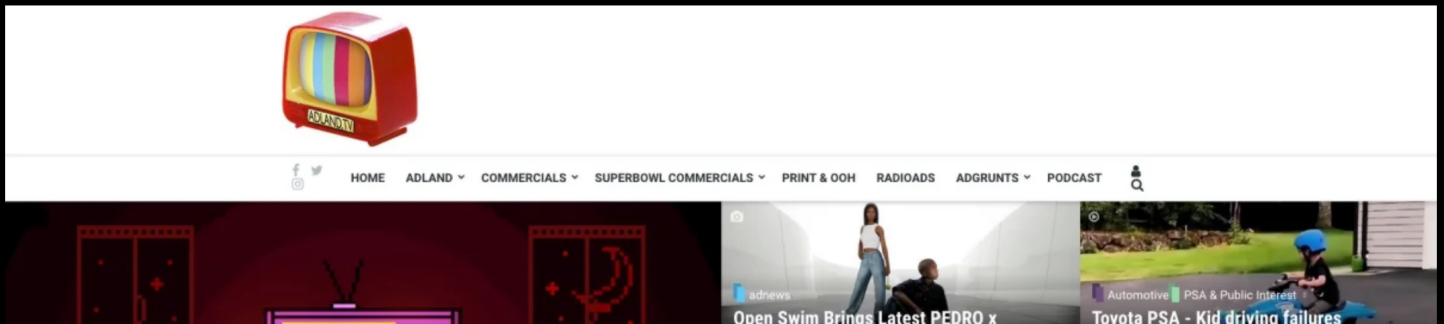


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BEHIND THE BYLINES: ÅSK WÄPPLING

Julie Descamps 2023-05-12

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As one of our first guests, we are happy to feature **Ask "Dabitch" Wäppling**. An experienced Epica juror and the founder of the widely acclaimed [Adland](#), Ask brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the table, sharing her insights on creativity and the industry.



What inspired you to become a journalist and how did you get into the profession?

In junior high, I was interested in media and there was an elective course that gave us the opportunity to edit our own tv-programs and visit newspapers. That's where I got hands-on experience with doing interviews for national radio, editing short local news segments, and even typesetting newspaper headlines with old fashioned lead type. This was so interesting to me, to experience all of the parts of making media. It wasn't until I had a career in advertising, however, that marketing press asked me to write columns and eventually reportages for them, from the perspective of someone who was working in the advertising industry.

We know you have a very rich background - could you tell us a little bit about your place of origin?

This has always been a question that stops me in my tracks. I always find this one difficult to explain, as my entire family and I are from Lapland. The family birthplaces stretch from Sweden to Norway and Finland, for many hundreds of years, and I know all the places very well. I grew up hearing stories about family members who moved around within the Sápmi borders, while simultaneously moving around the world for jobs in a very "nomadic" manner. So I have lived in Saudi, the United States, Germany, and so on, and when I decided to go to University it was in New York and London. But when I get bogged down by modernity, as I did right after I graduated college in London, the only thing that brings me back to life is the land in Sápmi. We all belong somewhere, and we all will feel our blood slow down and heartbeat settle when we are "home", as I have.

You have many activities. Can you describe what you do and who you write for? What are you up to these days?

I consistently write opinion pieces and reportages for the Swedish magazine Resumé, my own global marketing site Adland, and freelance to several other design and

my own global marketing site Adland, and freelance to several other design and marketing magazines. The reportages that I do are usually something that I pitch myself to magazines after seeing "a pattern" or new development in advertising, or having one suggested to me by my editors.

Reading press releases over my morning coffee helps me spot new trends quickly as I see a bigger picture than what makes it to most magazines, which is why I really appreciate my friendly PR people sending me even the shortest notes of what their clients are up to.

What essential qualities and skills do journalists need to thrive in today's media landscape?

Curiosity, the same quality that makes you a good ad creative. To ask "why" a lot, and seek out information on your own. Today's media landscape is so splintered that a journalist who can bring together all parts of a story, even those that play out entirely online, to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of events can carve out a niche all on their own. Also being balanced, so that you can get as objective as possible, is a good quality that many, sadly, lack today.

As a member of the Epica Awards jury, how do you approach evaluating and selecting the best creative work from around the world?

I work hard on judging the ads for their category. If I don't like the idea, but the animation is great and it is in "animation", it will have top marks. Over the years I have tried to judge every single thing sent in. This year, I managed to do 100% before the shortlist which was so satisfying. I want every single entry to at least have a shot, and if I'm not there to create the shortlist by looking at every entry, I'm letting people down. I feel this as a responsibility.

