



# Creative Certainty™

*Why it is so important, we even trademarked it.*

By Matthew Clark

So here's the thing: in the same way you should never explain a joke, you probably shouldn't try to explain a tagline or a mission statement or your *raison d'être* either.

But after a number of years of explaining what makes Subplot different from other design and branding firms, this phrase just kept coming up: *Creative Certainty*. And people were intrigued. They asked questions, they wanted to know more. It was both a door-opener and a nice way to sum up what we have learned after almost 30 years in the game.

## Creative Certainty is not an oxymoron.

Rule two of explaining an idea is never to start with what it is *not*. Rule broken.

But *creativity* and *certainty* are not necessarily mutually exclusive ideas, regardless of what many designers and consultancies will tell you.

Of course we all know brand consultants and agencies that live for workshops, tissue sessions, big data dumps, research panels and seemingly-empirical techniques to develop and refine brands – only to end up with arduous, jargon- and adjective-filled obfuscations that resemble hefty doorstops not actionable strategies. And we know design firms whose hipster-beard-wearing, hand-waving, Instagram-obsessed designers posit pretty wallpaper solutions and typographic exercises as poor substitutes for actual design solutions. Granted.

But creativity can be pragmatic. And certainty can be inspiring.

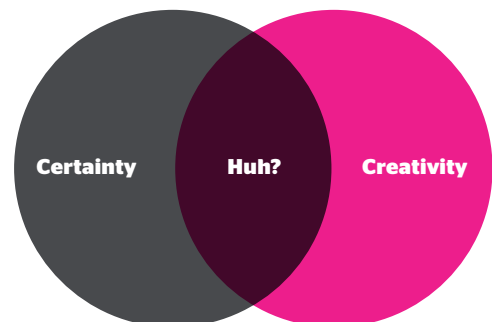
## Creative Certainty is not a “middle ground”.

If you are neither hot nor cold, you are lukewarm. If you are neither smart nor dumb, you are average. But *creativity* and *certainty* don't need to work that way.

A balance of *creativity* and *certainty* is not a midpoint along a spectrum of two polar opposites. That would make you really neither, but rather some sort of jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none. We all know these design firms, but none of that right now.



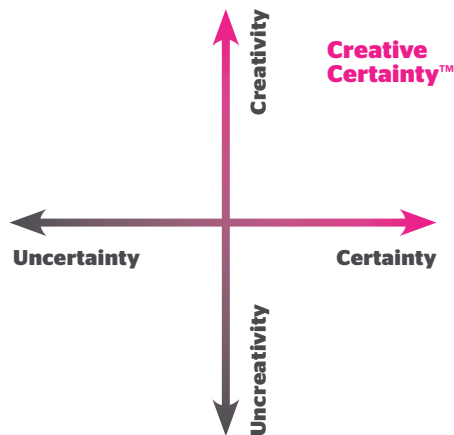
Nor are *creativity* and *certainty* two halves of some non-committal Venn diagram, where only parts of the two concepts overlap, creating a third territory. That would still assume too strong of a polarity, and too much territory that does not naturally overlap.



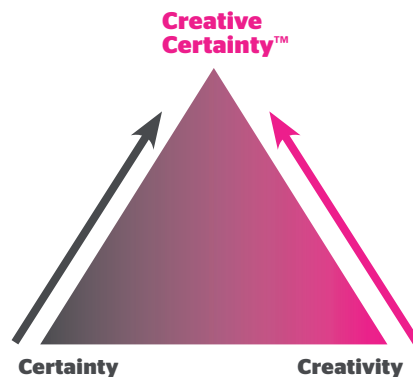


## Creative Certainty is the pinnacle of both principles.

To borrow from marketing consultants, maybe *Creative Certainty* is in the top right quadrant on a matrix chart, where *creativity* and *certainty* are both at their full strength.



Maybe *creativity* and *certainty* unite to form the apex of a triangle; not a midpoint as much as the peak of both expressions.



Perhaps the triangle is a volcano, where *Creative Certainty* is the pyroclastic flow spewing from the catalysts of *creativity* and *certainty*. Ok, maybe that goes too far.

## Or maybe Creative Certainty is just good Design.

That's a capital "D", you'll notice, not the small "d" design of pretty graphics and layouts.

This "Design" is problem-solving, and involves setting up new systems and ways of thinking. That makes tools easier to use and ideas easier to read and grasp. That examines culture and behaviours from the bottom up, and helps products and services fit well into our lives.

That's what our clients come to us for after all: smart, consumer-focused, business-asset, grounded "certainty" that is brought to life with inspiring, breakthrough, game-changing "creativity".

To put it another way, *Creative Certainty* is deductive, decisive, pragmatic, didactic, methodical, empirical, clear-eyed, fresh-faced, eyebrow-furrowing, poetic, alchemic, chimeric, grenade-throwing, mind-blowing, rule-breaking, breathtaking, kick-at-sacred-cows, maybe-not-what-you-expected-but-for-sure-what-you-need brand design.

A big claim. But one we are prepared to stand behind.

*Matthew Clark is Founder & Creative Director of Subplot, an internationally recognized brand design firm based in Vancouver.*