

EMBRACING UNCERTAINTY

or

HOW PLANNING EMBARRASSED
WAYNE ROONEY

A.P.G. Entry

Paul H. Colman & Graeme Douglas, W+K London

UNCERTAINTY

That's a bad thing for us planners, right? Isn't it best that we work logically and analytically, to predict outcome and minimise risk?

We're not so sure.

This is a paper about connecting Nike with a new audience in a new way.

About reaction. About instinct. About emotion.

It's about rejecting the traditional deterministic model of planning.

This is a paper that demonstrates that sometimes, just sometimes, planning's at its best when it's liberated, spontaneous, iterative and adaptive.

In fact, when it challenges the very definition of the word 'planning'.

CONTEXT

Over recent years, small-sided football has become the people's game of choice.

Due to its more informal and unrestrictive structure it's now played more than eleven-a-side, appealing to players from all walks of life; from solicitors at Power Leagues, to urban kids on inner city courts.

Nike has maintained a specialist range of kit for the small-sided game over recent years, and in late 2008 we were briefed to develop a campaign idea to support sales of their latest range.

So far, so simple.

But that wouldn't make for a very interesting story now, would it?

THE OPPORTUNITY

We sensed a far bigger opportunity. Way beyond selling shirts.

Focusing on small-sided football gave us an opportunity to make a far bigger brand statement about the very essence of the game; at its grassroots.

Grassroots football no longer lives in places like Hackney Marshes, it lives in urban enclaves and estates all around the country. Green swapped for grey.

And the player that operates in these new spaces – the urban footballer – is one that Nike has always struggled to talk to. It felt like they'd bought into Nike *despite* what we'd done. We'd never represented what football was to them.

Perhaps a focus on small-sided football was the bridge that Nike could use to begin to turn these perceptions around, and engage an audience that has always been, well, un-engageable – and get them to play more and play better.

THE PROBLEM

The opportunity was there. Small-sided football was the ideal conversation starter with the young urban footballer.

But it wasn't quite as easy as all that.

While we had the territory, actually taking it out there and turning it into something smart, relevant and authentic for these kids was another matter entirely. Power League this isn't. We couldn't just transpose all of Nike's traditional eleven-a-side structures onto this campaign.

And as we pondered this dilemma, we began to realise something really rather daunting: perhaps planning, in its conventional sense, wouldn't help us get to the solution.

(Which is a bit like being stuck on Wigan Pier on a Saturday night not knowing what a 'Donk' is.)

THE URBAN FOOTBALLER

Urban footballers live and play in an unstructured way. They're hyper-local and move in intensely loyal and tight social circles. They have a degree of cynicism about the establishment because, frankly, the establishment has a degree of cynicism about them.

They consume media in a very different way to your average Nike devotee. They snack, dip in and out, and value peer-to-peer endorsed content above anything else.

They expect authenticity. But not in a weird, paradox-ridden marketing way. They mean real. They mean by them, for them.

They're not an homogenous 'segment'. They're not an 'audience' that you can 'buy' time with. They're not a 'group' that you can pin down geographically.

And, above everything else, they're not an audience that you can predict.

THE RUB

And there's the rub. They're unpredictable.

Not in the way that the Daily Mail would have you believe (we met loads of them and they were lovely) but in an unstructured, slightly chaotic, marketing-unfriendly way.

Usually, planning is a deterministic discipline.

In other words, of the philosophical view that every event, including human cognition and behaviour, decision and action, is causally determined by an unbroken chain of prior occurrences. Or so Wikipedia says.

We are trained to believe that you can (and should) mitigate risk by carefully plotting a route from x to y, considering every variable beforehand and factoring it into the strategy. Planning, in the literal definition of the word.

Which while fine for some tasks, given the nature of our audience, was not going to work for us.

DETERMINISTIC PLANNING

Planning was essentially born out of the need for more effective advertising.

But we were after something more than *advertising*. These kids expect brands, especially ones like Nike, to do more than merely broadcast at them. We needed to be more sophisticated than that.

