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2018 DBA Design Effectiveness Awards

Opening address

Deborah Dawton, Chief Executive, Design Business Association

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Good evening to you all and welcome to The Brewery for the 2018 DBA Design Effectiveness Awards.

It's a pleasure to welcome you all here tonight to celebrate the irrefutable impact of design in business.

I'd like to start with a very warm thank you to our sponsors Epic Print, Red Setter, Stratton Craig and UPM Raflatac for their valued support of the DBA. I'd also like also extend a big welcome to Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport who is here this evening and all of our award judges. A huge thank you for bringing your expertise, enthusiasm and dedication to the judging process, ensuring the quality of debate and deliberation was first class.

A Bronze, Silver or Gold Design Effectiveness Award is certainly not easily won, but it's the rigour of the judging process that makes these awards unique and so coveted. Design effectiveness doesn't happen by chance. It is born out of the skilful commissioning and management of design, amalgamated with intelligent design thinking and execution. Your success tonight is a testament to the strength of your partnerships - the coming together of business acuity and creative prowess - and you should be extremely proud of the trophies you'll be taking home this evening.

I too am always incredibly proud when this night comes around. Proud to work in, and for an industry whose impact permeates every aspect of the economy and society. Whose work is intrinsic to driving growth and competitive advantage for organisations of all sizes and across all sectors. I'm proud of your ability to radically improve customer and citizen experiences of brands through their products and services; to define and bring to life purpose, to earn trust, and build engagement in ways that no other business function can, proving that design is the yeast in the business mix.

In today's challenging, fast moving markets, with an ever more discerning public, our customers, design has never been more relevant and its ability to impact on a positive future for the British economy will be clearly evidenced tonight. You only need look to the brands leading the field today – businesses that have strategically embedded design across their organisations to drive their success – to see how fundamental design will be to all thriving enterprises of the future. In fact if you x-ray the most successful start-ups in the last 10 years, you can see design sitting at the very heart of their organisations.

Our industry has unique characteristics that set us apart. And it's these characteristics – the way we think differently; the way we work differently; the way we aspire differently - that enable us to deliver this level of customer impact and financial return for the businesses we work in and for.

I've recently been speaking with Bo Burlingham, Editor-at-Large of Inc magazine in the US. I got in touch with him because in two words – and a book – he's summed up for me the very nature of the UK design industry: *Small Giants*. That's what you are. His book is about

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greatness, not in terms of your own size or profits, but in terms of service delivery, impact, outlook, motivations.

The DBA sits at the hub of our thriving design sector. When I look at the DBA's membership, I see businesses defined by their determination to be, not just good, but to be great at what they do. Driven by a genuine desire to be the best they can be at what they do, to create a stimulating place for their staff to work, to provide great client servicing, to make a wider positive impact beyond simply their own financial gains. No matter if you are a two-man band, or firm with studios across the globe, I'm pretty certain that for the majority of you, these objectives - whether defined in your business plan or not - will be at the beating heart of your consultancy. It's what gives this sector its unique mojo. And it's what makes the UK design industry so special.

And our industry wouldn't be what it is without those of you in the room tonight who sit within the businesses that invest in design; who have created the right context for design to flourish in your organisations. Your astute management of design is fundamental to the level of impact we'll hear about tonight.

We've actually achieved in the UK what many haven't globally, and that is that design leaders from across all business sectors, as well as all sorts of designers - industrial, brand, packaging, service, digital and so on - integrate so well together in the DBA, rather than associating simply in blinkered single discipline huddles. You value each other's expertise and you value the sharing of knowledge: we see this clearly in the success of the DBA's mentoring programme Twenty/Twenty, which pairs industry pioneers with rising design leaders of the future. The willingness of the mentors to share their experiences is evidence of a sector invested in its own future, and the long-term impact of this should not be underestimated.

So it's important to remember, especially on a night like this, that you may be each other's competition, but you are also each other's strength.

It's this combined strength, and the diversity of our offer, that powers the UK design sector's reputation for being world-leading. In a country with a thriving cultural and creative sector, which delivers nearly £100 billion to the economy each year, design is one of the fastest growing of all the creative industries. Your craftsmanship is world-renowned; your effectiveness is formidable. Creative *and* commercial - that's the reputation you've rightly earned.

We have clients from fourteen different international markets represented tonight, whose collaborations with British agencies have delivered significant impact for their businesses.

Our industry not only attracts overseas investment, it has rightly achieved destination status for the best design talent from around the world. This talent is drawn to the reputation of our industry, the diversity of projects on offer, and the culturally rich backdrop the UK provides for further creative stimulation. I don't think I need to convince anyone in this room of what that talent brings to our sector.

Maintaining reputation is now imperative. It is important to you individually as agencies. But more broadly than that, the profile and standing of our sector is pivotal to a thriving design industry, which in turn will help deliver a thriving economy. After all, design can be a cross cutting enabler in any business, in any sector. Its unique ability to work from the inside out across the entire supply chain can drive innovation, unearth growth opportunities and improve productivity and performance.

To ensure we remain at the top of our game, we need a healthy, flowing talent pipeline - and I call on Matt, whose presence here tonight is recognition of the importance he places on the design sector, to help us and the wider Creative Industries benefit from future immigration policies that support rather than hinder our world-standing, and to recognise the essential

and pressing need for investment in creative education, to further develop home grown talent.

A very wise man told me yesterday that you open the door to any future for a child who is numerate, literate and creative. Before any of us could talk or add up, we daubed paint blobs on paper! We drew pictures. It was instinctive. It was a way of expressing ourselves when we had no other way of doing so. But those paintbrushes are literally being snatched out of young people's hands. The option to pursue a career in this £100 billion industry needs to be instilled at a young age. Great designers take years to gestate and we're in the process of designing a generation of young people whose creativity is seen to be valueless. And we've also done a great job of convincing their parents that there isn't a future for them in creativity. Matt, I've never heard of a government cutting its investment in the thing that makes it a shed load of money. Please help us to turn the tide in government before we take to the streets on this, because the very future of the businesses in this room depend on that tide turning very soon. Design will be a key driver for growth in a post-Brexit economy, I can guarantee it.

Our footprint compared to other industries might still seem small, but our reach and impact is already vast. Tonight's winners' roll call is proof of that. And you'll hear about the extent of that reach as our host Samira Ahmed announces the awards this evening. It's why we'll be presenting your trophies, not in traditional generic categories, but in groupings that more clearly illustrate the depth and breadth of design's capabilities; groupings that demonstrate the scope and scale of what a considered and well-managed design investment by the businesses in the room tonight has delivered.

So, Small Giants, let's not shy away from our industry's nuances. Let's celebrate the way we think differently; the way we work differently; the way we aspire differently – because then together we have the best chance to continue to drive up our reputation, to remain an irresistible destination for world-class talent, and to play a pivotal role in economic growth for years to come.

That's why this year the DBA will focus on shining a light onto the characteristics of our industry - the particular drumbeats we dance to, that set this sector apart. We'll be championing your reputation, and we'll be helping you recognise and cultivate those beats in your own businesses, so when you strive for greatness - as you all do - it's realised.

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