


## To be a thought leader, you need to have thoughts

Tim Burrowes   
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Welcome to a midweek edition of Unmade. Today we explore how companies in the communications world - and their bosses - position themselves as thought leaders, inspired by the example of the new magazine from Mat Baxter's Huge. And we finally see a good day on The Unmade Index.

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### How to be a thought leader

A few years back, the boss of a big organisation (which you will have heard of) invited me to lunch. He's not with the organisation any more, but I'll keep his role vague nonetheless.

We met up at Sake restaurant, in The Rocks.

"I want to raise my profile in the trade press," he told me, over the excellent tuna sashimi. "Like Mat Baxter."

During the years that Baxter was based in Australia, his high profile was a genuine mystery to many of his peers. Why was he always in the trade press?

The answer was actually simple. Baxter had a point of view and was fearless in sharing it. That included during his time as one of the founders of the now deeply missed Naked Communications Australia ("brilliant misfits" indeed), and it survived his move back into the corporate worlds of WPP's Mediacom and IPG's Initiative and UM. Some people disagreed with him, but he actually stood for something.

His contrarian point of view came from a place of conviction, rather than pursuit of headlines. That was simply a happy byproduct.

I explained to the person over lunch that if he wanted a profile like Baxter's, he'd need to have an interesting, original point of view. He'd need to be brave enough to share it when not everybody agreed.

I could tell that it wasn't really what my host wanted to hear. He wanted a shortcut to being seen as a thought leader without actually needing to form and express those original thoughts.

My host that lunchtime has since mostly disappeared from view, while Baxter is still in the game. These days, via five years as global CEO of Initiative, he's still with IPG, now running the New York based Huge.

Last year, Baxter closed all the Huge global offices except for the company's Brooklyn HQ, declaring it a global experience company.

Yesterday, Huge unveiled its latest thought leadership project. It's a new, "editorially independent" magazine on the future of business called Huge Moves.





Huge Moves magazine

The magazine's editor-in-chief is Jennifer Leigh Parker, who has previously worked for the likes of CNBC, Bloomberg and Forbes. She also worked in branded content publishing for Surface Media.



Editor-in-chief Parker and "executive sponsor" Baxter

It's not unusual of course for agencies and other players in the space to commit resource to thought leadership activities which show off their expertise.

PWC has created a market position as a prognosticator on the media space thanks to its annual Media & Entertainment Outlook report. For many years, Junkee Media's annual research into the youth audience positioned the masthead as an expert on the demographic. And plenty of agencies and media companies publish research and surveys (If I receive one more white paper on ESG I'll scream).

Media agency PHD has been publishing books for more than a decade now. Hell, so has Trinity P3 pitch doctor Darren Woolley.



An independent publishing masthead is less common though.

The nearest recent example I can think of is venture capital giant Andreessen Horowitz, which last year launched a masthead called Future. At the time it was seen by some of independent tech journalists in the space - most notably Kara Swisher - as an arrogant attempt to control the conversation.

Future wasn't particularly good, and Andreessen Horowitz announced its closure a couple of weeks back.



So what to make of Huge?

In fairness, it's really hard to judge a magazine by the PDF, and I haven't yet laid my hands on a printed edition. Things like the quality of paper stock and even the level of gloss make a big difference to the tactile reading experience.

On first impressions, I can tell you this much, David Ogilvy - king of advertising long form - would have hated it. We open on the second page with the runners and riders listed light-on-dark. Ogilvy always argued that was much harder to read, and I agree.



Missing from that masthead are sub editors, usually an essential component of magazine publishing. My inflexible neural pathways, formulated by many years of magazine proof reading took me straight to the typo before I saw anything else.

#### EXECUTIVE SPONSORS

Chief Executive Officer, Mat Baxter  
Chief Creative Officer, Fura Johannesdottir  
Global Head of Marketing, Jason Schlossberg

Yup, they spelled the boss's job title wrong. To be fair though, that was the only typo I stumbled across in the whole magazine.

It's a good business magazine that avoids the trap of feeling even slightly like advertorial. If it wasn't for the interview with Baxter explaining the rationale, you'd have

no idea what organisation was behind it.

**Why did you decide to green-light this magazine?**

**Baxter:** We're advocates for storytelling. To brands, we'll say: "The best way to grow is to tell great stories and engage with audiences." All we're doing is exactly what we've recommended clients do for 20 years: Tell a great story, grow your business.

**Let's practice what we preach.**

Almost no ad agency runs ads for itself. Isn't that the height of irony? If you really believe in the power of advertising, why wouldn't you spend it on your own business? There's a contradiction there that is pretty irreconcilable.

**Historically, Huge has been digital-first. Why publish a print publication?**

It brings a degree of gravitas to the brand. It makes it feel more real and tangible. We're publishing the magazine in both physical and digital formats because that physicality adds meaning and a degree of confidence.

