

# FROM COLD CASE TO **GOLD CASE**

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# PREFACE

It's always a pity when a great idea doesn't get the case study film it deserves. Compare it to your last holiday. You ploughed through miles of snow, climbed a 3,000-meter mountain, just in time to experience an amazing sunset. Tell the story poorly, and it sounds like you hiked the Belgian Ardennes on a Wednesday afternoon. Tell the story right, and your audience will actually relive your experience.

Yet still, case study films remain every creative's nightmare. That's because they have become a medium on their own, almost demanding film directors skills from those making them. It is this observation that led to this guide. It's a combination of all my experiences of the last fifteen years, the structure is based on the idea that case films have a lot in common with short movies. This handbook will teach you to go from copywriter to screenwriter and use Plot, Genre and Structure to evolve from complacent to compelling, from messy to seamless – from case to story.

By sharing my observations with you, I hope your next idea will get the case study film it deserves.

Peter Ampe  
CCO

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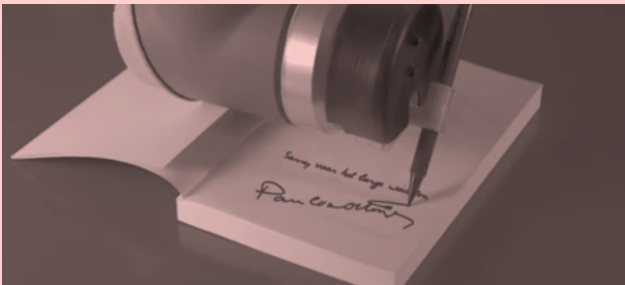


**PART I:**

**THE IMPORTANCE  
OF CASE FILMS**

but what if your favourite author has already passed away?

The impossible  
*Signing sessions*



Advertising Agency: DDB Belgium

Client: bol.com

Campaign: The Impossible Signing Sessions

Year: 2017



## Why every CFO should like case films

On a bright day in April 2016, my former CFO at DDB stopped me in the hallway with a grave look on her face. It was not the first time she had stopped me in the hall with that look, but this time I knew it was not to unkindly – or ‘kindly’ – remind me to complete my timesheets. This time it was about the hours our inhouse editor had spent on the case film for e-retailer bol.com.

“97 hours to be exact. All unbillable”, she said.

“They will be billable once this case gets us a new client”, I replied.

Deep down, however, I knew she was right: we did not count the hours on this one; we just wanted to get it right. Even the editor was getting slightly annoyed and started explicitly naming the edits V15, V16, Def, almost Def, Def final and Final final, hoping I would get the message.

In June that year, the same CFO stopped me in the hall once again, this time with a smile on her face. She was extremely happy with the Gold Lions award we had just won in Cannes. Just a few weeks later she was even happier, because a leading local mobile provider had invited us to work for them after seeing the case on our reel. From that moment on my CFO learned to appreciate case films. She even accepted the absurd amount of time we had been spending, because some ideas deserve a case film that’s on the same level as the idea. And, if it takes 97 hours to make a compelling two minutes, then so be it.

**CREATIVES LIKE CASE  
FILMS BECAUSE THEY  
WIN AWARDS;  
CFOS SHOULD LIKE  
THEM BECAUSE THEY  
WIN NEW BUSINESS.**

## No case film, no award

The shift from mono-channel ideas to multi-channel activations, brand experiences, services and product innovations has caused case films to become a necessity. A case film enables you to experience an idea seamlessly, giving you a feeling for the flow, different touch points and, ultimately, the overall results.

It makes a great tool for both agencies and brands alike. Marketing directors use case films for internal and external presentations to showcase the success of a campaign or a platform. Agencies enter them into award shows and put them on their reels to impress new and existing clients.

### **7,102 case films were made in 2019 (source: Cannes Lions)**

But let's face it, award shows are the main reason why case films are made. To give you an idea, 7,102 different case films were produced this year with the sole ambition of entering them in the 2019 edition of the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity. It shows how essential they are in today's judging system. Can you still win an award without a case film? I challenge you to do so. Can you change the colour of metal by investing time and money in your case film? I bet you can. To put it bluntly – no case film, no award.

