

# Q&A: Luke Ashton

Senior Copywriter, VCCP London.  
Caples Awards 2024 juror.

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



In 1998 Luke helped bring down a bank.

Realising that high finance was probably not for him, he became a travel writer and spent two years wandering around Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and India describing his experiences for Gullivers Travels.

Returning to the UK, he finally found his calling as a copywriter.

## **You're a top creative director. Do you have a side-hustle? What do you do as a counterbalance to the pressures of your workplace?**

I write promos for Japanese gameshows as a side hustle. My favourite show is a giant boxing glove that flies towards the contestant as they try and answer general knowledge questions before it punches them into a pool of icy water. And I play the guitar to relax. But my real side-hustle is my daughter. She's 5 and we regularly fly by fairydust to places beyond even a Brazilian creative's imagination. Looking after her is a counterbalance to the pressures of the workplace - as it's way more stressful...

## **If you hadn't ended up in advertising, what would you be doing instead?**

Probably a really bad Hedge Fund manager. My first job was managing funds at Barings Bank until my colleague Nick Leeson crashed the whole shebang, two weeks into my job. The fact I kept doing foreign exchanges the wrong way round (who knew?) and losing thousands of pounds may have contributed to the Queen's bank going under, although Nick took all the credit.

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

One of the first pieces of work I ever did. It was for the Medical Protection Society, a mutual financial organisation run by doctors for doctors that covers GPs, surgeons etc if someone makes a claim against them. They were under threat by the big American insurance companies who seemed cheaper in the short-term but were more expensive in the long-term. I read everything I could get my hands on (these were the days when you had weeks not hours on a brief) and found out that in the terms and conditions they were under a legal obligation to tell doctors if another organisation could provide better cover. So we made that the headline. "We have to tell you if you can get better value cover elsewhere. You can't. So we won't". The MPS is still going strong today.

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

I've not been involved in any way – but I think VCCP's 'There's a glass and half in everyone' positioning for Cadbury is an even bigger thought than a drumming gorilla and it captures the original generous heart of the brand right back to John Cadbury.

I also like 'Walk to the Well' that raises awareness of water poverty: a 9km Twitter thread that people have to scroll down for hours to dramatise just how far people have to walk to get water in Kenya.



See the case study video [HERE](#)

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

Volkswagen's 'The Blind Spot' from Ogilvy South Africa. It uses the blackest of black paints to hide the hazard in a black blind spot and it gave me the same that heart in the mouth feeling you get in London when a bike seemingly comes of nowhere on the drive to the tip.

Can you identify any trends which you and your fellow judges should look out for at The Caples 2024? GenAI, perhaps, or new developments in influencer marketing, etc?

AI is obviously the shiniest new Buzz Lightyear in our toy box, so I expect to see some great uses of it but I'd also like to see a trend towards making persuasive entertainment that leads, rather than just follows Tik Tok trends.

**Are awards important?**

Yes, we can all kid ourselves that we're making great work with clients but it takes a cold-eyed (and warm-hearted) jury to really define the I-wish-I'd-done-thats.

**What does it mean to you to be a juror of The Caples Awards in 2024?**

It's a privilege. The Caples is run by creatives for creatives and it's always put extra emphasis on how much an idea gets a measured response from people. For me, that's still the acid test.

**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?**

Well I know David Harris makes a stellar woodfired pizza from scratch and Patrick Collister has excellent taste in wine, so they'd be on the list!

But also:

Creative Director Nils Leonard, founder of Uncommon Studios, for his smarts, salesmanship and craft. Photographer Fiona Adams (known as the female David Bailey, she did the Beatles Twist and Shout album cover). She was an old family friend who passed away recently. I grew up next door to her and she always inspired me creatively, as she smashed glass ceilings.

Writer Douglas Adams. Listening to The HitchHiker's Guide to the Galaxy on the radio as a kid made me realise that writing could take you anywhere. And his still does.

Designer Thomas Heatherwick. If we think it's hard getting a 6-second film for Facebook made, then imagine how hard it is to make a cathedral of seeds.

John Webster. I moved into his office at DDB just after he passed away but that's as close as I got to the great man. He always put the punter first and it led to the kind of work that led the chat down the pub and not just in adland.



*Nils, Fiona, Douglas, Thomas and John.*

It would also be great if David Abbott could pop round too!

(I take these fantasy dinner party questions pretty seriously. During the last one I held in my head, Salvador Dali headbutted Elon Musk and Stephen Fry had to sit on Dali until the police arrived.)

We'd probably all talk about AI but I'd like to think we'd also talk about how human creativity can still blow the bloody doors off.

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

There's so many. Could probably change every day. So today, I'll say 'Ronseal. Does exactly what it says on the tin' because it became part of our language and is probably still generating gazillions of pounds in unpaid media even as I write this.

