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ALEX GORDON

The idea: Brand semiotics
The man: Alex Gordon
Words: Peter Firth
Visuals: Joanna Tulej

The language of semiotics is everywhere. We decode hundreds of signs every day. From traffic lights to cereal boxes, we instinctively uncover hidden meanings in the iconography we see in the world around us. Now Alex Gordon, with his agency [Sign Salad](#), is using semiotics to help brands create messages and reach consumers.

'Semiotics is about understanding the relationship between branding and culture through the medium of signs,' says Gordon. 'Crucially, this is about how the messages that brands communicate about themselves have an unconscious impact on consumer responses, opinions and behaviour.'

Cultural convergence

Through understanding where a brand sits in relation to the culture that surrounds it, Gordon uses semiotics to bring brands closer to their target audiences.

'We run texture analysis to understand all of the signs, symbols and images that a brand uses to communicate its narrative, value and purpose,' says Gordon. 'Then we look at emerging culture shifts, evaluate how this is affecting the brand and then position the brand to make sure it is culturally relevant.'

Demographic dive

A key technique that Gordon uses to understand how a brand will be received is demographic diving. Gordon argues that universal rules for how people will react to messages and signs can be inappropriate. In order to understand how best to employ messages, a rigorous understanding of different demographics is necessary.

'Communication and culture have different meanings for different ages, nationalities and ethnicities,' says Gordon. 'A demographic dive enables us to understand how the same message may be telling a different story, depending on the audience.'

Case in point

Sign Salad helped mobile operator [T-Mobile](#) to follow a new direction in its branding, moving away from notions of exclusivity towards an ethos of sharing. The mobile network's creative agency then incorporated the new direction into T-Mobile's marketing and advertising.

'The emerging cultural context of T-Mobile's target demographic of 18–30-year-olds was all about the narrative of inclusivity rather than exclusivity,' says Gordon. 'We showed them that there was a great opportunity to tell a new story, and to make sharing a prevalent ethos for that target audience.'

Top five take-outs

- 1: Use semiotics. Sign Salad evaluates the entire message communicated by a brand.
- 2: Employ the demographic diving technique. Sign Salad uses this key method to give brands an insight into how different people will respond to the same message.
- 3: Change your brand to fit the culture. Gordon draws on this technique to make sure that brands are relevant.
- 4: Build positive associations with your brand. People are receptive to hidden signs in your company's iconography.
- 5: Create positive signs in the landscape of your competition. It is common practice at Sign Salad to evaluate how a brand's rivals are perceived.



everything is
makeable,
anytime,
anywhere,
by anyone.

