



WORDS:
Rob Alderson
FEATURED PROJECT:
Force of Nature, by Field
www.field.io



SPECIAL REPORT

MOTION MATTERS

Landor's recent acquisition of ManvsMachine made a powerful statement, says **Rob Alderson** – motion is no longer an add-on, but an essential part of branding



ManvsMachine founder Mike Alderson faces a conundrum. “We wish we didn’t have to say that we’re a design and motion studio,” he says. “We wish we could just be a design studio, and people would get it because you should assume that motion is part of it these days. Can you think of a logo that doesn’t feature on-screen somewhere? I can’t.”

Jane Geraghty, president of brand agency Landor Associates, agrees. “Screen-based design is on the increase given that screens are on the increase,” she says. It’s not surprising that Alderson and Geraghty are singing from the same hymn sheet, seeing as Landor brought a majority stake in ManvsMachine at the beginning of November – “part of an ongoing strategy at Landor to broaden its creative capabilities,” as the company put it at the time.

Predicting how branding will evolve in the future is a difficult game on a crowded field. We’re surrounded by

message evangelists, storytellers-in-chief and digital prophets telling us that the branding landscape of tomorrow will be defined by emotional connections, meaningful interactions, or TMI (which Fast.Co has described as “a Venn diagram of transparency and romance”).

But surely one confident bet would be that motion will play a pivotal role in the future of branding? Surely, in fact, it already should be playing that role?

TAKING MOTION SERIOUSLY

Apparently not, according to London-based agency weareseventeen, which has worked with the likes of Channel 4 and Bank of America. “We’re not sure motion is being taken entirely seriously by brands,” says Stephen Simmonds, who founded the studio with George Alexander and Adam Brandon. “It doesn’t often seem like a fundamental part of a brand’s strategy – it seems like an add-on, or a nice-to-have, which is strange

because you’d think that motion would now be integral to a brand identity. It seems like it’s only a small number of clients who want to really move forward with it.”

Mike Alderson agrees that motion design can still be seen as an afterthought, but he believes things are now beginning to go in the right direction. “It’s still surprising when you meet people and have to explain to them why they should be doing what we’re doing. So many times we have to tell people that we can bring character to a brand that you can’t bring without motion, so we can make the same logo seem cheeky, or deadly serious or slightly scary just by the way it moves. And when you explain that to somebody, then they get excited.”

This is an important point – it’s not that brands should be ticking off motion design as part of an integrated 21st century creative strategy, it’s that motion design can invigorate a brand’s expression in hugely exciting and engaging ways. >

FORCE OF NATURE o *Field* o www.field.io

Any runner knows the feeling of getting into their stride, and this sensation formed the basis of Field's interactive Force of Nature installation for Nike.

Created for the company's Innovation Summit in London in 2015, it featured a treadmill fitted with custom sensors hooked up to Microsoft Kinect technology. As the runner started picking up pace, he or she was confronted with a dazzling wall of

visual effects remixing their movements into an immersive experience. Interestingly, apart from the Nike swoosh appearing at the start, Force of Nature took place in a largely unbranded section of the (otherwise heavily branded) exhibition space, which echoes what Field co-founder Vera-Maria Glahn says about creating an experience that "first feels right, then feels Nike."

EDITIONS
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Universal Everything

www.universaleverything.com

Editions At Play is an online publishing platform launched by Google Creative Lab and Visual Editions, which showcases "books that cannot be printed and immersive literature". The developers approached Matt Pyke's Universal Everything studio to create the brand identity, which cleverly combines nods to both the analogue and digital worlds. The word mark is reduced to a series of black vertical strips that represent both books on a shelf and the building blocks of binary code. A series of animated treatments are then added to this framework to change the look and feel of the brand identity as required. The iterations are endless and can be created with a specific title or author in mind.

