

# Lessons from typography

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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Natalie Lam, chief creative officer for Publicis Groupe, Asia Middle East, is the Loeries Digital and Digital craft category jury president and is a seasoned creative and entrepreneur.



Image supplied: Natalie Lam

She went to NYC Art school. At the Loeries International Seminar of Creativity, she spoke about lessons she has learnt throughout her career using typography analogies:

## What kerning taught me about obsession

My first summer job as a student was sitting in front of a large monitor for three months and kerning every word. It was normal, it was the norm then. What it taught me was that you must be obsessed about what you do, especially if you want to work in this industry.

## Widow taught me about details

Widows and orphans tie back to the last point. My first job was in a communications design agency that specialised in award-winning Annual Reports. As designers, we would submit the report to the typesetting team.



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They would come back with typesetting mistakes. The lesson is that it is not just about aesthetics but about details because details matter. They are what sets our industry apart and what gives us value.

## What Nike taught me about a sharp point

The reality is that Nike focuses on one new thing, everything else remains the same. That one new thing is the sharp point,

and it always stands out. You only need one sharp point.

As an industry we try to reinvent the wheel, but does it always have a big impact? Not always. You only need one sharp thing. We need to remember that. However, once you find it then you must give it your all.

## If you build it, they won't come taught me about rejection

It is difficult to build something and then maintain and grow it. Our industry has a different mindset. Our creative process creates a campaign and launches it and three months later we move to the next thing.

There is no responsibility to build something ongoing. Product and advertising people have a similar experience, as they put in blood and sweat with the client, but when you built it, do they come? Most likely not. Be critical of the work because there is so much rejection out there.

## How an extra click taught me about attention

I learnt this from evaluating and looking at campaign work. We are always fighting for attention. In the UX world, the goal is to get people to click on the buttons and buy. So, keep it simple and minimise the steps to get to that point. Less is more. The reality is that you are fighting with everything else that is more interesting. Keep it simple.



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## How an abandoned cart taught me about impact

Truly integrated work is challenging. There is a divide between the conceptual teams and UX or customer journey teams. Yet the two should not be separate. It is one thing to get the customer aware of the product and then have the desire for it, it is another to get them to click on the cart and pay. A person's decision to spend on your brand is huge so how do you take them from interest to purchase and then using the product and wanting to come back for more?

## How pixel perfect taught me about letting go

The lesson I learnt is that there is a time to let it go. Be nice to yourself and let it go. Find the balance.

## How negative space taught me about a different way

I did Chinese calligraphy as a young child and it helped me appreciate positive and negative space later in my life. Everyone is fighting for attention in the positive space. In the negative space, you can take a step back and think and create differently. Negative space provides opportunities and a lot of freedom.

## How Fiverr taught me about real competition

Tech today makes it so easy that you don't have to be a good musician. I started an electronic school to teach people how to easily make their own tracks. When you are an entrepreneur, you are mindful of every cent you spend. I wanted to do a music blog but needed a writer. I found a music writer for \$5 for 500 words, with a three-day turnaround.

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If I had briefed an agency I would have received the blog a month later and it would have cost me \$10,000. This taught me that the real competition is out there, and it is fresher and quicker than we are. It was a big wake-up call for me.

## What repeat visits taught me about business

Repeat visitors are so important if you want to build a brand with long-term impact. People buying the brand are paying the salaries of the agency and the client. Therefore, repeat visits are so critical. However, the advertising world does not think about that, we think about meeting the brief, and the deadline, but not the customer.

## How Craigslist taught me about common sense and relevancy

What is advertising about? Where is the industry going? We keep asking these questions. For me, the industry is about adding value through entertainment, laughter and inspiration that people are not getting in the real world.

But even if it is a great idea, what if it does not deliver results? Is it relevant then? Working in this industry, we must know what is real, what is relevant and what is not. And then work with real-world solutions.

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## ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from VMts.

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