However, a great case film will not save a mediocre idea. A bad idea will remain bad, even if you tie a pink ribbon round it. But the same pink ribbon tied to a great idea might have the power to turn Silver into Gold or Gold into a Grand Prix. On the other hand, a bad case film can kill a great idea.

## Inside the juror's head

How does a juror's mind work? To give you an idea, let me briefly recall my jury experience during the 2016 eurobest Direct Jury, which took place in Rome. The Italian capital is a fabulous historical place that I had been lucky enough to visit many times before. But when you're part of a jury, it doesn't matter which city you're in, you'll only see the inside of the same room for a few days.

Eurobest is a rather small award show when it comes down to judging conditions. But even so, we were still locked up with eight jurors in a small hotel room for three days. The bed was replaced by a round table and eight chairs. We spent every day watching the flat screen television on the wall, accompanied by the sound of a coffee machine grinding beans in the background. The lucky ones had a chair facing the small hotel room window. The only hope of a mental escape was the sight of the roof of the Basilica Del Sacro Cuore across the street. We were facing a life-size gilded figure of Jesus, shining like a promo star in his gold leaf coat. He was holding up his right hand in the direction of the Villa Borghese, two kilometres further down the road, where we would rather have been than in a standard double room occupied by eight people who were rather embarrassed to be sharing one bathroom. If you were lucky, someone was grinding coffee beans just when you were in there.



Our view from the jury room at eurobest 2016, Rome

Our category had 350 entries. Online pre-judging had narrowed this down to just under 200 cases. This was still a lot, or so the organisers warned us. We would take regular breaks, but even so, we became numb and indifferent – especially if one case was entered in different sub-categories. The fact that award shows have come up with a name to describe this phenomenon, says it all. They call it juror’s fatigue. It’s not yet an idiom in the Oxford Dictionary, but it’s a useful term to remember, because juror’s fatigue is the enemy of mediocre case films.

Even though Cannes reduced the number of categories in 2018 and put more weight on online pre-judging, judging is still a hard job. Even more so at home, where you have to carry on judging even though your kids need your attention. It’s tempting to judge a case film after the first 20 seconds. So, make sure your case is compelling right from the start.







**PART II:**

**MENTAL SHIFTS BEFORE  
YOU START WRITING**

EVERY YEAR IN THE UK  
OVER 19,000 CYCLISTS ARE INVOLVED IN ACCIDENTS

**LIFE PAINT**



Advertising Agency: Grey London

Client: Volvo

Campaign: Life Paint

Year: 2015

## From copywriter to screenwriter

When creatives present me with their first draft of a case film, I still come across word files filled with two minutes of text. No indication of what we will see, no indication of what we will hear and no indication of what we will feel. Just 30 lines of copy without even specifying whether these lines are meant to be spoken by a V.O. or formulated as supers. You're making a film, remember?

Don't start like this:

V.O. And off we go for two minutes of text, describing everything word by word, even when images would speak louder than words, pauses would create more tension, testimonials would bring authenticity and supers would create impact. But still we have this innate reflex to translate everything in text form and leave the editor to sort it out, because he's the one who has to find the corresponding images for every single word on the paper.

Start like this:

Fade in.

Ext. City by night. We see a close up of flickering lights. Cut to loads of bikes driving through the city. The music is building up a certain tension, as if something is going to happen.

The paragraph above is the start of Grand Prix winner *Volvo Lifepaint*. It dates from 2015 but is still a great example of what a case film should look like. Every component equates to a visual world. Every component breathes the same visual style; even the motion graphics of the texts are adapted to the idea. The specially composed music by Adam Halogen helps to put the right emphases, glorifying the product and setting a suburban mood of optimism.