The idea of a tightly defined *message* was also massively unhelpful – we couldn't simply tell them to be better footballers, we needed something that would inspire them, and what's more, something enabling.

And we also felt we wanted to get beyond the traditional measures of engagement. Thinking about mere *impressions* left us feeling dirty, like we'd be cheating them out of the experience they deserved.

All of this felt old school, out of date, unfit for purpose.

INTERACTIONIST PLANNING

We felt uncertain about what to do. It seemed to us that knowing all the initial conditions at the outset was no guarantee of what the outcome would be, and we just had to accept that.

So we did, and it set us free.

We instead focused on what principles we thought planning could champion, the things we felt would help us understand and inspire the Urban Footballer. They were:

A real dialogue - a true conversation.

An idea that they could play by, and live by.

A type of engagement measured by the emotional responses it produced, and the level of involvement it invited.

And a planning approach that worked in flux, instead of in isolation.

THIS WAS ALL CENTERED
AROUND ONE CORE
PHILOSOPHICAL SHIFT

FROM

MINIMISING RISK

TO

MAXIMISING REWARD

THE ROLE OF PLANNING FOR NIKE 5

Therefore the role for planning was threefold.

To champion this new sense of uncertainty, and the spontaneity and iterative process that flowed from it.

To immerse itself in the Urban Football community.

And to make everyone, from client to creative, feel good about this new approach (not an easy one).

COMMUNITY INTERACTION

We became part of the community. Literally.

We went to their games, and watched how they played football - what they wore, and how they spoke about the game.

We even played in their games. Got to know them as footballers, and as people (one of them, Tariq, even works with us now).

We visited their homes. Invited them to ours. Became friends.

Slowly we began to see the world through their eyes. We felt the stares they felt when they walked down the street in their hooded tops. And we too came under the gaze of the CCTV cameras that followed them no matter where they went.

We came to understand how football was an escape from these pressures, and one of the few times where they were truly free to express themselves.

‘WATCH ME NOW’

These cultural and football truths led us to our core idea, the thought that would be our gravity point for the campaign.

An idea that captured the spirit and freedom of the small-sided game, but also the suspicious surveillance society that diminished the Urban Footballer’s belief in himself.

That idea was: ‘WATCH ME NOW’.

It spoke to a desire to be judged for the right reasons, skill and expression on the football field.

But also to the wider audience’s preconceptions about someone simply because of the hood on their sweatshirt, or the color of their skin.

EMBRACING UNCERTAINTY

We came to understand that it was the overlap between Nike's world and the urban football world that was where interesting things could happen.

So when it came to creating content and shooting film, we encouraged the creative and production department to think beyond the idea of a 'shot' in the traditional sense.

We cast urban footballers we'd met, or invited them down to watch. We gave them mobile phones with video cameras and asked them to record what interested them.

We subverted CCTV cameras and used them to record the football, as well as conventional cameras.

And we never stopped recording (we believed that while the certainty of having a script was useful, it was between shots, in the uncertainty, that interesting things could happen).

In other words, we created the conditions for magic and drama.

ROONEY
VS.
CALLAM

THE NUTMEG

This approach paid off.

In between filming a huge cheer erupted around the pitch where we were shooting. Something had happened.

We'd encouraged the players and kids to mix, and while doing this Callam, a lad we'd met some weeks before, who plays on the courts of Manchester, bet Wayne Rooney that he could 'nutmeg' him. Rooney took up the challenge, offering him tickets to the Manchester derby if he could pull it off.

Callam got hold of the ball, dragged it back, and slotted it through Wayne's legs.

We caught it on film.

We caught it on CCTV. And we captured it on mobile phone footage (shot by the kids in attendance), from several different angles.

CREATING FOOTBALL CULTURE

The nutmeg was the perfect articulation of what we were trying to achieve – a moment where the world of urban football and the world of Nike collided in ‘uncertain’ terms.

It was the justification of our approach. Spontaneous. Authentic. And unplanned.

