

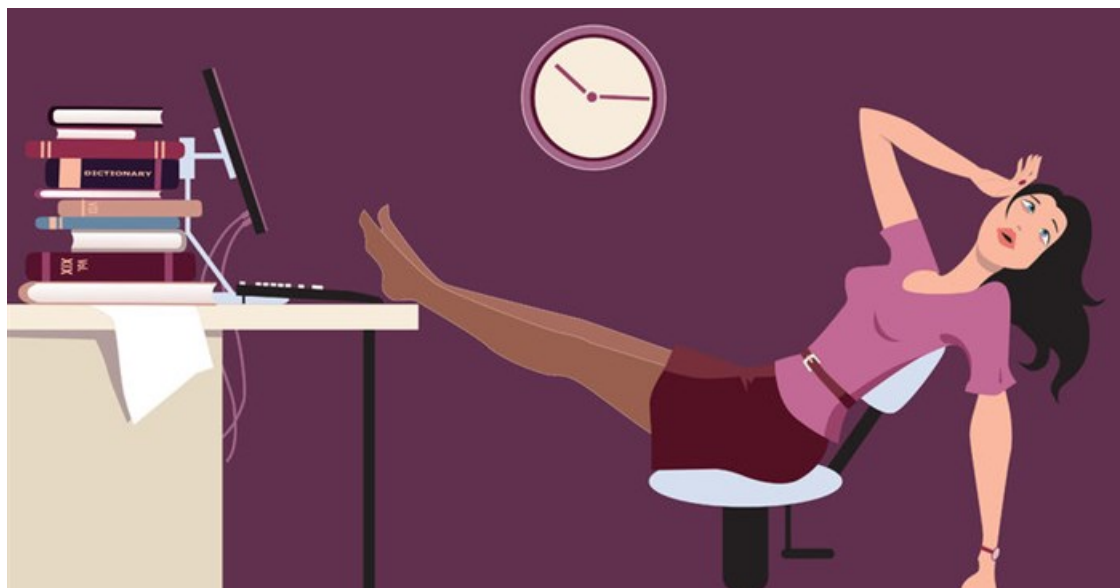
# And now a strange graph from a creative. Merry Xmas

By  Damon Stapleton

30 Dec 2015

*"The truth is rarely pure and never simple." Oscar Wilde*

It is almost the end of what for many in our business has been a tough year. In the last month I have read countless blogs about the death of advertising. It has become fashionable to write about this. There is the talk of technology and how the business is changing. I have read the sentence advertising is facing its Kodak moment in at least six articles.



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Added to this, I have had creatives from different parts of the world writing to my blog asking for advice on their career. They ask me if there is a future in advertising. Could they use their talents in another industry. They all tell me they are understaffed and had one in particular telling me he had worked Saturday and Sunday of every weekend for six months. I think we can agree no matter how masochistic you are this is not enjoyable or normal.

It was because of all of these swirling opinions, I started to wonder what the truth was. Is our business shrinking? Is it disappearing? Was there any evidence?

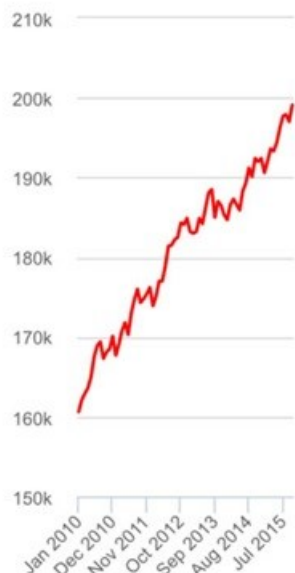
On top of this, I wanted to write something positive for my last blog of the year. A little Xmas cheer for those that have been naughty and nice. And, I wanted it to be the truth, not an opinion. We have too many of those already.

That's when I found this graph. It is a graph from the US department of labour that was published recently in [Ad Age](#). It shows that in 2010, the ad business in America employed 160,000 people. Today, 5 years later, there are close to 200,000 people that are employed. So, you have an increase of almost 40,000 employees. And we are talking about just ad agencies. This is the highest it has been in 15 years when the American ad business had 207,400 employees in the middle of the dotcom frenzy.

I looked at this graph for a long time. A long time. Advertising agencies in America have grown by 25 percent since the global financial apocalypse. While Silicon Valley has really been taking its steroids for the last 5 years, the advertising business has added 40,000 employees.

Now, I don't have stats for the rest of the world, which I am sure would be fascinating. Either the picture is completely different or, with global financial reporting structures and salary ratios, it's quite similar. However, many of the ad people

## US Ad Agency Employment



Source: AdAge.com/adjobs based on data from Bureau of Labor Statistics

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that have written to me are from New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. And they feel exactly the same as the people that have written to me from Sydney and London. And they sound remarkably similar to creatives from South Africa, Argentina and Brazil. So I guess for the purposes of this article, we will use the numbers knowing they are true for America. I can only guess if they are true for the rest of the world.

Whatever the answer, this graph has left me with two thoughts.

1. Perhaps, advertising is not shrinking. Perhaps, despite all the negative opinions and depressing emails and blogs advertising is growing.

This leads me to another thought.

2. Why does everybody who writes to me feel like they have less and less time if there are more and more people? Why are they working weekend after weekend if the industry has added 40,000 employees? Is the pie getting bigger? Or, are there more slices, more people and the same sized pie?

As Oscar Wilde said, the truth is never simple. After staring at this graph for an hour, I know he was right.

So, Merry Xmas.

It would seem the future is no longer darkly certain, but perhaps brighter than you think and definitely unclear.

Just the way us advertising folk have always liked it.

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## ABOUT DAMON STAPLETON

Damon is regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia. Before that, ECD at Saatchi and Saatchi Australia, before that, group ECD of TBWA Hunt Lascaris and global ECD of Standard Bank. He has won over 500 awards internationally, including a D&AD Black Pencil, Cannes Grand Prix, Grand Olios, ADC Black Cube and most effective ad in the world by Warc 100. Damon is now regional chief creative officer for DDB in New Zealand and Australia...

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