

GRUPO W

No-one knows what the future holds – but that, Daniel Granatta says, is what makes it exciting

I started this piece with the brief to talk about the future, or, rather, “our” future. But before embarking on that, I thought it would be a good idea to tell you about Saltillo, in Northern Mexico.

CHAPTER 1: SALTILLO, THE PAST.

Saltillo. Small, peaceful, boring. Have you ever heard of Saltillo? Well, it doesn't matter, actually. There's no reason why you should have, it's just the city where Grupo W has its headquarters, and from where we have travelled on an amazing ten-year journey that reached one of its highest points in 2008 with a ranking of fourth place in *The Gunn Report* list of interactive agencies. That day, the list started with Miami and continued with Stockholm and San Francisco, followed by Saltillo.

The weirdest thing about it wasn't that Saltillo was listed, but that Mexico was. Flooded by traditional media advertising, the biggest Mexican agencies have never worried to develop their digital infrastructures, leaving them in an awkward position today, because the audience for their campaigns is not where it used to be.

The void these companies left was, for us, like getting a backstage pass to the brands' dressing room, even if it meant being considered the tainted, “digital bit” at first. We worked in a discreet place: few worked in it and even fewer paid it any attention, so our references were fed by looking outside, not in. It was there that, for a long time, we have tried to plant the seeds of talent and hard work.

And then, surprise surprise, the world went nuts and the previously sidelined digital became the centre of everything.

No-one watches *Lost* on the TV in Mexico; they download the episodes before any internet feed reveals the next plotlines. People don't listen to their favorite shows via the radio, but through podcasts.

Every medium that is touched by “digital” becomes digital itself, because it's the only conceivable way for people to access the information first. That is until everything becomes digital, by which time it won't be labelled as such but will be termed “normal”.

This is a world in which projects erase the lines not just between advertising categories but between marketing and advertising themselves, and where the old formats don't disappear, but evolve into something else because of the changing media landscape that they helped to create.

Our ideas, that used to live on screen, have been forced to grow to survive (so they can reach that “digital” audience that is suddenly everywhere). When “Big ideas” in Mexico started to need digital, no one better than us to provide them.

Grupo W's team of 25 people was no longer sufficient and so we set about recruiting new talent.



Granatta... ‘We worked in a discreet place... It was there that, for a long time, we have tried to plant the seeds of talent and hard work’

CHAPTER 2: SALTILLO, THE PRESENT.

Saltillo. Small, peaceful, boring. Have you ever heard of Saltillo? Probably not, just like all those people from abroad who sent us their résumés. People from Russia, Ecuador, Spain, Colombia and Peru sent their portfolios with the high hope of working at Grupo W, while many Mexicans wouldn't consider working for us because Saltillo was small, peaceful and boring.

It reminds me of the phrase said by

the kid that Neo finds during his visit to the Oracle in *The Matrix*: “In order to bend the spoon, first, you have to understand there is no spoon.” To relate that to us: none of these people came to live in Saltillo; they came to work at Grupo W.

Our team continued to grow, picking up highly talented people with digital minds who were tired of not fitting in within the traditional agencies, and turning Saltillo into this kind of Mecca digital dumpster, until we were 65 people in two offices.

In addition, we moved our headquarters so that we now have a pool in the middle of the building. And we started collaborating on a regular basis as a production partner for agencies such as Goodby, Silverstein & Partners or Wieden & Kennedy. But even then, we kept feeling a little embarrassed about not being able to find all the local digital talent we wanted.

“Let's develop it,” someone said.

CHAPTER 3: SALTILLO, THE FUTURE.

Saltillo. Small, peaceful, boring. Have you heard of Saltillo? Maybe not, but it's the place where the students from Digital Invaders, our school of craft and digital creativity, live. A school we created in the building next to our office. Why should we pay for talent if it is cheaper to create it? Digital Invad-

‘I do think it's better to pursue the future, instead of waiting for it to come to you, and that it is better to question yourself constantly before the industry does that for you’

ers became our route to discover and nurture talent – not for us, but for Mexico. We only keep the best, but whether they stay or leave, they do so with a bit of digital in their souls.

EPILOGUE.

A team of almost 70 people, a school and a new office with a pool make up a present that once upon a time was just an imagined future.

I started this piece with the brief to talk about the future, or, rather, “our” future. But I don't have a clue about how it will be and we have decided to make our own future by adapting to our present circumstances.

I should say that I do think it's better to pursue the future, instead of waiting for it to come to you, and that it is better to question yourself constantly before the industry does that for you.

We made countless mistakes – yes, we did – but at the end of each year, we could always see that we were in a better position than the last.

Because the future, unknown, is an interesting place when you choose to build it without looking back. Even in Saltillo, a small, peaceful, boring place, but – at least within these four walls – terribly exciting.

Daniel Granatta is the creative director of Grupo W

At a glance

Founded 1999

Principals Miguel Calderón, chief executive; Ulises Valencia, chief creative officer; Daniel Granatta, creative director

Staff 69

Locations Saltillo, Mexico City

What would you like to see more of in 2010? Now that some tools (mobile, Facebook, Papervision, Unity) are over-explored, I'd like a return to good, simple ideas, instead of just hi-tech fireworks.

Which country's creativity (other than your own) do you most admire?

Sweden, the US, the UK and Japan. I very much like the technological maturity of their people and how campaigns make good use of that to engage them.