› Lithuanian studio Korb has worked with clients including Nike, Audi and Gucci, both directly and via agencies such as DixonBaxi and VCCP London. According to its founder Rimantas Lukavičius, motion design “is the way to show things and describe sensations which were invisible and unimaginable before. This kind of storytelling empowers brands to blur the limits between real and surreal.”

EMOTIONAL THINKING

So motion design could and should be playing a really central role in how we think about brands. “In terms of forging an emotional response, motion is just as important as colour or composition,” explain’s Simmonds.

This idea of emotional response links to the connections brands now have to make with their consumers. For Vera-Maria Glahn, co-founder of Field, the way brands perceive themselves – and are perceived by others – makes 360-degree thinking vital.

“A brand needs to know not only what it looks like, but how it sounds, how it moves, how it changes when it gets a different type of response,” she says. “It’s very clear that brands must have answers to those questions within their brand design. That’s the perspective we take in branding projects, thinking about behaviour and interaction, and a dialogue that goes in both directions.”

Field is renowned for its eye-catching installation work, often with an interactive element. But increasingly, according to Glahn, companies are bringing Field in to advise on overarching brand strategy at a much earlier stage. For example during the past year, Field has been helping Monotype with its ongoing brand strategy, drawing on its wide-ranging art and design knowledge as well as its very specific motion design expertise. One of the most impressive fruits

of this collaboration was Type Reinvented, three digital art installations presented at Le Book in Paris.

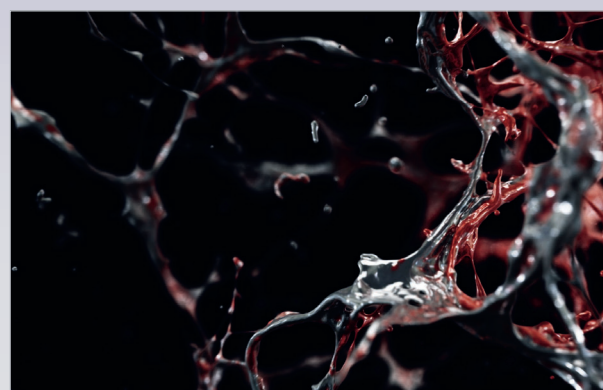
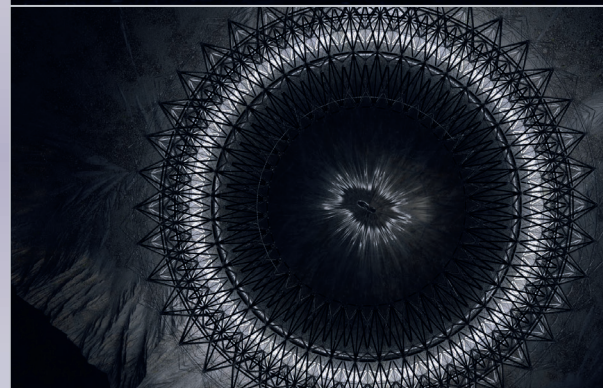
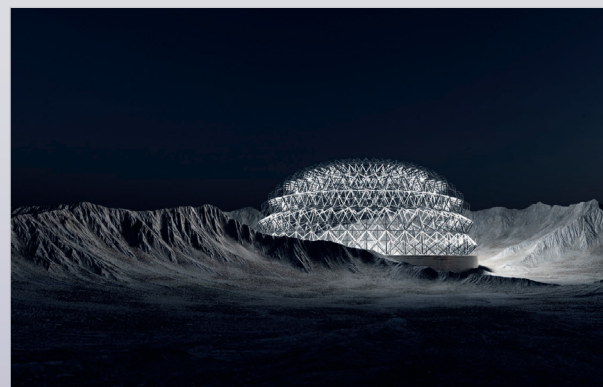
CLIENT RELATIONS

Importantly in these collaborations, Field is helping to define the core brand personality, rather than just taking the pre-agreed brand values and transforming them into something pretty for the client. That way of working with motion design is increasingly obsolete, Glahn believes.