“Kid leaves Rooney embarrassed” (that’s how the Sun Newspaper described it).

It became part of football culture. From the ‘Republik Of Mancunia’, an influential football blog, to ‘Soccer AM’, the footballer’s football show, Callam was being talked about everywhere.

A PLATFORM FOR THE WIDER CAMPAIGN

The nutmeg created a climate in which the urban football community were willing to engage in a conversation with Nike about playing more and playing better.

Essentially Nike earned the right to talk about football with them on our terms.

We further inspired with them spots in the Champions League, as well as inviting them to prove their game in the national 'Show Your 5' tournament.

WHAT HAPPENED

One Premiership footballer was embarrassed (but took it in great humour).

The moment was replayed over half-a-million times on YouTube.

The total bank of content was viewed over three million times.

Sixteen thousand players signed up for the Show Your Five tournament.

One client was delighted (“the work was so on the money for our audience it’s scary” – Ed Elworthy, Head of Brand Connections)

And two planners went into a room...

EPILOGUE

The idea of 'embracing uncertainty' is more than an approach to planning: it's an approach to life.

One we were forced to embrace during the writing of this paper. When after making excuse after excuse we were left with only 24 hours to write it.

We had two choices. We could leave it, jump ship, jack it in. And frankly, that would have made life quite a lot easier.

Or, as in the campaign, we could embrace uncertainty.

The paper wasn't written yet, which meant it could be anything. Anything at all. A daunting blank page or a canvas for possibility?

We chose the latter.

<http://www.twoplannersinaroom.com>

<http://search.twitter.com/search?q=twoplannersinaroom>

APPENDIX

You'll find the creative work in here. A copy of the creative brief. And a picture of two planners, in a room.

Prepare yourselves.

CREATIVE BRIEF PART I

BACKGROUND

5-a-side and other small-sided versions of football are now the game of choice for the majority of people who play. There are more places to play than there have ever been, and these unstructured, more fluid, formats allow for more of the players to get more involved than in the 11-a-side game.

To energize the football community Nike to need to connect with this grassroots game.

They've developed a new range of boots and kit specifically for this task.

AUDIENCE

The small-sided game gives us a chance to talk with a player who often falls outside of a lot of our football work – the 'Urban Footballer'.

Urban footballers live and play in an unstructured way. They're hyper-local and move in intensely loyal and tight social circles. They have a degree of cynicism about the establishment because, frankly, the establishment has a degree of cynicism about them.

They consume media in a very different way to your average Nike devotee. They snack, dip in and out, and value peer-to-peer endorsed content above anything else.

They expect authenticity. But not in a weird, paradox-ridden marketing way. They mean real. They mean by them, for them.

CREATIVE BRIEF PART 2

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Use the launch Nike's new 5-a-side range to create heat around the brand with a new audience

CREATIVE CHALLENGE

Show that for the urban footballer the game is one of the few moments where they can truly express themselves

PRACTICALITIES

We need to both inspire (the urban footballer to play more and play better) and enable (them to do so).

CREATIVE

CREATIVE

Nutmeg (see accompanying DVD)

