

Q&A: Debby de Ridder

Chief Editor, Happiness Brussels

10 answers to 10 questions that let us peer into the mind of one of the world's leading creative directors.



Everything about Debby is contrary. Most advertising creative directors like to look moody and serious in their portrait photos. Not Debby. And, in an era when ‘creatives’ have taken over advertising, she isn’t just a copywriter, she is a copywriter who specialises in long copy.

Is this sensible?

As she puts it herself, “The more you tell, the more you sell.”

Or, as the late, great Howard Gossage wrote, “People will read what interests them and occasionally that may even be an advertisement.”

You’re a Head of Copy/Chief Editor/Creative Director with all the pressure that the job entails. Do you have a side-hustle? What do you do as a counterbalance the demands of your workplace?

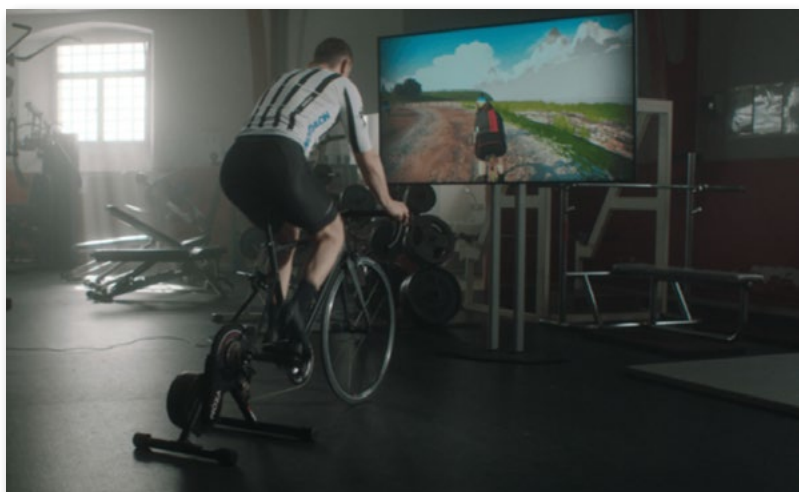
I cook, eat and (try to) read. But I’m also finishing my studies as a radio and podcast host. It started out as a hobby but in ‘The Breakaway’ project for Decathlon, I used my acquired skills to make a documentary podcast with the inmates who took part in the project.

If you hadn’t ended up in advertising, what would you be doing instead?

If you’d asked me this question 10 years ago, I’d have answered: “I would have my own breakfast and coffee bar.” But I really did that, 7 years ago. And I failed. Most difficult job I ever had. If you ask me today, maybe I would be an interpreter. Or a librarian.

In your career, what one piece of personal work are you most proud of?

‘The Breakaway’. Not because it is one of the most awarded Belgian campaigns ever but because it is a project: a start of a real change made in Belgian society.



‘The Breakaway’ was an eCycling team for prisoners, who were able to ride and race with people from the outside world, enabling them to feel a part of the society they would be returning to one day. A podcast followed the prisoners as they set out to race a team of prison guards and Police officers, recording the impact of sport on their lives.

What work has your agency/team produced you're particularly proud of?

From my time at BBDO, I'm proud of all the work we did for Lidl, the discount supermarket. When they became a client, they did not have a "face", a brand personality. BBDO gave them just that. With great results, because year after year Lidl gains more market share.

At Happiness, I admire the 'ReStory' project the agency did for Canon, where Canon restored photos that got destroyed by sudden floods in the south of Belgium. Photos have great sentimental value, and even more so when they are the only thing you've got left.



Floods devastated Belgium in 2021. 220,000 homes were destroyed. People lost everything. Canon tried to help those affected keep their memories with a free service that restored their water-damaged photos.

What recent work have you seen from another agency (or agencies) that you would really like to see entered into The Caples? And why?

#RaiseYourArches, the new McDonalds campaign. It's funny, catchy and bold: the ad campaign does not show any branding for the restaurant or its food. I love advertising with a purpose. But the last few years, if you don't cry with an ad, it's no good. Can we get some humour and fun back, please?



Are awards important?

They are, because it's a way to focus on and thank the whole team who supported your campaign. And let's not forget it's a way to get noticed in the advertising world. And to get a pay rise, ha-ha.

What does it mean to you to be a juror of The Caples Awards in 2023?

Love it, love it, love it. Ready to be blown away by creativity, and very flattered you asked me. For me it's also a reward for working my b*tt of all those years.

The Caples is free to enter. Is this brave. Or very, very stupid?

Creativity is not always linked to large budgets. Sometimes it is, but when it's done on a small budget, it shows even more dedication. And The Caples give those smaller budgets a voice too.

If you could have five creative luminaries sitting around your kitchen table, having a drink and a chat, who would they be? What do you think you'd talk about?

I'm too easily intimidated by luminaries. So, I'd prefer to drink coffee with five students who have new, ground-breaking ideas for the future of advertising. I'll just shut up and listen, if that's ok?

Impossible question. But what is your one all-time favourite piece of advertising, the idea you most wish you'd done yourself?

I'm a copywriter, so I have this thing with words. I love great copy ads, like the [Impossible View](#) campaign for Volkswagen. The most recent work I shared on LinkedIn was ['A British Original'](#) for British Airways. 500 unique print, digital and outdoor executions: try to emulate that one.

