



### *Ideas in Action*

# Cheeky Guerrillas in Utrecht

The four friends formed a band at college but it didn't work out, so they call themselves 'Autobahn' as a tribute to the band that never plays in the film *The Big Lebowski*. Instead they focus on what they excel at – using their best creative talents to design publications and websites that have something extra. Autobahn are based in Holland with a studio in Utrecht and have achieved impressive success in their first few years in the design business.

Their style and values could be described as 'bold' or even 'cheeky'. They like to be different and help their clients to get noticed, using innovative and edgy designs. Their team of four, despite different skills and approaches to their design work, is held together firmly by their shared belief in doing things differently. They are also held together in a corporate structure which gives each of them equal ownership, control and reward.



*Autobahn (left to right): Jeroen Breen, Maarten Dullemeijer (outside), Rob Stolte and Giovanni Grado (pictured – he wasn't in when I visited!)*

Clients gain from their unusual designs, and they have produced innovative publications for a mix of clients including a youth theatre, a university, a musical institute – and even the Dutch Ministry of Justice.

After spending a lot of time and effort using conventional 'cold calling' techniques to win new customers, they decided to use their 'cheekiness' to help their enterprise grow. They selected ten potential customers who they thought would be receptive to their style and would gain from their design talents. They then used 'guerrilla marketing' to win those customers in an inexpensive, direct and cheeky way.

Travelling by pushbike, they attacked in broad daylight, and with adrenalin pumping, they climbed up to the windows of target clients' offices – and then attached their posters. A huge exclamation mark caught the attention of the people inside who then read the small print: "We want to work for you!" Two of the ten targets became clients as a result – an impressive 20% success rate. (The other eight were more amused than offended.)

Autobahn select their clients carefully and even in the early days when cash was short they were prepared to turn down business from a client who didn't share their values and connect to their way of thinking. They pride themselves on helping customers by challenging the clients' assumptions and helping them to draw up an even better brief that fits with the customers' organisational objectives.

And obviously they work best with clients who value their bold, mouthy and cheeky style.

For the Autobahn guerrillas, cheekiness is profitable!

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## Links

[More about Autobahn](#)

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