

# Creatives pull together brands and consumers

Companies are mistaken if they think they can produce engaging content without recourse to a specialist publishing agency, explains *Paul Keers*



**Paul Keers**

**Position** Editorial director

Paul Keers founded Axon Publishing in 1994 with managing director Ellen Brush, bringing editorial and publishing skills together at the top of an independent company.

Their continued partnership has meant that Axon has always presented both creativity and publishing acumen as equal elements in its service provision.

Keers draws on experience as a journalist and editor for magazines and newspapers such as *Cosmopolitan*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Telegraph Magazine*, and as launch editor of *GQ* in the UK, to bring that creativity to bear.

Working with clients that range from retailers such as Marks & Spencer and Conran to universities, charities and membership organisations, Axon has earned respect for its creativity and dedication to meeting client needs, and its consistent quality and success across catalogues and the internet, as well as magazines.

**G**reat creative work and successful customer communications are rarely produced from within corporations. Internal politics, isolation from the creative community and the pressure of corporate concerns inevitably bear down.

Yet some companies, although using external agencies for their advertising and PR, believe they can do without the services of a publishing specialist. In most cases, this turns out to be short-sighted. What creatives do for clients, clients can rarely do for themselves.

Agency creatives work with three parties in mind – the client, the contributors and the customers.

#### Expert service

The client's marketing objectives are paramount. Agency creatives are not characters out of *The Devil Wears Prada*, imposing their ideas on all around them; they are professionals who listen to a client's message and then represent it in a way that will appeal to consumers. Their detachment from the client is crucial here; they are akin to a translator acting between client and customer.

Then there are the contributors. One of the continuing successes of customer publishing is its ability to use leading writers, designers and photographers, many of whom would never work directly for a corporate client in order to retain their editorial integrity. However, when commissioned and briefed by respected editors and creative directors, these contributors produce outstanding and effective work for customer publishers.

Which photographers are up and coming, which designers are in tune with a client's customers, and which writers does this audience respect? Only by being part of the creative community can agencies know the

answer to these questions; inevitably, commercial companies are outsiders.

Perhaps the most important group, however, are the customers. Agency creatives can represent the eyes and ears of customers; they are alert to corporate jargon that means nothing to a customer, to the image that is appropriate to the stockroom but not in the living room. They can detect blatant promotion as acutely as a customer, and edit it to become something digestible. They can speak to customers in their own language.

Some companies erroneously believe their brand to be so strong that customers will loyally read everything about their products and services, regardless of its editorial quality. In the competition for attention, brands no

provide, few of which can successfully be performed by client companies themselves. When it comes to advertising sales, for example, companies are often poor at assessing the true value of their publication in the media marketplace, and clients frequently encounter problems when dealing directly with advertisers, without the third-party involvement of an agency to guide them through this complex process and ensure they are not selling themselves short.

#### Objective and creative

Apart from the unique skills offered by publishing agencies, some of their success is related to the distance they provide. It is akin to the way in which companies can run a successful internal

**'Agency creatives are not characters out of *The Devil Wears Prada*; they are professionals who listen to, and translate, a client's message'**

longer have that kind of grip on today's consumers. Even those organisations with the strongest possible brand loyalty, such as football clubs, have lost readership when the editorial quality of their customer magazines has been poor.

Online, the quality of content can be even more important. In a jungle of user-generated noise, editors can present information in a compelling, and then credible, way.

Customer publishers are experienced in presenting editorial within a 'free' medium, whether that is print or digital, and in engaging an audience that has made no financial commitment to receiving it.

There are a wealth of other services and skills that publishing agencies

press office, dealing with incoming queries, but still needs the objective distance and industry contacts of an external PR agency to place stories in the media.

Nonetheless, the arena of creativity is where publishing agencies have the most to offer their clients.

The bridge that agencies provide between a company and its customers is crucial to the creation of engaging communications.

Companies that bring creative skills in-house may see them wither in the corporate environment, while objectivity, a position within the creative community and the ability to reinterpret corporate messages for customers are skills that remain unique to publishing agencies. ■



**Axon Publishing's clients include Michelin and the British Interior Design Association**

To find out more about Axon, visit [www.axonpublish.com](http://www.axonpublish.com)