that. By chance, you might know the answers to something that could change your life. And so you, you have to have specificity, but yeah, important principle. Beautifully said. We could be here all day chatting, but we, we can't. [00:59:00]

MAF: And maybe we'll, maybe we'll entice you back, Sarah, for another time.

Be for a chat another time. This was lovely. Thank you for joining us today. Thanks for being on the show. Thank you. And until next time, we'll ask those listening, if you found this of use, uh, please, uh, write a comment. Follow us on YouTube. It helps us reach other people like you who would be interested in, uh, the conversations we're having.

And until next time I'm Michael Iron Flicker and I'm

RS: Rich

MAF: Chilton. And you are? Sarah Carlton. Thanks for being with us today. Thank you. Thank you.

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