

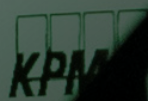
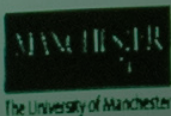
# CONSUMERISM HAS KILLED CHRISTMAS.

## DISCUSS

LISTEN. THINK. DECIDE.

@DISCUSSMCR #DISCUSSCONSUMERISM

PATRONS



*true*North

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### Title

Should this entry win a DBA Effectiveness Award? Discuss.

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### Industry sector

Culture/Events

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### Client Company

Discuss

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### Design Consultancy

True North

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### Submission Date

26 June 2015

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### For Publication

## Executive summary

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**Is it possible to create a new interactive event that not only makes a city more enjoyable and attractive to the intellectually curious, but engages people from all walks of life to participate in healthy, lively and accessible intelligent debate, in many cases for the very first time?**

## Discuss.

**This was the challenge that was posed to True North.**

To create, from scratch, an event that would offer intellectually engaged people something interesting and stimulating to do after work. An event that existed beyond the networks of business and academia.

That reanimated the debate and progressive thinking that Manchester is historically famous for.

That engaged ordinary people in debate about issues that mattered to them, and gave them an opportunity to voice their opinions.

That attracted high quality speakers.

That could be hosted in attractive but non-exclusive venues.

That would make a genuine, significant contribution to the city's cultural life.

That would attract enthusiastic sponsors from diverse backgrounds, as well as paying entrants.

And all with zero budget.

**THE FUTURE  
IS FRACKING.  
DISCUSS.**  
LISTEN. THINK. DECIDE.

**28TH OCTOBER 2014, 6PM-8PM**

MUSEUM OF SCIENCE & INDUSTRY,  
LIVERPOOL ROAD, MANCHESTER  
M3 4FP

**[WWW.DISCUSS.ORG.UK](http://WWW.DISCUSS.ORG.UK)**

**@DISCUSSMCR**

**#DISCUSSFRACKING**



## Executive summary

# That Discuss has been a success is beyond debate:

Audience numbers rising from 65 for the first event, to an average of 160, with a record of 250 turning up to hear ex-Happy Monday and parliamentary candidate Bez and others discuss fracking.

Attracting sponsors and seed funding even before the first event had taken place, and later from The University of Manchester, KPMG and The Guardian.

Delivering sponsorship of £44,000 against a target of £24,000 within a year.

Securing high quality speakers including Polly Toynbee from The Guardian, Tristram Hunt MP, Derek Hatton, Martin Vander Weyer from The Spectator, and Hardeep Singh Kohli.

Achieving a key objective of bringing in audience members from diverse demographics, united only by mindset.

(287 words)

Audience members  
increased from 65  
to record number of **250**

**184%**

of the sponsorship target reached



Hardeep Singh Kohli speaking at the 'Manchester's Message to the Scot's - Go for it. Discuss.' September 2014.

# Outline of project brief

True North was initially approached by the former Dean of External Relations at Manchester University who, having attended Intelligence Squared (a successful global series of debates) at The Royal Geographical Society in London, wanted to infuse Manchester's cultural scene with some of the same inquisitive intellectual activity.

He came to True North with the objective of launching a product in Manchester that would "stimulate and celebrate the city's intellectual curiosity".

True North seized upon this idea and, with long and detailed conversation and interrogation of the project's aims and reach, expanded and deepened the brief to address:

What happens in city centre Manchester to attract the intellectually curious 'after work'?

How can we engage the widest possible breadth of audience, from young professionals to the newly retired, students and academics to anyone looking for something stimulating to do in the evening?

How can this compete with other cultural activities such as theatre, television, cinema, art galleries, gigs and comedy?

Creating a brand that could attract speakers of profile and standing from a broad spectrum of backgrounds and sectors, and that would take its place as part of the city's cultural offer.

Making no-nonsense, direct, intelligent debate accessible to everyone.

In the redefining of this brief, the client in effect became the inquisitive minds of an entire city.

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### Objective

**“Stimulate and celebrate the city’s intellectual curiosity”**

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### Challenge

**Engage the widest possible breadth of audience and compete with other cultural/ ‘after work’ activities**

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### Solution

**Create a brand for a no-nonsense, direct intelligent debate accessible to everyone**

# Project overview

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## Description

Manchester has a diverse history of progressive, intellectual activity. The city spurred new, radical thinking particularly during the social and political churn of the Industrial Revolution; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels met in Chetham's Library in Manchester city centre – a partnership that became the foundation from which Marx's *Das Kapital* emerged; suffrage for women and people of lower social classes was taken up and given major prominence in the city. For many, Manchester is still the true (and was the original) home of *The Guardian* and *The Observer* newspapers, both of which are famous worldwide for their balanced, informed journalism.

However, True North's client had noted that in Manchester today there was a dearth of opportunities for engaging in intelligent debate and discussion, particularly for members of the general public outside of academia and commercial networks. It was in this context that the brief was embedded.

