

# REFLEC TIONS

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FEAR IS THE  
MIND KILLER!

RED LIGHT  
UNICYCLE

The Wins  
Available To  
Brands That  
Create With  
No Fear Of  
The Truth





**Most brands fear the truth like vampires fear the sun. They scuttle in shadows, hiding behind soft-focus commercials, abstract taglines, and glossy campaigns that polish reality into something no one recognizes.**

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And yet, beneath all this lacquered fakery lies a simple, untapped opportunity: tell the truth. Not the market-tested, watered-down “authenticity” brands like to crow about in pitch decks, but the raw, unvarnished truth of who they are, what they stand for, and why they exist. Brands that dare to create with no fear of the truth can build something far stronger, far stranger, and far more enduring than the safe mediocrity most produce.

**People aren't stupid. They're simply exhausted by the charade. And that exhaustion creates a wide-open space for the rare brand brave enough to shrug off fear and speak plainly.**

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Consumers already know the truth. They live it. They feel the broken promises every time a product doesn't quite do what the label implies. They sense the hypocrisy when a brand trumpets sustainability but stuffs its products in three layers of plastic. They hear the hollow ring of "community" when all a company really wants is more data points for its CRM.

Creating without fear of the truth means admitting imperfection. It means acknowledging limitations instead of pretending to be flawless. Imagine the power of a clothing brand that says, "Our jeans won't save the world, but they'll last longer than most, and that's one small step toward less waste." That statement carries more weight than a thousand slogans about "sustainability journeys" or "reimagining fashion for a better future." The former is honest, concrete, and relatable; the latter is a hall pass to nowhere. When brands put down the megaphone of aspiration and pick up the microphone of truth, people lean in. They recognize themselves in it.

# **Of course, truth in branding doesn't mean confessionals about every failure. This isn't about bleeding all over the consumer.**

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It's about daring to build from a foundation that isn't wrapped in fear. Fear of competitors. Fear of shareholder reactions. Fear of customers abandoning ship. Fear is what drives the endless over-promising, the plastic positioning, the desperate hope that a campaign can paper over the cracks. But fear corrodes. It reduces brands to shadows of themselves, never quite willing to stake a claim in reality.

Brands that fear no truth, on the other hand, become cultural forces. They give people permission to see the world differently. Take Liquid Death. While bottled water companies try to cloak themselves in purity and mountain streams, Liquid Death has built an empire on the bluntest of truths: it's just water in a can. But they've gone further, saying out loud what the industry won't: bottled water is boring, so why not make it fun?

They use humor, heavy metal aesthetics, and over-the-top campaigns to "murder your thirst" - and in doing so, they've exposed the tired pretenses of the category. No pretending to be mystical spring guardians. Just a wink and a can. Their truth is irreverence, and it works.

**Or look at IKEA. In a furniture industry drenched in images of glossy perfection and impossible luxury, IKEA leaned into the awkward, truthful reality of everyday life: cheap flat-pack furniture, meatballs, and a Saturday spent arguing with an Allen key.**

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Their marketing has celebrated clutter, cramped apartments, and the democratic truth that most of us can't afford designer chairs, nor do we need them. They admit the imperfections of their products (you'll need to build it yourself, and yes, sometimes it wobbles), but frame those flaws as a feature of accessible living. And people love them for it. By telling the truth about how most of us really live, IKEA turned furniture into culture, not just product.

# **The opportunity for brands today is even bigger. Everyone carries a camera, has a platform, and a voice.**

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Lies are exposed at the speed of a screenshot. Contradictions are surfaced with a single tweet. Greenwashing, virtue signaling, performative activism; all of it gets torn apart before the campaign deck even finishes uploading to LinkedIn. Fearful brands see this as terror. Fearless brands see it as freedom. If you tell the truth, you have nothing to fear. If you're honest about what you can and cannot do, then the mob has no rope to hang you with. The work speaks for itself.

