

## Dan Germain, Head of Creative, Innocent Drinks

### ***Imagine your organisation dedicated to public engagement ...***

Dan Germain works at a company called Innocent where they make smoothies and other healthy stuff. He's worked at Innocent since the company started and is the Creative Director. He oversees all advertising and creative tasks, from web to books to packaging to advertising. As well as making sure that the Innocent brand grows up to be big and strong he also finds time to draw rubbish pictures for the front of the smoothie labels. His greatest achievement apart from once growing a big beard is helping to create the brand, tone and bad jokes that people have come to associate with Innocent.

In this presentation Dan shared some of the secrets of Innocent's success. He described how an ethos of valuing people and involving customers throughout the organisation has inspired creative campaigns – such as the *Innocent Village Fete*, the *Big Knit*, and *The Innocent AGM* – and led to high levels of enthusiasm and engagement with their brand.

#### A few words about Innocent

I'm Dan

I write books

I write copy

I design packaging

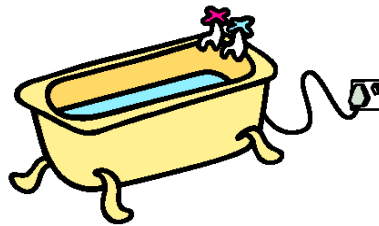
I make adverts

I like the web

I've worked at innocent since 1999

I helped invent the tone

I take a size twelve



#### What's the big idea?

Having an idea for a business is relatively simple, as many of us will know. However, making the idea happen is a different matter: this is the hard bit. Ideas are free and relatively free to have (they can also be rubbish – like an electric bath). The innocent guys had some rubbish ideas before they came up with smoothies.

What's more, other people will tell you your idea is rubbish, too. When innocent talked to people who knew about the food and drink industry, they told them it was daft, they knew nothing about the industry, it was a mad idea and that no one would want to invest in a start-up like that... there are probably around 70 investment companies in London that are kicking themselves now.

### Let the people decide

The moment when innocent came into existence was like this. Because the story is so famous now, you might have heard that it happened at Glastonbury, or V or somewhere like that. But I was there and this is how it actually happened.



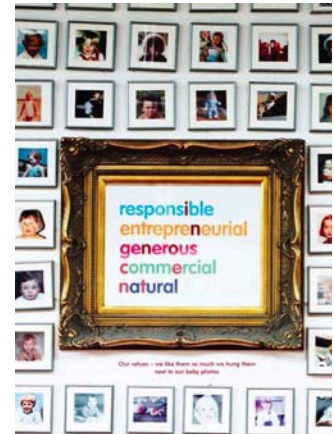
*“We decided that we should let the people decide whether our idea and product was any good.*

*“We went to a small jazz festival in west London (at Parsons Green) with a load of our sample products and put up a sign saying “do you think we should give up our day jobs?” We asked people to put empty bottles in either the yes or no bin and spent the weekend inviting people to come up and try it. The product wasn’t even called Innocent at that point. By the end of the weekend the people in this part of London had voted yes. (There were only two bottles in the no bin.). That’s the moment at which Innocent started and we handed in our resignation letters on the following Monday morning.”*

### Know what you care about

These are the values that Innocent holds dear and will always hold dear.

Innocent stayed away from having values for quite a while, but chose these [pictured right] because you can make the word “innocent” out of them, and they matched up with what we believe in. Innocent needed to do this because it grew so quickly, it needed something in the workspace to remind people what it was all about.



### The main thing

Knowing what you're about and never forgetting it is one of the defining characteristics of successful, customer led organisations.

For example, the basket making company, Longaberger of Ohio, could not make a stronger statement or have a more visible reminder of what it is that they do. They can never forget it! As an organisation which has been driven by the customer, this is the ultimate statement. The extraordinary thing about it is that the person at the top chose this way of showing what they're about. Ninety nine per cent of the top people in other organisations would have been scared to be so bold.



Not the main thing

Too often, though, businesses end up forgetting what they set out to do. When the people running the business stop following their instinct and stop being open to the people who make the business for them, then the wrong choices are made, as you can see here.



Not enough people at the top of businesses follow their gut instincts and just push on with doing the thing that they know is right.

Listen up, open up

The Innocent banana phone was the first manifestation of remaining an organisation that listens. This was the only phone in the office when Innocent started out.

Because this was the only phone, it could as easily be a buyer from a large supermarket, or one of our mums asking if we were going to be home for tea. Innocent still has this phone in the office. But that way, the team got to have conversations with everybody in their world. No matter who is calling, their call came through to that number.

Be willing to listen and take on new ideas

There is an open invitation for people to come to Fruit Towers, Innocent's headquarters, on the side of the packaging. If anybody drops in, they get to meet everyone, have a tour round and get a little drink. The buildings remain unchanged from the start-up office. The first thing you see is a wall full of stuff that people have sent. How many people have bought products from a shop or a supermarket and then sent a tapestry to that business? People send Innocent all sorts of stuff and it all goes on the wall. When we walk through the door, we remember who the boss is: the people who buy our drinks. This is a good place to come and think if you're trying to have ideas.