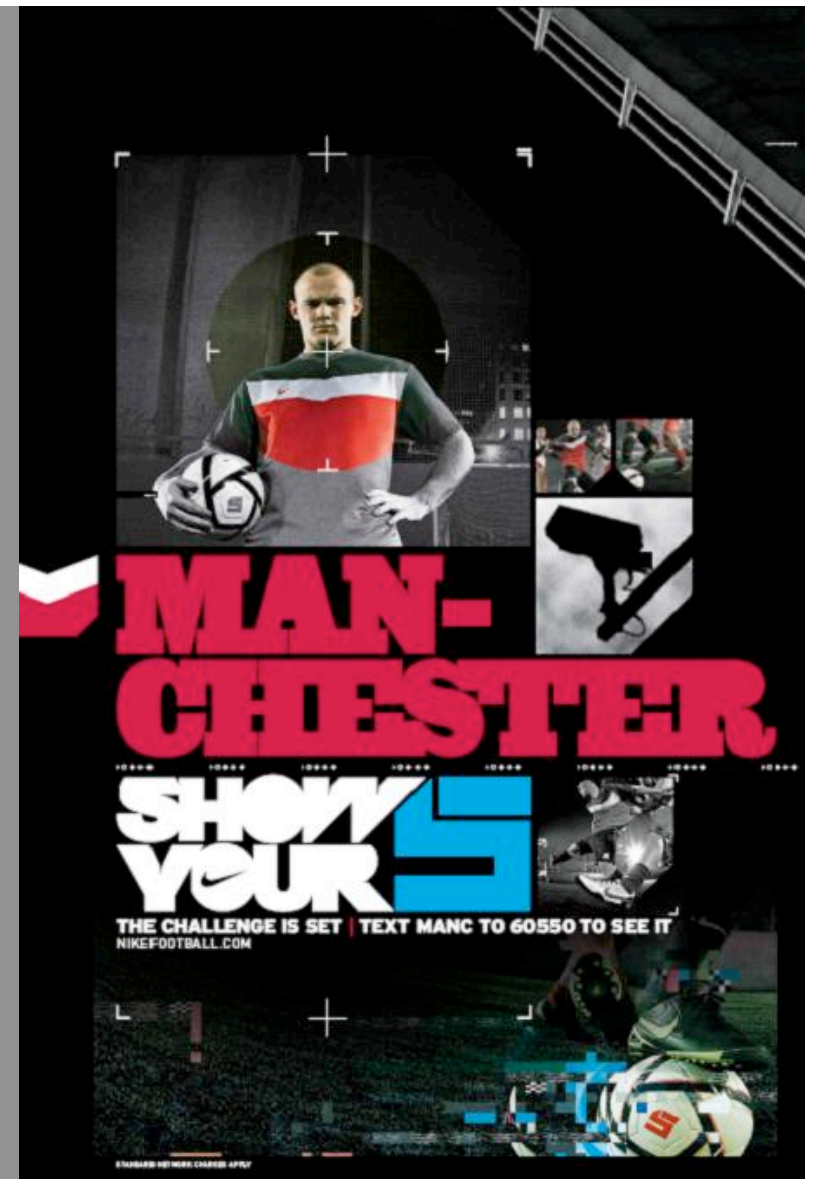
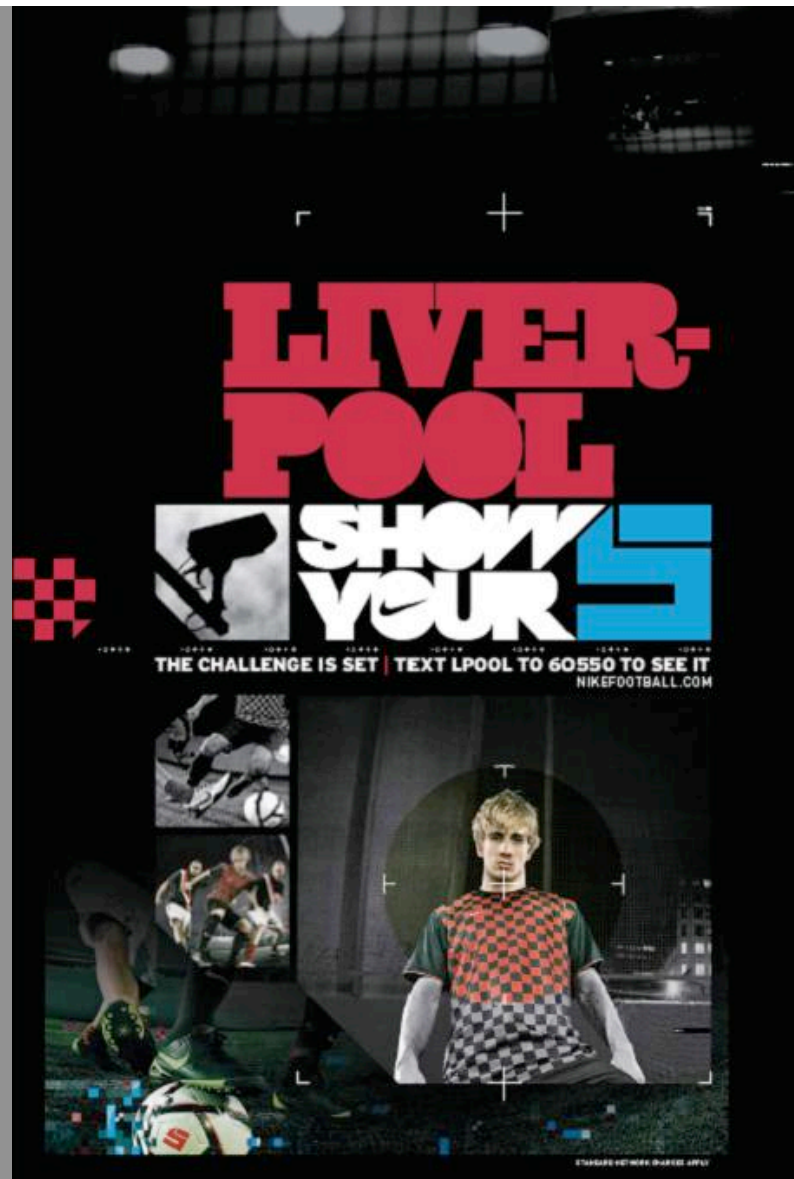
CREATIVE