After things are shortlisted, I hit my favorite categories first, which are all design and art direction related. Since this has been my job, I feel I can judge things up in these categories on their execution alone. In the end, great ideas and executions always float to the top, even if they don't have a million dollar budget.

Advertising and production agencies would be so happy to share everything that they are working on, but they are often locked down as to what the brands they work with will allow. Personally, I'm quite happy waiting for the "all clear" before writing about any new project. I feel allied with the production and ad agencies on this, it's the clients that are holding their cards close to their chest. Often their inhouse PR wants to make a big splash in the New York Times, or similar, forgetting how the media landscape is today. You don't have to "wait" for it to be published on USA Today before allowing anyone else to write about it. Things can be published on TikTok and will eventually end up in the New York Times.

It's truly a two way street now, strategies have to change and PR for brands should be ready to take calls and answer emails when a story starts rolling - particularly if the story is a bad one, they can prevent a lot of backlash. I think we can strengthen these relationships by having our free agent PR people act even more as diplomatic ambassadors, connecting us all so that ad and production agencies have a chance to shine with their work in the press.

What are the most memorable campaigns or creative projects you've covered and what made them stand out for you?

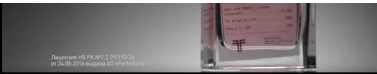
Wow, that's a tough one! I've been writing about ads since I was in my twenties! Any time a campaign broke new and unusual media ground, would have to be my choice. In that category we can put "fearless girl", which nobody wanted to admit was an ad, at first. And "dumb ways to die" which used music and animation to reach the target audience of children. There was also an amazing campaign for a bank in Kazakhstan where women sprayed perfume on the money and receipts that went through their businesses to remind the entire population of how many businesswomen the country had.

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"In the end, great ideas and executions always float to the top, even if they don't have a million dollar budget"

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prefer the independents, for example Adpulp, and a fellow Epica judge, **Tarek Chemaly's**, site, because of the perspectives that they bring.

Nobody has the time to follow the millions of individuals that work in the industry, so if anyone wants to be seen or have their work seen they should be telling the advertising press about it.

What's the biggest challenge facing the creative industry today – and how might it be addressed?

It's the same challenge as it always was and is - the creatives are truly not paid what they are worth. Everyone will have a great idea in their lifetime, but responding to a proper "prompt" (to use an AI term instead of "brief") is very difficult. Skilled and experienced creatives can do this, and should be compensated for it. We have left the years of unpaid internships behind us, thankfully, which was the biggest hurdle for diversity in the business, but we have another hurdle that is unaddressed now.

How do we handle parental leave? I say parental, because I think fathers also need a moment to adjust to life with kids, and unlike where I am from, this isn't the norm in most countries. We should always strive for a work-life balance regardless of potential children, because outside of the office living life is where the creative inspiration happens. In the real world.

The next elephant in the room has been glaring at me since I entered the business, and that is the blatant ageism. Why isn't experience valued in the advertising industry?

What role do you see journalism playing in promoting and advocating for diversity and inclusion within the creative industry?

Journalism shouldn't really promote anything, that's PR. Journalism may celebrate, expose, elevate and report. Journalism also shouldn't advocate.

As for diversity and inclusion in the creative industry, journalism can play a vital role in providing accurate and objective reporting on the experiences of underrepresented groups in many ways. One way is to note why some groups are underrepresented. Back when "college credit" and a dismal bus-pass was the only payment for graduated creatives to have a chance at the big name ad agencies, I wrote tons of articles about how this was a problem. Only the "rich" kids, supported by their own parents, or sneakily going on the dole in London, could afford to take these jobs that would get them a leg up in the advertising industry.

It was an effective way to lock out anyone who had to support themselves, or god forbid, other family members including their own children. I have been asked by big names in the industry to fly myself over to another continent to hold seminars at their events, unpaid, while raising a daughter as a single parent. I don't know where people expected me to earn my living from, or thought I did, in such cases.

Who are your role models or mentors in journalism and the creative world? And what's the best piece of career advice you've ever been given?

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In journalism, my role models are every single local reporter who made any news at all without getting their own opinion involved in it. These heroes are extremely few these days, and I often channel that just to casually report on work that I honestly despise.

The best advice that I was ever given was from the same mentor: "plan for kids because they will happen" and "make friends with the person next to you on the flight".

I have made a lot of memorable flight-mates in the seat next to me on long-hauls, and you may often learn something about subjects or industries - or countries - that you know nothing about.

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