She says: “Those hierarchy-based models where you have layers and layers of people who develop ideas and then trickle them down to the people who actually build them is changing very noticeably. We really enjoy working with brands directly because we have the chance to suggest ideas that are not what they might have expected.”

Field’s fruitful ongoing relationship with Nike – which has involved the much-lauded installations for the Force of Nature and Hyperfeel campaigns – is built on two-way trust. “Nike is very open-minded and has very strong people in-house who have the confidence to be convinced about an idea because they trust their own instincts,” Glahn says.

Similarly, Mike Alderson thinks working directly with clients is by far the best way to approach commissions, and he agrees with Glahn that the fewer layers involved in the process, the better the eventual outcome for all parties. “You get to have the discussion and the debate with the client yourself,” he explains. “If you lose that discussion, then you’ve lost and that’s fine, you can work with that. But in a lot of agencies there’s an awful lot of second-guessing going on where somebody is second-guessing their boss, who is second-guessing their boss and then two weeks before delivery, you get to hear from the

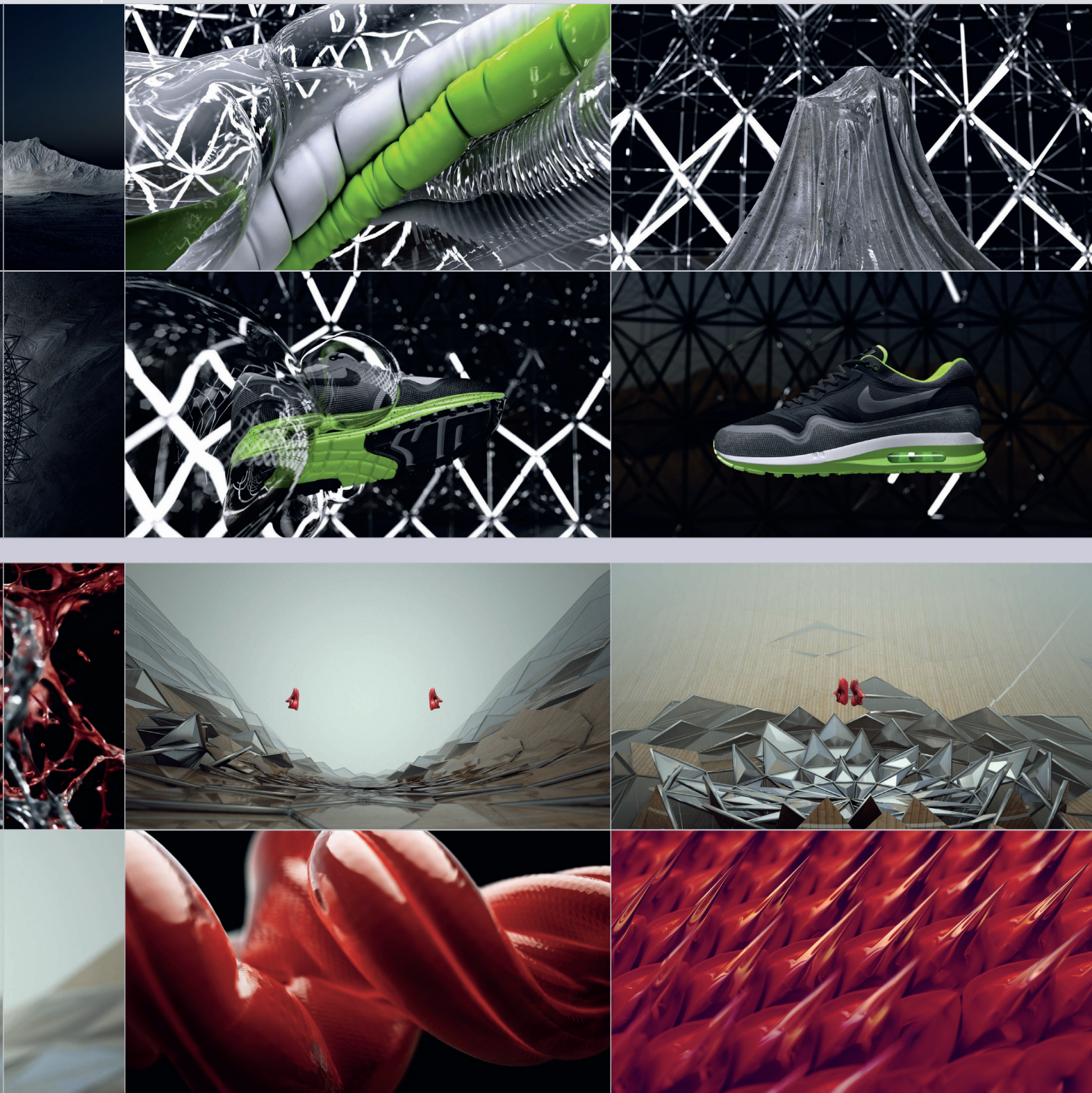


NIKE KD 8 AND AIR MAX LUNAR 1 ◉ Korb ◉ www.korb.tv

Lithuanian agency Korb describes its mission as “creating imagery that inspires” and nowhere is this more apparent than in its ongoing relationship with Nike. The team has worked on two collaborations with the client, starting with

an extraordinary piece for the Air Max Lunar 1 in 2014 wherein the shoe comes alive in a startlingly-lit pavilion in a rocky wasteland. The studio followed up with a piece for the KD 8 basketball trainer, which is shown hovering above

a futuristic jagged court, intercut with shots that take viewers inside the very fabric of the shoe. Both use organic, animalistic animations to capture the dynamism of the product and feature audio from the Echolab sound design studio.