Nutmeg official version (see accompanying DVD)

CREATIVE

90second film (see accompanying DVD)

Local recruitment posters



www.twoplannersinaroom.com

That's us, in a room, writing this paper, quickly.

twoplannersinaroom livestream

WELCOME TO OPTIMISM

Welcome to twoplannersinaroom

twoplannersinaroom! Congratulations on launching

Embed Full-screen Chat

ON-AIR LIVE 41 ON-DEMAND

MENU

Two planners – a slice of the love.

The screenshot shows a Twitter search results page for the query "twoplannersinaroom". The page header includes the Twitter logo and navigation links: Home, Profile, Find People, Settings, Help, Sign out. A search bar at the top contains the text "What are you doing?" and shows 140 results. Below the search bar, there are real-time results for the search query. The first result is from user AgeC (@Colman) who posted: "AgeC @Colman had www.twoplannersinaroom.com/ on in the background and was working along to your techno music – what a way to start a Friday morn!". Other results include tweets from rgleeson, markmark7, wkportland, FantasticNobody, and mauricio_durao. On the right side, there is a profile card for Colman with 61 following, 237 followers, and 1,187 updates. Below the profile card is a sidebar with navigation options: Home, @Colman, Direct Messages (73), Favorites, and a search bar containing "twoplannersinaroom". There is also a "Tweets on tees" section and a "Trending Topics" list including Susan Boyle, New moon, Bing, #musicmonday, MTV Movie Awards, Google Wave, Eminem, Twilight, Microsoft's, Bruno, and Following. An RSS feed link is provided at the bottom of the sidebar.

The screenshot shows a news article from the website "campaignlive". The main headline is "Wieden & Kennedy planners film 24-hour attempt at APG paper submission". The article is dated 28 May 2009, 3:00pm and is written by Kate Nettleton. The text of the article reads: "LONDON - The deadline for the Account Planning Group's awards submissions is just 24 hours away, but two planners from Wieden & Kennedy have decided to write their paper at the very last minute and stream their activity online." Below the article text, there is a "RELATED ARTICLES" section with several links: "APG publishes Gold Standard book", "W&K wins Fairtrade Foundation ad brief", "Wieden & Kennedy planners film 24-hour attempt at APG paper submission", "WPP shareholders urged to reject bonus scheme", and "OgilvyOne hires Birss as digital head". To the right of the article text, there is a video player showing a person in a room, likely the planners mentioned in the article.

The end.