

The machine that cannot dream

AI can generate content in seconds, but speed is not the same as creativity, says **Richard Silbermann**.

by Richard Silbermann
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A I is changing creative production and there are two emerging opinions. Agencies are panicking, worried AI will replace designers. Clients, on the other hand, are overexcited, convinced that a decent prompt is all you need to produce great work.

Neither is true. And if you're managing a brand, getting this wrong will cost you.

What AI is good at

It produces visual assets fast. A prompt that once meant briefing a studio and waiting a couple of days can now generate plenty of options in minutes. For teams under pressure, the ability to produce more, faster, for less is a real advantage. The economics of creative production have shifted and teams that ignore that will suffer.

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Where it falls short

The things that make creative work stand out are exactly the things AI can't do.

Empathy. In professional services, your clients aren't buying a product. They're trusting you with something that really matters: a deal, a dispute, a life's savings, a business they've built. The creative work that builds that trust comes from real human understanding. AI can't write from that place, because it's never been there.

Strategic storytelling. Professional services firms often look similar from the outside: same credentials, same sector expertise, same language about being 'trusted advisers'. The ones that

grow find a way to say something true and specific about who they are and why it matters. That's not a messaging exercise. It's a strategic act that requires genuine understanding of a firm's culture, its people and what it stands for. AI can produce well-structured content. It can't tell your story, because it doesn't know what makes you different.

Differentiation. This is where it gets commercially serious. If every professional services firm is using the same tools, trained on the same existing content, the output will look and sound the same. In sectors where reputation is everything, that's not just a poor outcome. It's a real commercial risk.

So where does a creative agency fit in this?

A good agency should be doing two things that are now more valuable than ever.

The first is using AI to make production faster and more cost-efficient. We've built it into how we work. The time it saves is real, and those savings feed through to better value for our clients.

The second is harder to replace, and it's where the relationship really earns its keep.

Briefing AI well is a creative skill. Getting genuinely distinctive, on-brand results requires someone who understands your positioning, your audience and your market deeply enough to direct the machine rather than just operate it. That's the role of a creative director. It always has been. AI hasn't changed that. If anything, it's made it more important.

Think of it this way. AI is a capable production studio. But a production studio without direction just makes noise. The director knows what the work needs to say, why it needs to say it, and whether what comes back is actually good enough.

For our clients, that creative direction (the thinking, the brand judgement, the ability to brief with insight) is where a creative agency now earns its place. Not by doing what AI can do. By doing what AI can't. ■

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