ALL 4 • [weareseventeen](http://weareseventeen.com) • www.weareseventeen.com

All 4 brings together Channel 4's linear channels, on-demand services and other digital content in one place. Magpie Studio designed a colourful new static marque and weareseventeen was

commissioned to develop the brand identity and its on-screen applications. The studio worked closely with Channel 4's in-house agency 4creative to create a motion design mechanism

based around the idea of 'push', with bespoke iterations for different All 4 channels and services. The idea was then rolled into the design of the interface and promotional packages.

person who counts. And lo and behold, they've got a different opinion." He continues: "We did a few high-profile jobs that didn't turn out as well as they could because we were brought in quite late by big agencies, and too much was promised and signed off before we could flex our muscles."

Now, as part of the Landor group, ManvsMachine hopes that some of these frustrations can be bypassed. News of the majority stake acquisition surprised many people, but for Jane Geraghty it made perfect sense in the current branding climate.

"It's our job to guide our clients about how best to tell their stories," she explains. "In a world where brand really is evident in so many more interesting and diverse ways, we were looking to accelerate our capabilities in the world of motion design."

CULTURAL IDENTITY

Landor was drawn to ManvsMachine for many reasons, Geraghty says, but first and

foremost it was the sheer quality of its portfolio. "I think they have a very similar creative ethos to Landor," she says. "They are happy to challenge where necessary and have a real commitment to doing effective and very creative work."

And there were obvious advantages for ManvsMachine and its ambitions too. Alderson says the studio has missed out on "a few really exciting opportunities because we were too small," frustrations felt keenly by him and his team because "it was nothing to do with creative reasons."