## Overview of market

Initial audience research to try and establish audience need, based on Mintel and Acorn Profiling, concluded that the prime demographic for a series of paid-for, after work cultural or intellectual events came from a corridor south of the city around the M20 postcode that is home to a mix of people in their 20s and 30s working in academic, professional service and commercial roles, without children and with the disposable income, interest and time to take part. A second group, older and more wealthy, was identified spreading out into the nearby suburbs of Cheshire.

This was a concern given the aim of the project to 'democratise' debate and stimulate thought and curiosity across the widest audience possible.

Following this initial research, with two focus groups. The first group comprised late 20s and early 30s, childless city centre professionals and creatives; the second was an older, more affluent group who all resided in the M20 postcode.

The focus groups were convened to test the model and get a sense of what would appeal in a new paid-for events offer. One key finding was that the offer should be as inexpensive as possible and appeal to a mindset rather than a demographic. Another was the need to build a strong sponsorship proposition based on the potential for the concept to have wide appeal and interest, and genuinely contribute to making Manchester and its citizens "intellectually active," rather than aim the concept at a more exclusive audience willing and able to pay a higher ticket price.

## Launch Date

12 June 2013

## Size of design budget and production costs

There was zero budget. However, believing in the power of an open debate forum and wanting to make a contribution to the city's cultural offer, True North devoted 92 hours of time pro bono, worth £7,840.

A primary objective was then to attract devoted supporters: both paying audience members, and sponsors – as identified in the focus groups.

Consequently, the success of Discuss would rely solely on the design solution: the brand, the website, social media and emails, as well as the tone of voice developed for these communications. This would be vital, not only to attract an audience and secure sponsorship, but also in attracting speakers and securing venues.

(503 words)

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# £2,000

Initial funding secured to part-fund the first two debates

## Outline of design solution

# Concept

The quality of the product, the intrinsic intellectual stimulation it provides and the joy of the debate would be the sole marketing resources. So the tone of voice and design solution had to really resonate and drive the broadest possible interest.

Working from the basis that the concept had to have broad appeal, and reference the divisive nature of the debating concept – two sides, arguing against each other around a single issue – True North conceived the name Discuss, to be presented always in the title of the debate.

A bold and clean sans serif logotype and plain-speaking strapline, *Listen. Think. Decide.*, to provide the 'invitation to engage', set the tone for the creative execution, and critical to that was the tone of voice.

# DISCUSS

LISTEN. THINK. DECIDE.



# THATCHER'S LEGACY CONTAINED NO HOPE FOR THE NORTH. DISCUSS.

DATE –  
12TH JUNE 2014

VENUE –  
MEMORIAL HALL, ALBERT SQUARE  
CHOP HOUSE, ALBERT SQUARE,  
MANCHESTER.

TIME –  
6PM – 8PM

JOIN THE DEBATE ONLINE –  
[DISCUSS.ORG.UK](http://DISCUSS.ORG.UK)

DISCUSS  
LISTEN. THINK. DECIDE.

SPONSORED BY  
Marketing  
Manchester

# THATCHER GAVE HOPE TO MILLIONS, EVEN THE NORTH. DISCUSS.

DATE –  
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VENUE –  
MEMORIAL HALL, ALBERT SQUARE  
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DISCUSS  
LISTEN. THINK. DECIDE.

SPONSORED BY  
Marketing  
Manchester

Advertising A frames – allowing both sides of the debate/argument to be explored



# Outline of design solution

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## Tone of Voice

The creative challenge was to incite debate by exposing both sides of an argument: a provocative lead statement followed by the call to action, Discuss. With that in mind, True North proposed that each Discuss event's title would be simply the motion for debate, phrased in a provocative way, see examples opposite.

This direct, bold and no-nonsense style of written communication democratised the notion of debate, and opened it out to anyone who was willing to be curiously engaged in the issue up for discussion. The tone of voice let the motions speak for themselves, without prejudice.

## Venues

Even the choice of venue was a key consideration in the design solution: needing to be outside the realms of the academic and corporate elite. The first series of debates were held in the events room of a historic chop house opposite Manchester Town Hall. To embed Discuss in the city, True North arranged other venues including the Museum of Science and Industry and People's History Museum. As of March this year, the new 'home' of Discuss is perhaps the most egalitarian venue of them all, Manchester City Library.

The room layout for each event was carefully considered, to encourage an "open floor." Rather than being seated above the audience on a stage, speakers for and against the motion, as well as the debate chair, sat at a simple table at the front of the room – placing them as close to the audience as possible. A microphone was passed around so attendees could participate in the debate by voicing their viewpoints.