Advertising Agency: AMV BBDO

Client: Libresse

Campaign: Viva La Vulva

Year: 2018

A more recent case study creating a coherent visual world is multiple Cannes Lions award winner *Viva La Vulva* for Libresse/Bodyform. This case film is based on the original three-minute love song for female genitals, the body part women feel most insecure about. To turn it into a case film, winning both a Glass Lion and a Titanium, the agency designed pulsing graphical vulvas to illustrate the results. This was done in the same style as the music video. They also kept the intervention of the V.O. to a minimum, again letting the images speak for themselves. Or sing, in this case. And killer one-liners made up the added V.O. Take the concluding line as example: “viva la vulva turned vulva shaming into vulva loving.”

Both examples show that, from the outset, you have to think in terms of video and music to tell your story, not solely text. So, start thinking like a screenwriter. You will need this skill later on in this handbook.

## Form your writer's collective

Here's the second mental shift: go from trying to do it on your own to asking for help. You might be able to come up with an idea by yourself, but every great case film is an exercise in co-creation. When you look at successful TV series, the secret of their success is talent combined with a group effort. An episode of *The Simpsons* might look like one great talented outburst, but a look behind the scenes teaches us that it is the result of many talents working together. Several screenwriters are involved, throwing scripts back and forth, re-writing episodes six or seven times. And when they think they have thought of every detail, they get everyone together to confront the script with reality. Even the voice actors are present to pressure test the jokes. So, there is a lot of work to be done to make success look easy.

### **"If a case film had opening credits, who would be in yours?"**

If you want a great case film, you shouldn't be the only one in the opening credits. Here's the minimum line-up you should surround yourself with:

- Creative team
- Strategic planner (to help with the challenge and results)
- Account director (who knows the client brief best and can provide results)
- Editor/motion designer (to help create a visual world)
- Sound engineer (to help with music and SFX)
- Critical audience (to organize a viewing on a big screen for colleagues)
- Script doctor (to help you fix the bugs)

The critical audience is important. Have the guts to show your case film to someone whose judgement you value. For me, that's my wife, who's also a former production director. I value her opinion, but even more I value her constructive criticism. Honest feedback is exactly what you need. Don't ask friends who will only flatter you. It won't help your case, just your ego.

Equally important: get a script doctor. In most cases this will be your creative director, but in addition, you can have an external script doctor, someone you value, who can give constructive feedback and be honest enough to say that the basic idea doesn't merit a case film. As a run up to Cannes 2019, I was consulted by a number of agencies, which just goes to show how insecure everyone is when it comes down to making case films. I'm no exception. Besides script doctoring, I also have my own script doctors.

**“Don't think you can do this on your own,  
invite the strategic planner and even the client.”**

**“Don't write like a novelist in splendid isolation,  
write like a screenwriter in collaboration.”**

## Make the case film part of the creative process

Creatives always sigh when I ask them to start thinking of a case film during the creative process of an idea. I agree, it might sound premature to think of the case film when the idea is in the embryo. But there's a good reason for starting early. Having award categories in mind will help you to spot the flaws in the campaign flow and detect new touchpoints. Thinking in terms of categories will also urge you to clearly determine your project's KPIs. Do you want to boost your sales? Change behaviour? Have the highest possible response rate? Drive traffic to stores? Or simply dominate the world press? Determining these questions upfront will help you make your work more relevant and the client happier.

This won't just make your campaign better; it will also improve your case study. You will know beforehand which video footage you will need to make it. If your idea needs a seeding movie or an after movie, make sure you shoot the extra material you might need. This could take the form of testimonials, footage of an installation setup or experts explaining the making. You will be glad to have all this extra footage when you start editing. It will also lower the production cost. I might be being too empathic, but since my confrontation with the CFO, the time we spend on cases is always in the back of my head.

### **“Go for the epic split: split the costs with your client.”**

I really believe that you should try to split the costs with your client. A case film is as important for them as it is for you. Case films are not just an award-bringing tool, they are also a promotional tool for everyone working on the project.