

# the glue society



*The Creative Industries Innovation Centre (CIIC) produced this feature article for its website, [Creativeinnovation.net.au](http://Creativeinnovation.net.au), to showcase the experiences and knowledge of an innovative Australian creative company.*

The Glue Society is one of the most respected creative collectives in the world thanks to a unique business model that blurs the lines between advertising, art and film.

As a 'creative collective', the business is made up of writers, designers, artists and directors based in Sydney and New York.

Its founders, Jonathan Kneebone and Gary Freedman, have pioneered a business model that focuses solely on conceptualising and executing creative ideas for clients in contrast to 'traditional' advertising agencies, which also offer services such as strategy, media planning and account service.

By specialising in creativity, The Glue Society has remained a nimble, independent player in a market dominated by multinational networks like Publicis, BBDO and Ogilvy. It is celebrated as an award-winning, cutting-edge consultancy with a client list that includes brands such as Virgin Mobile, BT Financial, Elle McPherson Intimates and BankWest.

Since launching in 1998, The Glue Society has branched

beyond advertising into film direction and independent art projects, making it one of the most unpredictable creative collectives in Australia.

The Glue Society is currently planning its debut into TV production, and hopes its future projects will impact popular culture and convey a strong sense of humanity in a world that's increasingly absorbed with technology.

### ***How would you describe your business model?***

We're distinguished by our ability to write/conceive ideas and direct/execute them from start to finish. We do not have permanent clients, preferring to work on a case-by-case basis. Our ability to be useful at every stage of the advertising process has ensured we've remained relevant to a far wider audience than if we'd specialised in one particular 'area' of business.

### ***How did you calculate the risks/returns of entering this market?***

The downside of being a pioneer in the field is that you have to educate the entire market as to how to use you and work with you. At the beginning, it was necessary to create our own work, which we felt epitomised our skills and abilities, to attract the right type of customers. By starting slowly, but deliberately, we were able to grow steadily.

### ***What were your start-up costs?***

We were able to start without borrowing any funds because

## Case study



Cover image:  
Art meets advertising for  
42 Below Vodka

This page:  
Sculpture by the Sea,  
Sydney 2006  
*Hot With A Chance  
of Late Storm.*

we [Jonathan Kneebone and Gary Freedman] were the only overhead. To some extent we were defined by what we didn't want to do as much as what we wanted to do. We did have a plan, but we decided very early on that flexibility was vital if we wanted to be relevant to a lot of different types of client.

We like to do work which goes against the establishment to one degree of disorientation, and we set out a mission which read: "We want to make a living doing what we love doing". Those truths exist today. The ethos saturates both our name and the work we still do.

### ***Your company has grown from 2 staff to 10 in 11 years. How have you managed that growth?***

We are now 10 staff in two offices in Sydney and New York. We are very careful about who we choose to join the Society. We tend to look for people who have ambitions to do things they haven't yet achieved – the headspace is more important than the evidence of success. We prefer people who recognise that creativity should be a learning, experimental process as opposed to simply doing what you've done before.

### ***What business indicators do you use to measure your company's performance?***

We aim to be profitable enough to invest in our own creative futures. We use any additional income we have to subsidise art projects, television programming and other creative endeavours such as books and magazines to help build our own creative profile and relevance.

In the past we have set out to create work that would

change the way advertising is done, and were lucky enough to be awarded a Titanium award at the Cannes International Advertising Festival and the public art prize at Sculpture by the Sea, Sydney. While awards are not our mission, they do reflect to some extent success at breaking new ground. Our latest aim is to create a piece of television entertainment which represents a Glue Society approach to life. We are very close to getting some buy in to a proposal.

### ***What's your approach to risk and experimentation?***

If we were asked to make a car, we'd be interested in what a Glue Society type of car might be. It would have to deliver on the key objective of being different – not just for difference sake, more that by applying some new thinking, the end result will be more engaging to the user. New connections would result. Applying that to a car, for example, would end up with a more rewarding driving experience. Or a more enjoyable journey. Why should it be the way it has always been?

We all uphold a firm threshold of 'what is us' and what our benchmarks are, and that has to be reached before we can sleep at night.

### ***Looking back, is there anything you should have done differently?***

Perhaps we could have afforded to have more confidence earlier. When we decided that our hunch was right, sure enough the opportunities came along.

## ***What are the primary traps for small businesses setting up in this sector?***

You are only as good as your last project. And you can't use past success as a guarantee of future success. You are always relying on your wits to make the NOW work.

## ***What trends are driving your business?***

We believe humanity and simplicity are set to become very powerful forces. Technology is making our lives more dynamic, meaning we are somehow connected to more things and information. But we will be aiming to inject into everything we produce an almost overwhelming sense of humanity. It seems strangely obvious to say that people need people more than anything else. But stating the obvious isn't a bad thing either, right now.

## ***In 1999 The Glue Society moved into TVC direction and in 2005 it launched its first art project - a melting ice cream van - at Sculpture By the Sea in Sydney. Why did you diversify into these areas?***

The value of doing things we haven't done before continues to broaden the type of creative opportunities we are asked to contribute to.

## ***What are your biggest challenges looking forward?***

As a creative company, we see our bigger opportunity as contributing to popular culture, the national economy and the arts. We also look forward to being able to diversify wherever on the planet we may be able to exist. Such growth needs to be managed without compromising our key creative skill sets or our own identities.

## AT A GLANCE

Name:	The Glue Society
Website:	<a href="http://www.gluesociety.com.au">www.gluesociety.com.au</a>
Location:	Sydney NSW and New York USA
Sector:	Advertising, production and art
Launch:	1998
Directors:	Jonathan Kneebone & Gary Freedman
Total staff 2009:	10
Products/services:	Writing, design, art, direction
Milestones:	Winner of the Titanium Award at Cannes Advertising Festival, D&AD Silver, Clio & One Show Gold, Sculpture by the Sea Public Art Prize, voted CREATIVE magazine's 'Hotshop of the Year' in 2005 & 2008.

Article by Barbara Messer

## ABOUT CIIC

The CIIC supports the business of creative enterprise. It is an Australian Government initiative, part of the Enterprise Connect program and is supported by the University of Technology, Sydney.

## FIND OUT MORE

Visit [www.creativeinnovation.net.au](http://www.creativeinnovation.net.au), [www.enterpriseconnect.gov.au](http://www.enterpriseconnect.gov.au) or call the CIIC on 02 8217 5000 to find out how we can help your creative business.