

# REFLEC TIONS

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Embrace  
Indifference &  
The Truth That  
So Much Of What  
We Do Is Too  
Often Tuned Out



# **Most of what brands make never gets seen, remembered, or cared about. That's not cynicism. That's the truth.**

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Decades of marketing effectiveness studies, eye-tracking research, and hard sales data all say the same thing: the vast majority of ads are tuned out; skimmed past, scrolled over, muted, skipped, or simply ignored. The world is noisy, attention is scarce, and most brands' output is as noticeable as a tear in an ocean.

Yet the industry still acts like every single post, banner, or thirty-second spot is being consumed with rapt attention, dissected for nuance, and fondly recalled. It's a flattering fiction we tell ourselves so we can keep cranking out work that's safe, predictable, and invisible. We make what the brief asks for, tick the boxes, ship it, and hope for the best, knowing deep down that, outside of our carefully curated case studies, hardly anyone will notice.

This is the grand lie of marketing: pretending attention is a given, when in reality, it's a prize that must be fought for.

**Consumers don't wake up eager to engage with brands. They're not scrolling Instagram to find your latest launch film or turning on TV to watch your thirty seconds of branded wisdom.**

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They're living their lives; dealing with work, kids, money, dinner, boredom, bad news, good news, and everything else in the human experience. Your ad is, at best, background noise.

Most brand content fails because it doesn't earn its right to be noticed. It's wallpaper. Safe enough not to offend, bland enough not to engage. Worse still, much of it is indistinguishable from the competition; identikit templates in different brand colors, repeating the same promises with slightly different synonyms.

Consumers have learned to filter this out like static. They're not consciously rejecting you; they're not even aware you're there.

# **Here's the opportunity: once you truly accept that most of what you make will be tuned out, you can start asking the better question; what exactly do we need to do to cut through?**

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Instead of pretending every piece of output is precious, you begin to design for impact, not just completion. You stop chasing approval from internal stakeholders as your main metric of success and start measuring creative work by its ability to pierce the fog of indifference. You stop thinking “what can we get away with?” and start thinking “what will they stop for?”

Ironically, this acceptance is liberating. If 90% of marketing vanishes into the void, then you have permission - in fact the obligation - to make the 10% that doesn't really count.

Cutting through isn't about yelling louder or spending more. It's about making something that rewards the attention it's asking for.

The best brands have already figured this out. They don't try to win every second; they try to win the seconds that matter. They make fewer, better things. They value ideas that might get noticed over ideas that are easy to approve.

**The tragedy is that most brands still opt for safety. Committees sand down sharp edges. Legal takes the teeth out. Someone insists on adding the tagline just in case. The work becomes a beige compromise; technically fine, strategically sound, but utterly ignorable.**

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In this environment, “tune out” isn’t just a consumer behavior, it’s an outcome baked in from day one. If you produce something with no risk, you’re guaranteed no reward.

And doing something that genuinely cuts through doesn’t just risk being ignored, it risks being noticed for the wrong reasons. It risks pushback, misunderstanding, or even backlash. Which is why so few brands do it. The ones that do are the ones we talk about years later.

**Once you stop assuming  
people are paying attention,  
you stop wasting time on the kind  
of work that only works in fantasy.  
You start building for reality.**

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You brief differently. You ask, “What will make someone stop scrolling for this?” You give creatives permission to swing harder. You protect bold ideas in the approval process instead of diluting them to nothing. You accept that not everyone will like it, and that’s the point.

You also recognize that cutting through isn’t always about more. Sometimes it’s about showing up in fewer, smarter places. Sometimes it’s about making something so good that people choose to share it for you. Sometimes it’s about breaking your own format, your own style, or your own category rules so that people actually see you.

**The truth, that most of what brands make is ignored, isn't depressing. It's clarifying. It strips away the polite delusion and forces you to reckon with the real stakes.**

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It's not about whether your ad "works" in a test group or makes the marketing director happy; it's about whether it survives the brutal Darwinism of the attention economy.

If your work can't even get noticed, it can't change minds, build memory, or drive behavior. It can't do anything. Attention is the gatekeeper to every other marketing objective. So stop treating it like a given and start treating it like the scarce resource it is.

# **The brands that thrive in the next decade will be the ones that stop making content to fill calendars, and start making ideas to fill minds.**

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They will measure success not in impressions bought, but in impressions earned. They will embrace risk not because it's fashionable but because it's the only way to matter.

They'll look at a cluttered, noisy, distracted world and think: Most of what's out there will be ignored. So ours won't be.

And then they'll do what it takes to make that true.

Because here's the final, inconvenient truth: cutting through is hard. It takes taste, courage, discipline, and persistence. It's easier to accept tune-out as inevitable and keep feeding the machine with safe, invisible work.

But easier never built a brand anyone ever cared about.





## 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.



FEAR  
NO  
TRUTH

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.