Now with Landor's clout behind the team, Alderson welcomes the prospect of being able to compete on a more level playing field. "We have our big brother in the playground now. When we need them to step in, they step in, whether we just want them to prod someone in the chest or punch someone in the face," he laughs. "It feels like there are no excuses any more for us missing out on jobs, because hopefully we can be a

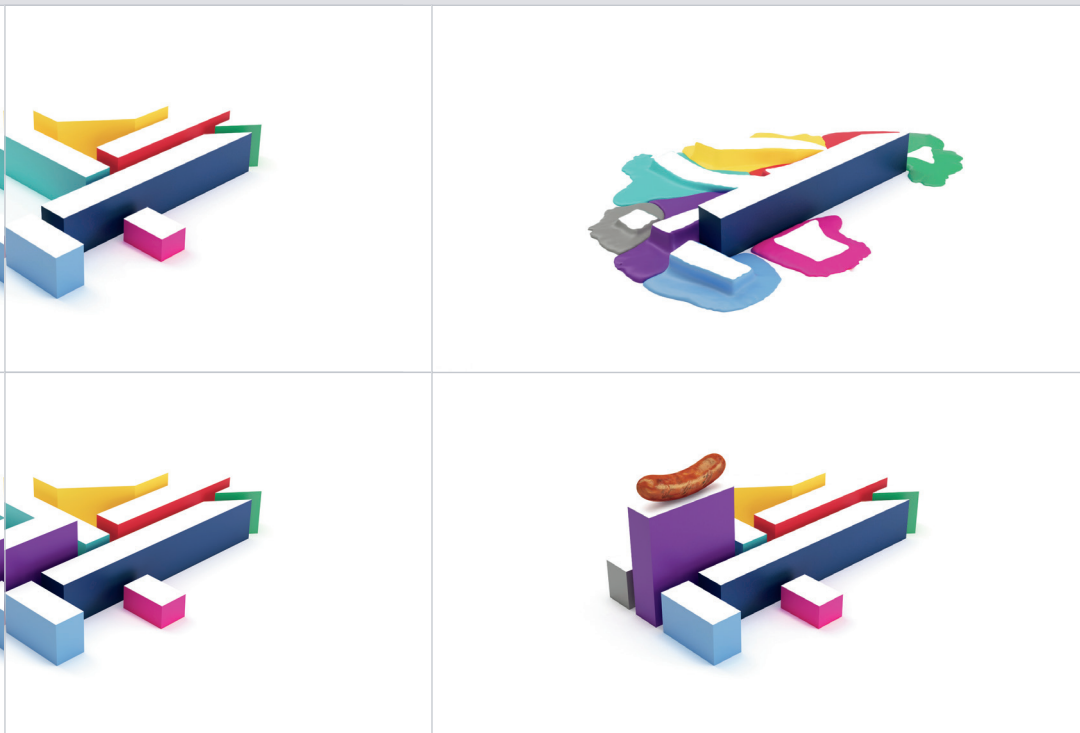
cool company for the clients who want us to be a cool company, and we can be a very impressive, slick operation for the clients who need us to be that."

BOUTIQUE MENTALITY

That said, ManvsMachine's founders know that its 'boutique culture' is intrinsically linked to its creative excellence. The idea is not to grow hugely in London; rather the team want to set up a small studio on the West Coast of America, followed in time by one on the East Coast.

This boutique culture is almost impossible to fake, which can cause problems for big agencies that set up their own motion design divisions, aiming to compete with specialist studios like Field, ManvsMachine or Universal Everything.

"They are trying to force a boutique mentality into an absolute monster of a company, so it's a funny one," Alderson says. "That's what Landor figured – we could kid

**XBOX****ManvsMachine**www.manvsmachine.co.uk

Earlier this year Microsoft launched a drive to change the way we see the Xbox, moving it from being a dedicated gaming device to a versatile home entertainment hub. As part of this campaign, ManvsMachine worked closely with the Xbox team in Seattle to create "a motion brand language for all on-screen exposure" – from TV advert tags to longer animations. "This became the inspiration for the 'morphing X' design, organically folding layers of the logo inside-out and never repeating the exact same form twice," the studio explains. It was a hit both in the design world and, more importantly, among the hard-to-please gaming community.



