

INSIGHT

Why the industry shouldn't need directors' cuts

Why hire a director but not let them see a project through to completion? In an argument for quality, trust and authenticity, **Mutt Film** director **Jason Smith** believes that we shouldn't need a director's cut, because that should be *the cut*.

by JASON SMITH on 28 FEBRUARY 2022

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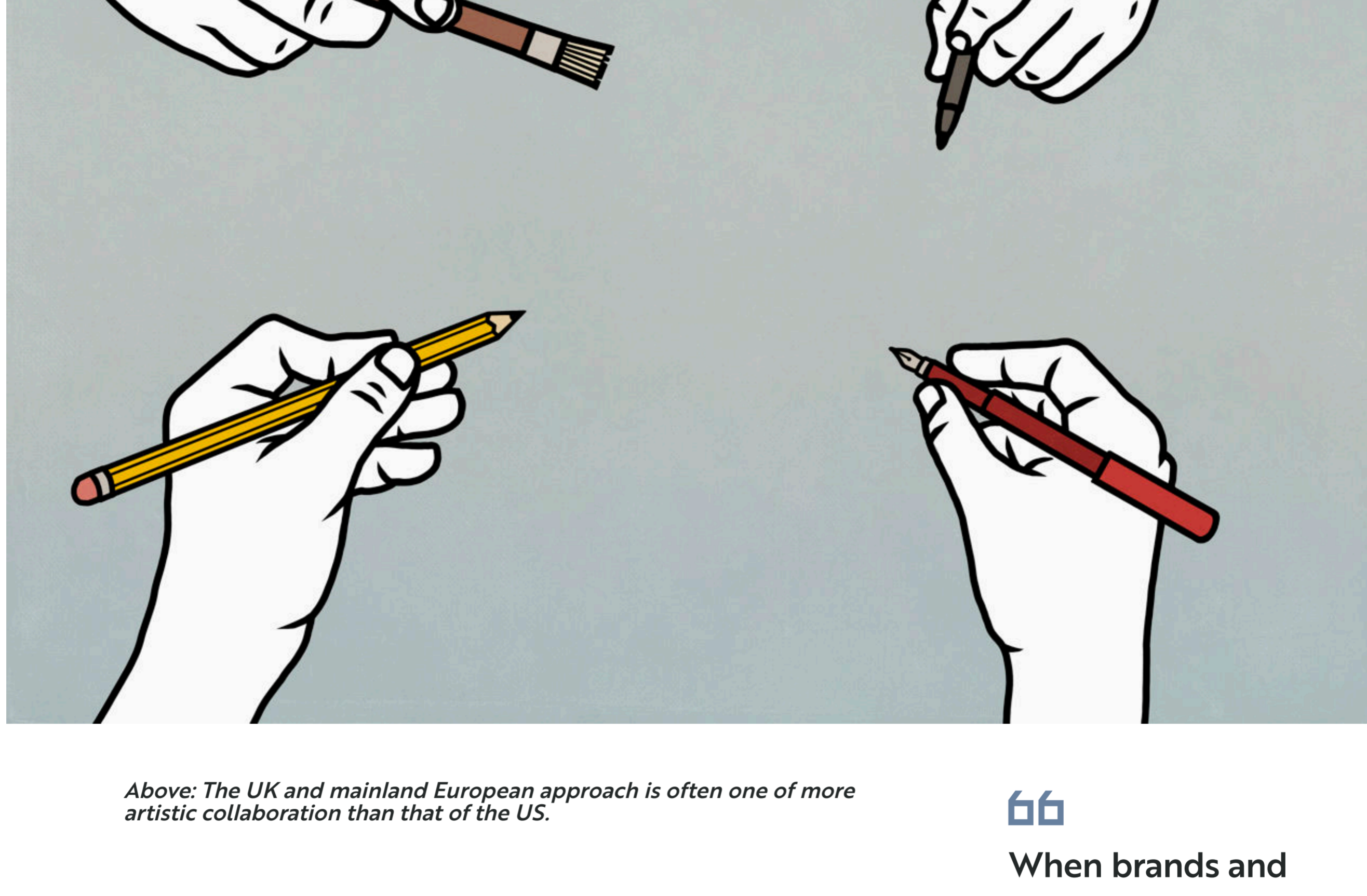
Working with European and US agencies and brands, I've come to notice a trend that may have larger implications than we, as an industry, realise.

In mainland Europe and the UK, in my experience, directors are expected- indeed contracted - to helm the production for an ad and oversee all of its post, through to the final edit. We either work with trusted collaborators the agency has hired, or with our longtime contacts, depending on the nature of the relationship.

Of course, this also happens in the US but, more commonly, the US follows a different plan of attack. The agency conceptualises a spot, and/or accepts director briefs, and selects a director. The agency also hires their third-party partners in post production including colour, music and sound design, and the director then helms production.

