

Creative brain drain

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The next time you're on a flight from Montreal to Toronto or Vancouver, you may be joined by more than just desperate ex-pats and tourists smelling up the cabin with the St. Viateur bagels or smoked meat they're bringing back home. That guy across the aisle, the one all dressed-up in his awards show best of torn jeans and creased T-shirt, might just be a Quebec creative moving to either of the two biggest cities in so-called English Canada.

Yes, it looks like Quebec creatives have joined bagels, smoked meat, and less significant stuff like hydro-electricity, aircraft parts and pharmaceuticals, as the province's hot new export.

First it was star BBDO Montreal creative director Martin Beauvais decamping last spring to join Zig in Toronto in a similar role. Then, in late summer, it was BBDO Montreal creatives Martin Rivard and Nicolas Quintal who were hired away by Rethink to handle the French language needs of national clients from Vancouver.

Instead of doing a silly thing like opening up an office in Montreal, Rethink partner Chris Staples told *Marketing*: "Why don't we hire a great Quebec team that speaks English as well and have them work out of our offices and learn our system and our culture."

Yeesh. This mass exodus of francophone creatives almost makes one yearn for the days when it was just hundreds of thousands of anglophones and ethnics (oops, allophones) leaving Quebec en masse.

The departure of Beauvais, one of Quebec's most awarded creatives, certainly did not go unnoticed and some creatives were shocked he would leave the collapsing overpass, potholed paradise on earth that is Montreal for uncouth Toronto.

"I didn't want to live in Toronto," Beauvais quickly ensured *Infopresse*, saying his move was all about the prospect of working at Zig.

Beauvais also promised to introduce his Zig colleagues to the concept of 18-hour lunches with wine rather than the barbaric Toronto notion of gulping down a tuna sandwich at the desk while worrying about the next deadline and/or mortgage payment.

Vancouver-bound Quintal noted, in a similar vein, that when the duo was initially contacted by a headhunter, their first impression was to say "Oh no! Toronto, that doesn't interest us." (Apparently, the prospect of being swallowed up in a tsunami or going through a bone-rattling earthquake is vastly preferable to the joys of the Danforth.) "When we found out Rethink was behind the search, we suddenly felt more interested."

In an open letter to creatives in the wake of the Beauvais move, Nicolas Massey, creative director of Amen in Montreal, said it highlighted a decision Quebec creatives have to make: Work abroad on major brands with major budgets or stay in Quebec where there are too many agencies vying for not enough clients. The result is that "every time a french fry stand launches a call to offer, at least 20 agencies deploy their heavy artillery to land the account."

But Massey ended on an optimistic note. "We have all the potential to rank among the best, and this despite frustrations that our market imposes on us: small budgets, ignorance on the part of

clients, limited media placement, etc.” Quebec is at the dawn of a new era of internationalism and has never had so much desire to push back the borders and create national campaigns, he said. Slowly but surely, it will get its piece of the pie. “We’ve got all the creativity and dynamism required to create international calibre campaigns. Why can’t Montreal become a world mecca of creation?”

Likewise, Simon Beaudry, an artistic director at BOS, said Quebec has all it needs to develop domestic and international brands and that its creative is exportable. The Beauvais move is a feather in Quebec’s cap and he could just as easily have been hired by an Italian or Japanese agency than one in Toronto, he said.

Noting that Quebecers don’t move for work nearly as much as their rest of North America counterparts, and that they have everything to gain by doing it more, Beauvais said he’d like to create a snowball effect. A reverse snowball effect that would encourage creatives from the rest of Canada to come to Montreal would also be a good thing, he added.

And so the departure of the Quebec creatives is a win-win situation. It indicates that the creative output in the province has improved to the extent that its top creatives are now being sought by other Canadian agencies.

And, at the very least, it’s bound to boost wine sales at restaurants near the Zig office.