› ourselves and try and start our own motion department, or we could just go to the best one out there and say, 'Are you interested in joining us?' I have a lot of respect for that as a model."

SIZE MATTERS

There does seem to be a correlation between studios that stay relatively small in terms of headcount and those doing the best work at the moment. ManvsMachine has only 20 staff and won a D&AD Black Pencil this year. It was also ranked fourth in the UK Studio Rankings 2015, Computer Arts' annual peer reputation survey – notably climbing eight places since 2014. Universal Everything, which has just six employees, placed sixth.

Alderson believes that being small is more about a mentality than actual staffing levels, but he acknowledges that having lower overheads meant ManvsMachine had the luxury of being choosier about the work it took on. "It means we dance to the beat of our own drum a little bit more. We turned away any work that we didn't think would get us to the super high concept, top line level as quickly as we could. It was an attitude from day one – we wait for the right opportunities and never fuck up. That was our business model."

Vera-Maria Glahn, whose London-based Field studio has 12 employees, found the same thing. "Being a relatively small entity gives us the agility and the freedom to make the best recommendations to a potential new partner and say, 'This is what we think you should be doing.' If we're not aligned in that, then maybe we don't work together this time."

This same independent spirit also allows the Field team to dedicate a lot of time to research and development, both as part of client commissions and as self-initiated projects. These learnings keep the studio up to date with technological innovations and ahead of many of its competitors in this field. "I think because we're independent, we can invest time into

things we are excited about and interested in, and we don't have to justify why to anyone," Glahn explains.

Looking to the future, it seems inevitable that motion design will play an increasingly prominent role in the overall branding process, simply because of the ways we interact with media now, but it seems unlikely that it will come to dominate branding. The key thing is to start thinking about motion design as a tool – perhaps even a critical one – rather than an end in itself.

"The art of branding is very much the same even though the industry has changed and each brief has its own set of rules and constraints," explains Stephen Simmonds at weareseventeen. "The fact that we have motion design as a tool doesn't

really affect the way we design – we use it to give more possibilities to do different things. It's more about the whole process, being able to think 'What is the right answer to this brief?' and then using motion to realise it."

Motion design used inappropriately is incoherent at best, and annoying at worst. The dream for Mike Alderson is simply that it will cease to be a topic of conversation at all. "It's nice to think it will become an equal, and by becoming an equal it won't get mentioned. It's just design, application and execution," he says. "What happens after it evens out will be interesting." Time will tell, but if we're now talking about a 100-year-old company buying ManvsMachine, might in 100 years it be a case of a ManvsMachine acquiring a Landor? ●

5 WAYS TO MASTER MOTION

As motion continues to play an increasingly important role in almost every branding project, here are a few tips from the professionals about getting the best results

01 — START EARLY

Bring the experts into the process as soon as possible. If a branding project has already been put together and then motion designers are brought in to make it move, you won't feel the full benefit. Motion design should be an intrinsic part of brand thinking, not an afterthought.

02 — TRUST THE EXPERTS

Following on from the above, if you've made the effort to collaborate with motion specialists, there's no point just having them rubber-stamp your ingrained way of thinking. Give them the time and space to explore and challenge your preconceptions and, in Vera-Maria Glahn's words, "have the confidence to be convinced."

03 — BE FLEXIBLE...

According to Jane Geraghty, president of Landor, brand coherence is much more

important in this day and age than brand consistency. Give the motion designers the freedom and autonomy to push the brand in directions that make the most of their medium even if that means stretching previous understandings of a brand's parameters.

04 — BUT DON'T BE TOO FLEXIBLE

That said, know when to stop. Motion design for its own sake is pointless. Motion design that goes too far can be really irritating and actively damage a brand's positioning. And sometimes, albeit rarely, nothing needs to move.

05 — DOCUMENT IT WELL

This seems obvious, but think about how motion design elements can live on after a branding project has been completed. If motion is an integral part of the outcome, then it should also be an integral part of how it's presented online.