This is the paradox: truth is both risk and shield. It makes you vulnerable, but it also makes you undeniable. When the noise of the marketplace is deafening, truth cuts through like a bell. It doesn't need to shout. It doesn't need to posture. It resonates. People recognize themselves in it, and recognition is the first step toward trust. Not trust in the sense of "brand loyalty metrics," but trust in the sense of human connection: I believe you because you dared to say what others won't.

The scathing part of all this is that the opportunity is obvious, and yet almost no one takes it. Instead, brands keep chasing relevance like hamsters on a wheel. They co-opt trends, slap their logos on causes they barely understand, and commission ads that look like every other ad. They write value statements that sound as if they were spit out by a corporate jargon generator. They avoid truth because they confuse safety with success. And in doing so, they guarantee irrelevance. Safe brands fade. Fearless brands endure.

# What might it look like for more brands to create without fear of the truth?

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It might look like a soda company admitting that, yes, sugar is addictive, but at least their version is made without the chemicals of their competitors. It might look like a sneaker brand acknowledging that global supply chains are messy, but being transparent about where they fall short and where they're improving. It might look like a tech platform admitting that screen time is a problem, but that they're working to help users manage it instead of pretending endless scrolling is a gift. In every case, truth doesn't weaken the brand, it strengthens it. Because it tells people, "We see the world as it is, not as we wish you'd believe it is."

And what's more, you don't need a battalion of consultants to conjure up fake values. You don't need to manufacture elaborate stories that don't add up. You don't need to spin, deflect, and crisis-manage every time reality intrudes. All you need to do is look at the facts - your product, your impact, your role in the world - and tell them straight. That simplicity is its own competitive advantage. While others spend fortunes maintaining illusions, the fearless brand invests in reality.

**None of this is easy, of course.  
Truth will piss people off. It will unsettle  
shareholders, disrupt boardrooms,  
and make competitors seethe.**

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But that's the point. If you're not willing to risk discomfort, you're not really building anything. You're just wallpapering over the cracks, hoping no one notices the rot beneath. Fear of truth is fear of living. Fearless creation, by contrast, is a declaration: we're here, this is who we are, and we're not hiding. That kind of clarity is rare, but when it shows up, it's unforgettable.

So the opportunity is waiting. In fact, it's been waiting all along, ignored by the majority and seized by a courageous few. Brands that fear no truth don't just sell products; they shape culture. They don't just make ads; they make meaning. They don't just earn profits; they earn trust, respect, and sometimes even love. And in a marketplace glutted with noise, that is priceless.

The question isn't whether the opportunity exists. It does. The question is: who will have the guts to take it?





## Gordon Gerard McLean

So I'm the one behind the mystery moniker. Here's a bit about me. Originally from Dublin, I've spent 25+ years as a brand strategist in a variety of creative companies; from Sheffield to London, Istanbul, New York, and Cupertino, CA.

I'm fortunate to have helped launch, build and reinvent some of the world's best brands; including Apple, Bacardi, Bank of Scotland, Bing, Bombay Sapphire, EA Games, GE, Gillette, Grey Goose, Guinness, Halifax, Hilton, Holiday Inn Express, HSBC, Perfect Day, Radisson, Sandy Hook Promise, SAP, ServiceNow, Vodafone, Wells Fargo, and Yerba Madre.

I've also been lucky enough to lead a body of work that's been recognized for its commercial impact by the IPA and Effies, for its strategic thinking by the Jay Chiats and ARF, for its cultural impact by the MoMA, Emmys and TED, and for its creative excellence by The Clios, One Show, Cannes Lions, D&AD, and others.

Now based in LA, I fly solo under my nom de strat, Fear No Truth, helping agency, start-up, and marketing leaders, wherever they are, to find, tell and manage their brands' true stories.

Let's LinkedIn.



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Fear No Truth is an independent strategy practice, based in LA, that helps agency, start-up, and marketing leaders everywhere to find, tell and manage their brands' true stories.