After a couple of years, Innocent started doing a festival in Regents Park. It was called Fruit Stock. It started off small; it was not heavily promoted, but it was free. After four years, there were 160,000 people turning up at which point the police asked for it to stop. All Innocent did to promote the event was put it on the packages, the website and use their growing e-mail database. Then they waited to see if people would turn up. The innocent team all wore T-shirts inviting people to chat to them, so they spent the weekend walking around and hearing what people thought about all sorts of interesting things, not necessarily to do with their drinks.

### You don't have to be corporate when you become successful

Innocent now organises its conversations in a more concentrated and structured way than it did years ago. The company has to have a formal AGM or A Grown-up Meeting, with lots of financial results. This could have ended up being rather boring and corporate. However, the team came up with an idea.

They used to send out a weekly e-mail to about a dozen people who originally signed up for it. As this continued over the years, Innocent now has a weekly newsletter list of about 150,000 people. Innocent decided to run a lottery so that about 150 people from this list can come and attend the AGM, which is also combined with fun things like trying out potential new products, mixing drinks and so on. Innocent also finds that it is very good for them to invite people to come and talk to them directly once a year, asking why they are not doing this and that. It keeps the team moving forward. Dan believes that asking people what they want has been a defining part of what innocent has achieved, and it seems to work well for them.

### Keep connecting with people and sharing ideas

Innocent has learned a lot on the way; for example, packaging. The team knew there were some legal requirements (ingredients, nutrition) but when researching other packaging, they saw lots of information and statements that was not necessary or informative. They couldn't see that this was of very much interest or use to people, so instead they filled it up with other things.



The team cleared off the stuff that they didn't understand, left the stuff that has to be legally there, and then there was a big wide open space. They started doing drawings, sketches, writing – anything interesting. They also realised that in life and in the world, there is much more in people's lives than fruit juice.



## Be interesting

Making your business or your enterprise or your movement just a bit more interesting than other people's is also important.

There is no reason why people should be so drawn to Moleskine books, except that they look nicer and that fold-out in the back gives you a story. Who wouldn't you want a book like Picasso or Hemingway used? It just makes it friendlier, more desirable.

### The history of a legendary notebook

Moleskine is the legendary notebook, used by European artists and thinkers for the past two centuries, from Van Gogh to Picasso, from Ernest Hemingway to Bruce Chatwin. This trusty, pocket-size travel companion held sketches, notes, stories and ideas before they were turned into famous images or pages of beloved books.

Being interesting can also be about free, or cheap stuff. Howies, a clothing company in Wales, started putting a thought for the day on their website. They just kept things interesting, so that you knew a little bit more about their business than you normally would.

### From small acorns

One of our favourite things at innocent that originally started small is our Big Knit campaign, where we put little woolly hats on our bottles to raise money for charity. This was the brainchild of a man called New Adam (when he joined we already had an Adam, so he was christened New Adam). He came up with the idea of putting hats on our bottles and for each one sold we would donate 50p to Age Concern to help keep older people warm during the winter months (20,000 older people die each winter in the UK because they can't keep warm, and New Adam wanted to do something about that). New Adam's pitch involved getting volunteers to knit the hats by hand. We thought he was nuts. Who would knit them? Where? How will they get onto the bottles? There was no way it would work.

In this case, there was nothing better than being proved wrong. In the first year New Adam got over 3000 hats knitted by grannies up and down the country. By year two this increased to 20,000, then 80,000, and in 2008, with Sainsbury's helping out and asking their staff and customers to help knit, over 500,000 little woolly hats were knitted, by people from the age of 7 to 97, from our mums to Paul Smith, raising over £250,000 for Age Concern. A beautiful example of what you can achieve if you're prepared to start small.



Ultimately, it is about talking to people. The worst thing for Innocent would be to get too grown-up and stop chatting with the people who buy drinks. It would be disastrous if Innocent thought that it was so big it knew it all and could move to getting feedback to one single focus group sitting behind a single way mirror, instead of going with intuition and what people say.

On Monday morning at nine o'clock, every person in the building has to go to the weekly meeting. At the end, there's always a small exercise; every person stands up and talks for a minute about what they're doing, so the business knows what everyone is doing for the week. If it goes on too long, a big hooter sounds. It gives everyone a good start, instead of them creeping in at 10 o'clock and moaning until lunchtime. Innocent finds any occasion to eat cake and gather together in their big communal space to natter about stuff. If we do that internally, it will be mirrored in the engagement with people outside.

### Keep sharing, keep talking

The great thing now is that there are so many ways to do this and they're all free. None of this technology existed 10 years ago when Innocent started, with a very slow dial-up internet connection on one computer.

Now Innocent exists in all sorts of virtual places and they are just great fun to be in. These are the places where you are going to learn the most from your customer or your audience. Innocent started a Twitter feed about a year ago and it was the most boring thing ever; we got into real trouble with our customers, who told us they didn't want to hear about the budget and product launches; they wanted to know when people at Innocent had done interesting stuff. You will find that all of the information that Innocent puts up on Twitter and the website is nothing to do with the business. Conversation is free.

### Listen up, open up

Everyone will tell you that your idea is rubbish, but if you don't try, you'll never know.

You can never know where the next great piece of advice is going to come from, or the next project that is going to work.

June 30, 2009

#### **all white now**

Last Monday, we promised to update you on the **whiteness of Andrew's new shoes** after a week of him wearing them in.