After the production wraps, the director's work is passed to post production teams, typically taking this important part of the production out of their hands. More than once, I haven't seen a final cut until just before a campaign launches. By then, it's too late for a director to suggest edits that better match the client's vision, the director's brief, or the agency's concept. Hence, many directors feel a strong need for a director's cut for use on their reels and beyond.

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Above: The UK and mainland European approach is often one of more artistic collaboration than that of the US.

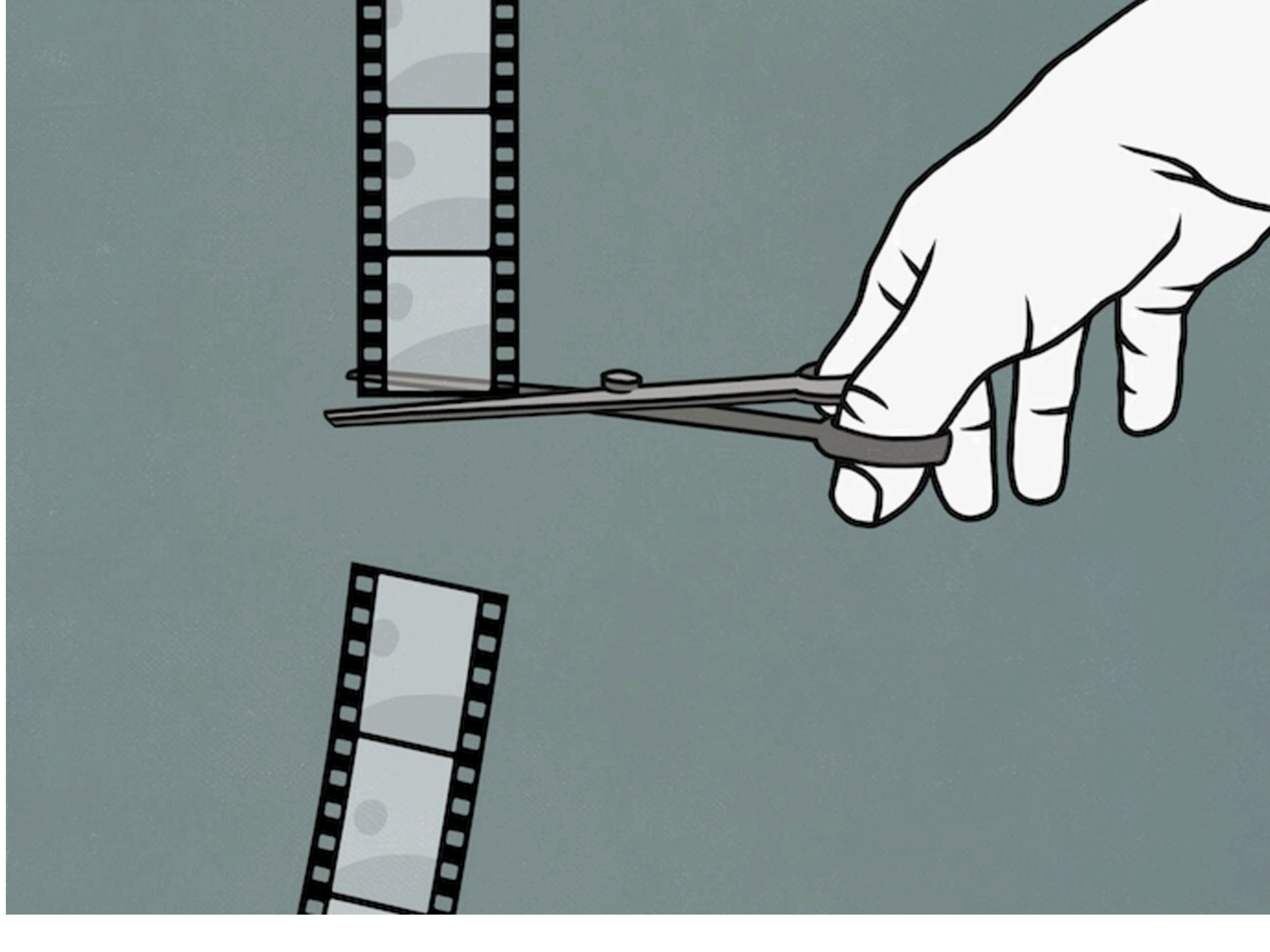
Why do the US and Europe processes differ in this way? The UK and Europe encourage directors to collaborate with their editorial partners to furnish an optimum result. In fact, a director often won't get the job unless they commits to this way of working. The US is the opposite, and has the reputation for a longstanding hands-on, structured editorial approach by the agency and client. Control, sometimes, steps on the toes of creative spontaneity. That's not to say the US doesn't produce some of the best creative in the world, just that it's often without the director's valuable editorial input that could make it even better.

