



Addictlab.com: Bringing creative minds together



news and trends

Written by Jennifer Searle

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There is one thing you cannot do with Jan van Mol and that is categorise him. He is an ideas-and-concepts man, yet through his online thinktank network Addictlab.com, he offers so much more than just this.

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Addictlab draws together creative minds from a variety of industries and through various platforms such as the brainstorm sessions, exhibitions and magazines, to explore and develop ideas and trends.

It all started about 12 years ago when Jan, who ran his own advertising agency, realised he had limited control over his client's brands.

"I was actually a supplier and ultimately the client got the final say. If we were working on a graphic and I thought it should be red and the client thought it should be green, it would end up being green because the client made the decisions. I was limited in the changes I could give that product and brand," he explained. "This got me thinking about what the added value of the creative is. And I started to ask: who is looking at the overall brand?"

In his opinion it is a good idea to look at all elements of the business and then consider creative avenues for the company as a whole so that the brand is reflected in all aspects of the company.

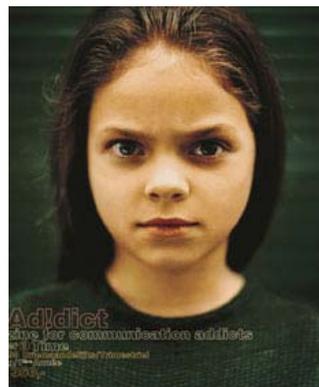
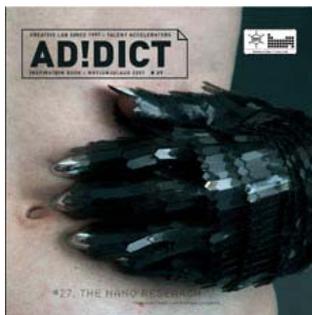
"By looking at all aspects of the company and considering ways to promote the brand at all these different avenues, it encourages cross pollination and creative thinking."

This desire to offer more on a creative level and to gather people to think in different creative ways is what first inspired Addictlab, the global thinktank. Twice a year, Addictlab selects a theme and starts brainstorming it through different avenues. The innovative products conceptualised in these sessions or from lab members individually are showcased at exhibitions.

The exhibitions are a fusion of creative disciplines, which range from fashion and photography to food, illustration, audio and performing arts. "If you think you have something to contribute to an exhibition you can just arrive at our event and display your wares," he explained. This platform is an opportunity for Jan and his lab ambassador to meet their lab members. "It also shows us how they think, how they collaborate and how they create," he explained, "this assists us when we are selecting lab members to participate in a brain storm session." "Our brain storm sessions are very personal. Instead of crowd sourcing and just giving a cross section of random people a theme to brainstorm, I select very particular people to think about a selected theme" he added. Often Jan will choose creatives who are not obviously linked to the chosen theme. For example, when he was commissioned to consider designs for BMW bikes, one member of his think session was a British photographer who drove around London on a scooter. "He was a creative person who understood the physical presence of a bike," he said.

Sometimes the themes are randomly chosen and other times companies approach Addictlab and commission a theme. It is an interchangeable system but Jan's biggest concern is to keep the creativity flowing at each of his hubs all over the world. "This system is designed to accelerate creativity," he said. While he acknowledges that it is important to think of the next step and how to commercialise the ideas, this is not a priority because he does not want the importance of the idea to stifle the creative process. "If we wait for the money to come before we start thinking about a concept then we return to merely being suppliers," he commented.

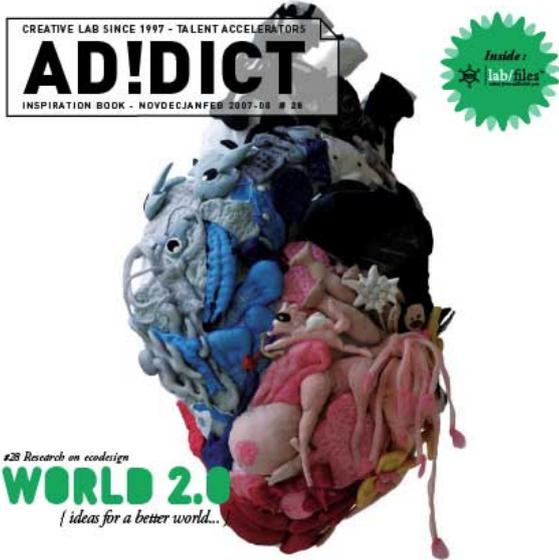
Companies can come on board at any time because this process is ongoing and while there is a definite chain in this process: first the ideas and brainstorm session, then the exhibition and then the magazine, this does not mean that it all ends here. "Just because we publish a magazine or host an exhibition under a certain theme, it does not mean that that lab is closed. The ideas are still active but we need to keep moving forward and move onto the next theme. It does not stop after the magazine," he said and added, "We published a magazine on chocolate, but this doesn't mean a chocolate company can't still come to us and ask us for new chocolate ideas." However, Jan was quick to add that Addictlab is all about exchange and they will not hand a concept over unless the lab member is content to offer it over.



Most recently, this has happened in South Africa. Michaelle Janse van Vuuren, a South African lab member, has created a solar light, which is inspired by nature and is similar in design to a pinecone. The design was part of the Eco Research in Addictlab. Jan put the Pine Cone Light in the Addictlab community and used its open source methodology to enhance the concept. This is an important step for Addictlab because it reflects the truly collaborative approach of this process. The 3D prototype was printed by Materialise in Belgium, and exhibited as a work in progress at the Addictlab Life Lab session at the Creativity World Forum in Antwerp in November 2008. Materialise has decided to collaborate with Addictlab for the further development. The Pine Cone light will be part of the MGX's new collection 2009, called "Bouquet 2009".



In addition to this, there is more happening in 2009 for Addictlab in South Africa. Danone will be implementing a suggestion from Addictlab in February. Jan is also hoping to host a brainstorm session at the Design Indaba to inspire a new lab. While he plans to leave South Africa this year, his hope is to have the systems in place to keep the institution sustainable. "South Africa has been a very interesting test. There are so many wonderful creative minds here. I have to think about keeping it going."



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