

Doing the Cannes can pay off

The Cannes Lions are the Oscars of the advertising industry – and this year, the Irish will be there in force, writes Colette Sexton

Last year, just seven people from Ireland went to the Cannes Lions advertising awards. This year, more than 60 Irish delegates, from a range of ad agencies and post production houses, along with media owners and clients, will join a 10,000-strong crowd at one of the biggest events in the yearly advertising and marketing calendar.

Beginning today and running until Saturday, the Cannes Lions is more than just an awards ceremony, it's a festival. Past speakers include Bill Clinton and this year, TV chef Jamie Oliver, Yahoo chief executive Marissa Mayer and Snapchat founder Evan Spiegel will take to the stage.

Stephen Quinn, managing director at creative agency Atomic, will be there for the first time. He said that Irish creatives and agencies were very interested in the Kinsale Sharks, ICADs and AdFX awards, but were "preaching to themselves" at such local events.

"A lot of Irish accounts have moved either their marketing functions to Britain or their agencies to Britain, which is a problem for quite a small country. You get all the agencies fighting for the same sort of clients. Somebody will win, but because somebody wins, somebody loses. We're not growing the market, we're cannibalising the market between ourselves. It's not a good way to process and grow

the industry by taking work off each other all the time," he said.

Quinn, who is attending Cannes in his capacity as a board member of the Institute of Advertising Practitioners in Ireland (IAPI), reckons the Irish creative industry has to start competing for international accounts and awards.

"There's no way we can compete on an international stage, at this point, as a creative industry collectively. We're not taken seriously, or we're not even on the radar," he said.

He said that his trip to Cannes would be focused on what the international community is talking about, as well as finding out the best way to enter the awards and then sharing that information with creative directors in Ireland when he returns.

IAPI will host a meeting after Cannes with all of the creative directors to discuss what was learned there. There will be another meeting in the autumn with agencies to brief them on how best to prepare entries for Cannes.

"Dublin is a technology hub – why can't Dublin be a creative hub?" he said.

Andy Pierce, group strategy director at Core Media, will also be attending the festival for the first time, and will be the first person to represent Ireland's largest media buying agency at the event.

"We took a decision this year as a business, if we want to have more of a global focus on what we do – raise our own game, increase the effi-



Stephen Quinn, managing director, Atomic, and IAPI board member
Picture: Feargal Ward



Richard Carr, managing director of Dublin ad agency Rothco; right: Sharon Walsh, marketing director of Heineken Ireland; inset: Andy Pierce of Core Media

cacy of our advertising – then we decided we should start paying a lot more attention to what's happening at a global scale. It's been a bit remiss of us in the past," he said.

During the recession, Ireland was seen as an extension of Britain and Europe, according to Pierce.

"We've always maintained that we're able to connect

with Irish consumers in a more effective way than British brands. We've always maintained that the quality of the work we do is global standard, but I wonder whether, as an industry, we've always practised what we've preached," he said.

Pierce said that raising the standard of Irish work to a global scale had been a

major aim of IAPI, and that this was one of the reasons Irish agencies were upping their game in relation to Cannes. Global groups were also putting pressure on their Irish arms to enter more global awards.

"There's a lot to be said for Ireland being more visible at Cannes. You see markets smaller than ourselves winning awards because they've taken an interest," he said.

Tania Banotti, chief executive of IAPI, said that the organisation spent a lot of time promoting Cannes this year and encouraging Irish delegates to go.

"Cannes is important because it celebrates the best advertising in the world. Advertising that is not only really engaging, but also some of the most successful in the world."

Banotti added that the goal was to start building a reputation for Ireland at Cannes which will spread internationally. The Irish delegation

stands to learn what categories it is most likely to do well in, so it can be "a bit cannier and more strategic".

"We won't win overnight, but with this number of people going, I think they'll go back all fired up, saying there's no reason why they can't do this ambitious work," she said.

"Once you've won a Cannes Lion, promotions, bonuses and new jobs are generally what's offered. It's considered the pinnacle to win a Cannes Gold Lion."

Richard Carr, managing director of Dublin-based ad agency Rothco, agreed that Cannes was "certainly the ultimate endorsement of creativity".

This will be Rothco's fourth time attending Cannes Lions, but it will be the agency's first time speaking Rothco will take to the stage on Wednesday at 1.30pm, just after Kim Kardashian. Its speech will discuss "blood, sex and storytelling", and how it can learn to create and interview with an audience using Shakespearean techniques and those of stand-up comedians.

Carr said that, globally, Cannes was now a big draw for clients. He said that in the last few years clients such as Unilever, Heineken, and Coca-Cola had begun attending of their own accord and not necessarily waiting for an invite from an agency.

He said that large international clients looked out for agencies which were doing very different work, and that the best way to highlight that work was through Cannes.

"From the organisers' point of view, getting the clients there is the key thing, because if you get the clients there, ultimately they buy into why creativity is so important," he said.

One-third of Rothco's

business comes from international work, such as Heineken, Taskrabbit and Unilever.

Heineken will be recognised as creative marketer of the year at Cannes this year, only the second company to win the award twice. Its brands in other countries have also been shortlisted for awards, including Heineken Ireland's work with Rothco.

Sharon Walsh, marketing director at Heineken Ireland, said people who were going to Cannes needed to be selective about what they went to see, adding that the real inspiration could come from the smaller workshops.

"It recognises creativity at the highest level and that's something that inspires us. It's a big competitive advantage to your business," she said. "Cannes can be a great way to reward, inspire and learn."

After Cannes every year, Heineken Ireland goes through the winning work to learn from it. "That's the beauty that Cannes can give, it's not only about being there," Walsh said.

FleishmanHillard Ireland won a bronze Cannes Lion for a P&G campaign in 2013. Rhona Blake, managing director of the PR agency, said that the award set FleishmanHillard apart from the competition.

"We have definitely won a lot of additional business because we won at Cannes. That would definitely be something that clients would note, especially larger clients," she said.

Blake said that the Cannes Lions were an important event for PR companies now, as well as for the advertising industry.

"It is a festival of creativity, and it's a really important opportunity for people in the creative area to see what's happening and get great ideas," she said.

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