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Editorial houses are not to blame for this phenomenon. Really, no one is 'to blame' for following one strategy over another. However, clients are often balancing existing relationships with other editorial houses that, while experienced and skilled in their own right, are not synced with the creative vision of the project from the beginning. Therefore post production is often shared between multiple vendors, without the overseeing eye of a director.

This doesn't make sense to me. When brands and agencies take the time, expertise, and consideration to handpick the right director for a project, why do they not entrust those directors to work alongside the editor of an ad to bring their vision to its conclusion? Why are advertising directors' cuts more prevalent in the search results of a creator's own YouTube and Vimeo channels than the brand client's platforms, or the ad trade media?

I want to make the case for directors' cuts to be *the cuts*. For the benefit of both the directors as well as the brands and agencies looking to ensure that their vision for a compelling campaign stays clear from the inception of the idea through to the final moment of post production.



Above: A director's collaboration with an editor is a huge part of what defines their style to begin with.

I can see the logic behind why clients would pass off a director's footage to an editor or post company of their choosing. To maintain a consistent brand image, clients work with established editors who bring enough brand knowledge to unify each of their campaigns. These relationships are often long-held and not easily broken. Nor should they be, but why not, as a minimum, utilise the director with that chosen editor, as everyone would benefit?

“ If a brand or agency is after a director's visual style for their next project, utilising said director solely for the production portion shortchanges the director's capabilities in the edit bay, alongside a strong editor. A director's collaboration with an editor is a huge part of what defines their style to begin with. Robbing them of that collaboration risks ending up with a final product far different from what the client, agency and director imagined. Then, if the project differs vastly from what the director expected to put on their reel, the director's cut cycle begins anew.

As I said, agencies hire directors for *their style*, based on finished reels and completed work full of edits *they* oversaw. If a brand or agency is after a director's visual style for their next project, utilising said director solely for the production portion shortchanges the director's capabilities in the edit bay, alongside a strong editor. A director's collaboration with an editor is a huge part of what defines their style to begin with. Robbing them of that collaboration risks ending up with a final product far different from what the client, agency and director imagined. Then, if the project differs vastly from what the director expected to put on their reel, the director's cut cycle begins anew.

When considering changing this industry norm it's helpful to consider what it might mean for a promising director's career. It's difficult enough to be awarded work when just starting out; a new director's reel is full of specs and/or student work, and they're trying to make their first connections. All directors have been there. When they finally get an opportunity to shoot for a major brand, eager to showcase what sets them apart from the rest, it's demoralising to see a result that doesn't authentically display their uniqueness.



Above: A new - or indeed experienced - director wants to see the work they create display their creative uniqueness.

So, while that director may earn a client they can add to their CV, they might also lose a spot they can proudly add to their reel knowing that it aired to an audience of millions. They have to recut the spot for their reel, which earns less acclaim by it not being the *final* spot. This is the same for experienced directors who need to keep refreshing their reels with new work. The adage that you're only as good as your last job is still the case.

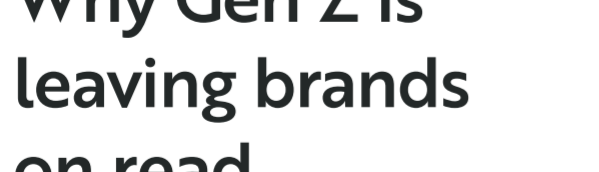
“ In an ideal creative landscape, there would be no need for director's cuts as everyone would share the same vision.

Everyone involved in crafting an ad campaign wants nothing more than authenticity and for that campaign to be the best it can be. Brands and agencies want to be transparent about their ethos and values, and production and post companies want to enthusiastically showcase their best talents. To work together as a creative system, clients must pick the creative briefs that best align with their core campaign message, connect with creatives for the talents and styles they seek, and trust these production and post experts to do their best work.

In an ideal creative landscape, there would be no need for a director's cut as everyone would share the same vision; this may seem naive and utopian but it would be better for all involved, clients, agency and directors alike.

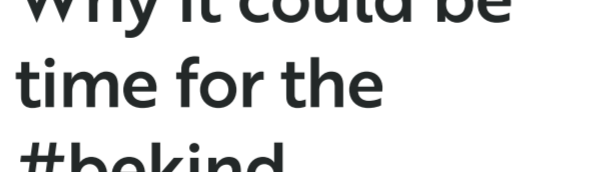


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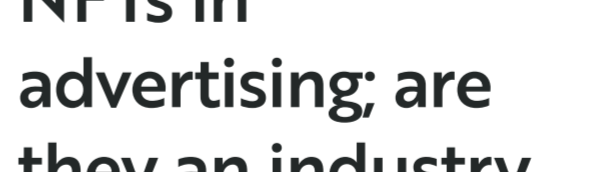
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