

Thomas O'Connell

Brand Strategy Director

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PROFILE

20+ years building brand strategy for Nike, LEGO, Google, PlayStation, PUMA, and Adidas across 70+ global markets. Known for cultural sharpness and commercial rigor in equal measure — equally at home in C-suites selling through at the highest level and in a coffee shop equipping a brand for success in a day. From leading brand innovation for Fortune 10 companies to managing 15+ startup brands from napkin sketch to raise and beyond. Grew up across five countries, educated in Scotland, fluent in four languages.

EXPERIENCE

LEGO — Brand Strategy Director

2022 – 2025

Global brand strategy across a matrixed, product-led organization spanning media, retail, and content.

- Self-initiated brand expansion that identified \$150M in untapped market headroom — and directed its capture.
- Unified narrative across media, retail, and content by aligning creative, analytics, and business unit leads at scale.
- Managed multi-year brand plans balancing creative investment with KPI frameworks tied to brand equity and commercial outcomes.
- Developed channel strategy across TikTok, Reddit, and AI-driven media — expanding reach into emerging platforms while maintaining brand safety.

We Make Heart — Founder & Strategy Director

2013 – 2025

Brand consultancy serving 25+ global clients across lifestyle, consumer products, SaaS, and enterprise technology.

- Repositioned Keurig Commercial beyond a single business unit — expanding across the full Dr. Pepper portfolio, growing revenue headroom per employee from \$50 to \$250 annually by shifting the brand from coffee to total workplace refreshment.
- Broke Google into the C-suite by replacing decks and email with high-touch physical artifacts — reframing Google's value beyond search; adopted as the standard for senior executive engagement.
- Unified SolidWorks — a fragmented \$4B CAD portfolio — under "Build the Future, Faster": one platform structuring sub-brands, CEO keynotes, advertising, and social campaigns that outperformed historical benchmarks by 3x.
- Redefined PUMA's retail presence from passive display to high-engagement experience — anchoring the brand's highest-impact campaign launches through partnerships with The Weeknd, the Kardashians, and FUBU.
- Built operational brand systems for Infinity Automotive, Jackson Hewitt, Quickbase, and Timberland — frameworks that outlasted the engagement and continued driving consistency and commercial performance.

Hill Holliday — SVP, Group Strategy Director

2011 – 2013

Youngest-serving SVP in agency history, promoted within six months. Rebuilt lifestyle, sports, and media practice.

- Operated as connective thread between siloed departments — organically growing the agency's bottom line by selling media business into creative clients and creative business into media clients.
- Drove five consecutive new business wins, reintroducing lifestyle and sports clients to the agency's portfolio for the first time in decades.
- Led integrated strategy for PUMA, VH1, Liberty Mutual, and Dunkin' across campaigns, media, and cross-functional teams.

OTHER EXPERIENCE

- **Modernista!** — Strategy Director. Brand strategy for Nickelodeon, Showtime, and MTV. New York 2010 – 2012
- **Havas** — Creative Strategy Director. Creative strategy for Nestlé, Jaguar, and Dos Equis. New York 2010 – 2012
- **BBH** — Communications Strategy Director. Media and channel strategy for Ally Bank. New York 2010 – 2012
- **Proton Communications** — Senior Creative Strategist. Brand strategy for Johnson & Johnson. London 2006 – 2008
- **WPP** — Media Planner. Award-winning global media strategy for Nike and PlayStation. London 2004 – 2006
- **United Nations** — Economist. Macro- and micro-econometric modeling. Geneva 2003 – 2004

EDUCATION

University of St Andrews Scotland
MBA, Economics & International Relations · MA, Modern History & International Relations

EXPERTISE

Cross-Functional Leadership	Global Brand Strategy	Brand Architecture
Narrative & Positioning	Cultural & Consumer Insights	Influencer & Lifestyle Strategy
KPI Frameworks	New Business Development	Purpose & Impact

WHAT ELSE?

Everything communicates. A brand lives in the humans who use the product, the employees who champion it, and the keynotes you deliver. True strategy accounts for every touchpoint, not just the obvious ones.

Inform the world. Pushing a brand out and hoping it leads the category is an expensive, outdated playbook. Bringing culture in — informing the world rather than just reflecting it — is what drives true category leadership.

Be kind. The shortest belief on this list. Without a doubt the most important.