**We're producing an independent magazine, instead of sticking to white papers or pay-to-play content. Is that a huge move for this company?**

Yes, because I'm not in control of what's being written. There's an independent voice for the brand that is unencumbered and uninfluenced by the agendas that exist in the business more broadly. We want an independent, objective editorial voice for the brand. We want to be provocative and audacious. And we want

that to be free from those business-centric concerns that often bleed into these sorts of things.

We've been very intentional in saying that Huge Moves should run as an independent, separate part of the business. It's producing compelling content that only has one objective — to engage with an audience.

**Do you believe that the craft of journalism can thrive within this context?**

Of course. But it doesn't thrive when it's constrained. The craft of journalism is about an independent voice and objectivity. You can't have a journalist being directed; look at some papers where that's happened, where journalists are being told what to write and what's off-limits. Those outlets have lost all credibility, because they're not celebrating and living the craft of journalism.

**Each year, we'll publish the 10 Huge Moves we think will change the business world in the year to come. Is futurism part of Huge's DNA?**

Oh, 100%, because you can only guide brands if you've got a point of view about where they need to go and what they need to do. That means you've got to have an idea of where the world is going. And so futurism is the mechanism by which you strategize for brands.

**You've got to stay ahead of the curve.**

You do. This industry is all about looking ahead and having the skills, the talent and quite frankly the courage to look forward and plan in an accurate and hopefully inspiring way.

The content – AI, Web3, NFTs, the future of the workplace, supply chains and so on – would not be out of place in The Economist. And that's also the drawback. There wasn't much that I haven't already read in The Economist.

Overall the content feels US-centric. That may be by design. Although Huge claims to be a global agency, I bet most of its revenue comes from North America.

The downside of the long lead times of magazine publishing are also evident. The world of AI changed after the mag went to press. Although many of the images were generated by Midjourney, ChatGPT – which may prove to be one of the most significant developments of the decade – arrived after deadline. It's not the fault of the editor, but the AI feature is hopelessly out of date before it even lands on client desks.

Nonetheless, the magazine is more than good enough that client recipients of the magazine will struggle to throw it out without reading it first. It will sit on coffee tables for months, which is good brand marketing for Huge.

As well as publishing occasional printed editions, there will also be a [regularly updated website](#). Incidentally, Ogilvy would have hated the design of the website too. Online, the articles are published across wide columns, too wide for comfortably reading long form.

And in what feels like something of a gimmick, readers can sign up for an NFT which will give them access to additional content and invitations to events.

So is it money well spent?

For people who are in the industry but not close to a particular agency, they can usually hold at the most one thought or impression. The magazine improves the chances of Huge being thought about not as just another agency, but first as a business transformation company. That looks like job done.

I bet other agency bosses will be wishing they'd done it first.

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## Unmade Index: A burst of green

Most of The Unmade Index of ASX-listed media and marketing companies finally had a good day on Tuesday. The index rose by 1.84% to 662.4 points, after five consecutive days of falls.



# UNMADE INDEX

## +1.84%

Index  
**662.4**

Among the broadcasters, Seven West Media led the charge, rising by 4.82%.

The Market Herald, currently in the midst of a boardroom power battle as shareholders from the Argyle family attempt to oust founder Jag Sanger, was the only stock to fall, dropping by 7.69%.

Symbol	Company name	Closing price	Daily change	% change	\$ Market Cap
NEC	Nine Entertainment Co	2.04	+0.03	+1.49%	3,479,001,654
DHG	Domain Holdings Austr	2.94	-	-	1,857,071,322
OML	oOh!Media Ltd	1.31	+0.05	+4.38%	766,222,896
SWM	Seven West Media Ltd	0.44	+0.02	+4.82%	683,658,183
HT1	HT&E Ltd	1.01	+0.03	+3.59%	313,762,052
SXL	Southern Cross Media	1.13	-	-	280,239,546
EGG	Enero Group Ltd	2.72	-	-	252,199,381
PPL	Pureprofile Ltd	0.04	-	+10.53%	46,613,237
TMH	Market Herald Ltd	0.42	-0.04	-7.69%	115,100,156

Time to leave you to your Wednesday.

Regular readers will receive an unlocked edition of Tuesday in their inboxes tomorrow morning. Our paying members received the analysis - which focuses on the final radio ratings results of the year - yesterday.

In six exclusive charts, we reveal which network wins the metro drivetime battle across the five capital cities; we look at the shockingly poor performance of ABC Radio National in breakfast and drive slots; we explain why Jim Wilson had to lose his 2GB slot; and we examine the curious come bump for The Kyle & Jackie O Show.

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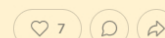
Toodlepip

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7 likes



### Comments



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## Why Coles is getting out of the servo game

Welcome to a Friday edition of Unmade for those few people who remain at their desks on this unofficial (except for Victoria) long weekend. You can...

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## Painful exits after Mumbrella's illicit afterparty

Embarrassing as it is, Mumbrella's owners have done the right thing in parting ways with staff, and (eventually) disclosing (most of) what happened

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