

# CULTURE VULTURE

The marketing world is a stage for Antony Spanbrook who uses theatrical background to get message out

A background in theatre prepared Antony Spanbrook for a unique place in the business world. Hailing from Sydney, Australia, his groundbreaking business career was inspired by a wide range of cultural influences.

"I come from a theatre background but studied business at university," Mr Spanbrook said. "I had always done amateur dramatics. My sister is an actress and my mother sang and, with a Dutch father and Croatian mother, a multicultural background gave me a passion to learn about new cultures."

He started his career as a producer and production manager in theatre and television where budgets are often tight and business depends on ticket sales. An opportunity arose one day for him to use theatrical techniques to communicate marketing concepts and that launched a career that put the two together.

"The first big pitch I had was for Microsoft's launch of Windows 95 with [marketing agency] Jack Morton," Mr Spanbrook said. "I had been in the company for six months and this was a 'David and Goliath' moment. I knew nothing but we won the event and it took place in Sydney at the convention centre with Dame Edna Everage. Using theatre to build a brand really inspired me."

Mr Spanbrook, through powerful concepts and striking theatrical presentations, gets corporate messages heard. He organises events, conceives ideas, and writes music and scripts. In an event in the late 1990s, he helped telecommunications firm Digital PC send out a message at a sales conference using *The X Files* theme. The concept, which involved IT managers lapsing in a coma if they did not use the right software, demonstrated how creative ideas could be applied to a corporate setting. In 1997, he came to Asia to produce the first corporate show held at the Forbidden City in Beijing for Nokia phones.

"It's about taking a lot more liberties and using some theme, message, or storyline to get a message across.

"If a company wants to enforce its

brand in a creative way, it's important that it gets noticed and remembered at an event such as a sales conference."

This artistic approach has taken Mr Spanbrook step by step towards monumental events that shaped his career. In January 2004, he was employed as producer of the opening and closing ceremonies for the Olympic Games in Athens.

"It presented everything including Pythagoras showing the cradle of western civilisation and the beginning of democracy. The Olympic Games have a certain protocol, the flag raising, who walks where and the order of speeches is set for you but, in between that, you get free reign for the creative stuff."



**Antony Spanbrook:** He was inspired to work in different cultural settings with innovative event planning so he opened his own company, Luminous, in Hong Kong, giving him the opportunity to help build brands in the region which had included the Venetian Macao, HSBC Premier and Hong Kong International Airport. Luminous is promoting nine international brands at the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games.

"We help brands with everything from customer hospitality, through to logistics and getting different people into hotel rooms," Mr Spanbrook said. "When you are dealing with parallel events at the Olympic Games, it is more about hosting people and getting leverage for brands around the event because, ultimately, the Olympics is the hero."

Live performances provide creative alternatives to digital marketing that get brands noticed through experiences that are fresh, exciting and real.

"The challenge is coming up with an event or live experience that fits the brand, and that the management feels works for them. It needs to be justified to clients because they need to be sure they can get a return on something that has to be more than just a cocktail party," he said.