

# thenetworkone Exchange Programme:

## DDI, Australia & Grabarz & Partner, Germany

*As part of thenetworkone exchange programme, Creative Directors from Germany and Australia swapped places this summer. They immersed themselves in different teams in agencies on opposite sides of the world, made friends and learnt a lot in the process.*

*We caught up with Chris d'Arbon (DDI, Sydney) and Yannick Labbé (Grabarz & Partner, Germany) to find out what they thought of the experience...*

### **How have you found the exchange programme?**

Chris – It's been awesome! I didn't know what to expect, but the culture at Grabarz is fantastic. Everyone has been super cool, supportive and very interested, coming up to me and asking about Australia, home and all kinds of things.

I'm working on an international team as a Creative Director. In the team there are Italians, Swiss, French, Germans, Americans so there's been a bit of comradery in the team because half of us aren't from Hamburg (or Germany at all), so we're all in the same boat and it's brought us together. It's been great to work with all these different people, languages and cultures.

Yannick – It's super nice! I've had a great team, they were very welcoming and we did a few cool projects. DDI in Australia is smaller than Grabarz, so it's much more of a hands-on experience. That was very cool because I got the feeling that I got things moving. People were very nice, welcoming and professional.

### **What is different about your agencies?**

C – They differ in size: DDI is a smaller boutique agency, we do a lot more branding and design focused work. Grabarz is bigger and they do a lot of advertising. Germany is the land of the big car accounts – there's all these massive German car brands that are built here, so they're a big deal! Grabarz work on a couple of them, which is really cool to see because car work in Australia is often appropriated from Europe. It's great to come over and work on projects where they start.

Y – Grabarz has over 200 employees and DDI has maybe 20% of this, so the processes are very different. However, what surprised me was that somehow you always meet the same characters! It's nice that even though the agencies differ, there's a general vibe that people that are interested in advertising are the same on every continent. There's an understanding that's there from the start. Of course, the economies are very different also – Australia has 22mil inhabitants, which is about a quarter of what you have in Germany, so the accounts, budgets, work and tone of voice is different. There are so many variances that we could talk about, but basically, they don't *really matter*, and that's the nice thing that I took home from this experience. If you like your job and you like to be a creative in this industry, it doesn't matter for whom you work, what really counts is the people that you work with. To me at least, it really doesn't matter how big or small the agency is.

### **What have you learnt from the experience?**

C – DDI is more focused on design, whereas Grabarz is more of an advertising-centric agency, so a big portion of that has been ideation and conceptual work.



(Left) Yannick Labbé, Grabarz & Partner; (Right) Chris d'Arbon, DDI

Sometimes it's a tough process, because you don't have the inspiration or you're struggling to wrap your head around the brief. I've learnt to get through that process upfront and making sure the idea is super, super strong before jumping into any visualisations.

To focus on concepts and ideas, how they work and making sure they're awesome, has been really cool.

Y – I was at DDI for 3 weeks, a few weeks less than Chris, so it was a brief period of time to learn a lot, but what I took home with me is that it's very good to be confronted with situations that you can't envision at all. Anything could have happened, so it was a very surprising thing that everything worked out as well as it did and sometimes it's just better to make it up as you go along than to plan everything!

### **How was the agency culture?**

C – Culturally it's been super cool, the people have probably been the highlight, meeting all these weird, amazing, charismatic creatives – they're a real motley crew of characters and they took me under their wing. It was my birthday while I was here and they threw me a party; I've been cruising around outside of work hours with people as well.

Y – Same thing, it's always all about the people. If the guys at DDI hadn't been as great as they were, the trip wouldn't have been worth it! We had lots of laughs and lots of great times.

### **Would you recommend the exchange programme?**

Y – For sure! I'd always recommend experiencing situations that are out of your comfort zone. As a challenge to yourself, you should definitely try this unique experience.

C – 100% I would recommend it. It's been cool, not just from a work perspective but from a life perspective too. You're living in an apartment, you get public transport to work, you're *living*. You're not a tourist you're working there and experiencing another side to the city. Thanks to thenetworkone for connecting us! Everyone has been asking about this arrangement, saying "How does this happen? Why are you here? Why is this Australian guy in Hamburg?" and we've mentioned thenetworkone to everyone. It's a great thing to be a part of: connecting people, agencies, creatives, lives and stories that otherwise would never have come in contact with each other. It's really cool that you guys are facilitating that – it's been awesome. Everything has been positive for us both.

