

LEAP OF FAITH

Disillusioned with corporate advertising agencies, Jane Evans went out on her own. Today, her company Giant Leap counts brands such as Revlon and James Squire in its portfolio and is a haven for clients who do things a little differently.

STORY **RACHAEL OAKES-ASH**
PORTRAIT **NADJA BERNHARDT**

British-born, Australian-based Jane Evans is the creative marketer who flew her best friend to Melbourne to see television psychic and medium John Edwards in March this year. The reason? Her best friend's birthday. "We always try to do something different each year," explains Evans. "One year I did a portrait of her in my art studio, with hair and make-up."

This attitude is Evans' trademark in the advertising and marketing industry, where she's known as someone who does things differently. She used real size 16 to 26 models for Katie's womenswear brand 1626 and treated them like supermodels. She's also washed a woman's telephone number written in lipstick off a bachelor's shirt with Drive laundry detergent. The television commercial subsequently sold worldwide.

Evans' obsession with difference started early. Not everyone can claim to be the daughter of a beauty queen and a prize livestock artificial inseminator. Born in Liverpool and raised in Surrey, Evans started her own business at the age of 12, selling sweets on the local golf course to golfers in need of sustenance. An entrepreneur was born on the 18th hole and Evans went on to study advertising and marketing at Ealing College. She then entered the hallowed halls of London agencies Leagas Delaney and KHBB. It was on a trip to Sydney with her father, who was selling bull semen, that she fell in love with Australia. In 1987, she packed her bags and set up home here, scoring a job at the John Bevins advertising agency.

After 10 years as art director for companies such as J Walter Thompson, Ogilvy & Mather, Clemengers and Principals, Evans was fed up with what she saw as layers of obstacles between her job and the client.

"If the creatives could just talk directly to the clients, how much easier it would be in the advertising world. It doesn't need to be a war. The whole

process is set up as adversarial. In London, there used to be a 'suit' who would take the clients into the creative department brandishing a chair like a lion tamer. He was trying to make out it was this mad department filled with crazy people who came up with ideas. In reality, the best creative people I know are the straight ones," she explains.

In the mid-1990s, Evans' dream was to be a creative director—until her breasts got in the way. "I was taken out by a leading head-hunter who said, 'Forget about being creative director, it's not going to happen. There's not going to be a female creative director in Sydney.' But I'd promised myself I was going to be a creative director by the time I was 35, so if I had to open my own shop and give myself the title, then I was going to do it."

Six years later, she is CEO of her own advertising agency, Giant Leap, which she started from her home.

Evans now lives in Annandale, Sydney, with her two daughters, Ella, five, and Maya, three. She is a 'creative strategist' to hand-picked clients whose unique selling points are their integrity and quality.

Giant Leap pitched passionately for the Guide Dogs Association, because Evans' mother raised and bred guide dogs when she was a child. Her pitch for Katie's 1626 line of clothing was fuelled by her frustration at images of underweight women. These clients sit alongside Revlon, Kimberley-Clark and Lion Nathan in her portfolio.

"The big advertising agencies have become shops," says Evans. Her company consists of three people: Evans, a studio manager and a designer.

"Technology has enabled creatives to freelance and work in a boathouse or a stable block and there are enough clients who require the quality without the structure of large agencies. By contracting out, it means we can put on an A-class team at a reasonable price and do things





Giant Leap's advertising campaigns for (from left) the Guide Dogs Association; Katie's 1626 clothing line, James Squire beer and Revlon.

started off with Chuck just walking into pubs with a case under his arm.”

The story actually started well before that, with label design, brand concept and original brewing for flavour. The bottles are nostalgic in shape and colour, the labels are like parchment and each one tells a story. James Squire descendants were located and invited to reunions and Squire’s original signature was found from his will to create the logo. The man was reborn and the beer was brewed for an intensity of flavour and colour similar to the original.

The challenge for Evans was installing a creative strategy with very little money and maintaining quality control. “I wanted it to be all about education and enhancing, not polluting the visual environment. We do beautiful pictures that are framed and hung on pub walls, rather than tatty posters. We made girls’ promo T-shirts as so many bar staff are women and they’re not going to wear an oversized man’s T-shirt. We don’t do fridge magnets, it’s not our style: we do beer mats that tell a story.

“THE PROBLEM WITH BRAND DEVELOPMENT usually is that you can get so caught up in what you do that you actually forget who you are talking to. It’s about the message received, not the message sent, and too many people are so concerned about getting out what they want to say that they’re actually not thinking about the person on the other end and what they want to hear.”

“When I grew up in marketing,” she continues, “the Holy Grail of any product was the unique selling point. It’s much harder to find that in

such a ‘me too’ market when there are so many products around. Consumers are jaded by ‘new improved’, ‘enzyme this’, ‘institute that’. People are media savvy and they’re starting to see through all of those things. Today, buying a product is about your personality, it’s what brands actually suit you.

“Consumers are starting to define who they are by which brands they use, and that’s not just buying Gucci—it goes all the way down to what nappies you buy,” she explains.

With an impressive client stable already, who would Evans like to work with in the future?

“I would love a company like Virgin, one that is forward thinking, willing to take a risk, with some decent money behind it. I don’t see much evidence of clients willing to take risks. There are too many committees, too much research and too many people in the process who only have the power to say no. You have to deal with 10 people who can say no until you get to someone who can say yes. People have to take personal responsibility for creativity, whether that is the person creating it or the person buying it, and people are too afraid to make a mistake, which stops anything new coming up.”

Art director, creative strategist, marketer or brand guardian—whatever Evans is, she is an inspiration to clients willing to step out on a limb. “I’m an ideas person,” she says. “I just know that ideas come in a space between thoughts. I don’t know where it comes from, perhaps collective unconscious. It’s a bit magic, I think.” ■