Albert Square Chop House

**MARGARET THATCHER'S  
LEGACY FOR THE NORTH.  
ALL DESPAIR AND NO HOPE.  
DISCUSS**

**DEMOCRACY IS BROKEN.  
DISCUSS**

**THE NHS IS DOOMED.  
EXCEPT IN MANCHESTER  
DISCUSS**

**THE FUTURE IS FRACKING.  
DISCUSS**

**PRIVATE SCHOOL SHOULD  
BE ABOLISHED.  
DISCUSS**

**MODERN FOOTBALL HAS LOST  
ITS SOUL AND NO LONGER  
DESERVES OUR SUPPORT  
DISCUSS**

# Outline of design solution

## Collateral

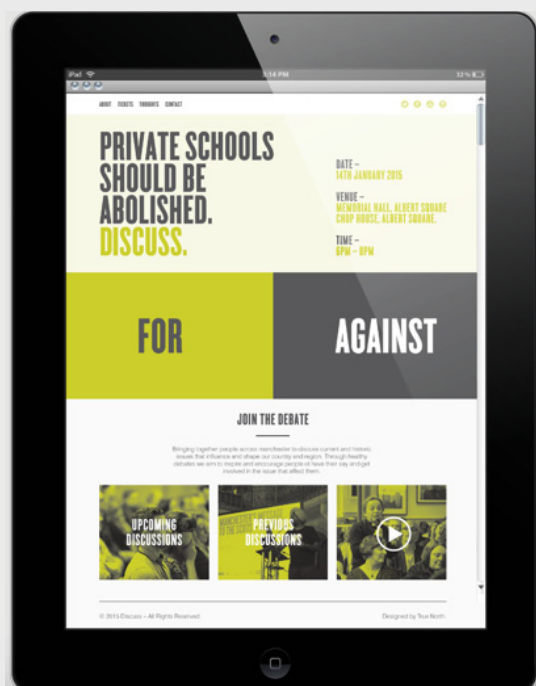
For each event, True North also produced creative collateral which was presented if possible in context to the debate topics to encourage voting – for example, during a debate around alcohol ('Drink, a greater menace than drugs. Discuss.'), two-sided beer mats expressed opposing sides of the argument, and spoke to those who would be affected or have an opinion, prompting active participation.



## Online

Emails and Twitter posts continued the execution of this straight-talking, participatory style, and the website existed to summarise and even continue the debates online, as well as drive people to forthcoming events.

(474 words)



Website – homepage and twitter wall



## Summary of results

# Audience engagement and diversity

The audience for the first, free, event numbered 65 – recruited entirely from networks of the founders. Within 12 months, audience numbers had grown to average 160, each paying £7 per ticket.

At the end of the first year, in June 2014, True North and New Economy Manchester gathered data from the audiences at the debates and found some interesting results.

- Only 4% of the audience was from the M20 postcode.
- Less than 1/4 of the audience was from Cheshire.
- According to initial audience research these were supposedly the 'only' areas that would be interested in such an event. Discuss had effectively engaged a diverse audience and successfully avoided the 'exclusive club' trap many debating events have fallen into.

- 40% of the audience did not have a university degree.
- Only 7% of the audience described their employment status as being at "director level."
- Only 14% of the audience had an income in excess of £40,000.
- 39% of attendees identified themselves as 'coming along to their first ever debate'.

These results confirmed that the objective to appeal to a mindset rather than a demographic had been achieved.



# 39%

of the audience were first time debaters

# 40%

of the audience did not have a university degree

# “

**I've always sat on the fence when talking about this, I wasn't really sure what I thought about it, that's why I came along. To get more knowledge, form an opinion.”**

Discuss Audience Member

# “

**I had a question in my head & as I asked it I felt a bit nervous but I'm glad I did. Wasn't boring – I thought it might be.”**

Audience member from RECLAIM Project, a Manchester based charity working with young, working class children aged 12-15

# Summary of results

## Cultural Stakeholder Engagement

Following the success of initial debates, the ethos of Discuss resonated with cultural venues from across the city and beyond. Events were staged as part of Manchester Literature Festival, and Manchester Science Festival.

Within twelve months, Discuss raised £44,000 in sponsorship revenue against a target of £24,000.

Top tier annual sponsors are:

The University of Manchester.

KPMG Manchester.

The Hamilton Davies Trust, a private charitable foundation.

Utopia Technologies, an IT distribution in Manchester.

Individual event sponsors were recruited to support individual events relevant to them;

Regeneris, an economics development consultancy, sponsored 'Manchester's Intellectual Gift; more markets and free enterprise than Marx and Engels. Discuss.' Liberty SIPP sponsored 'Big Business is Unethical. Discuss.' CEL Leadership sponsored 'Private Schools should be abolished. Discuss.'

The Guardian came aboard as media partner in April 2015.

The diversity of sponsors and absence of 'usual suspects' further reinforces the success of the concept in appealing to a diverse range of people, united by a passion for participating in "celebrating and stimulating intellectual curiosity."

## Long-term sustainability

The Guardian has recently signed up as media partner, which gives the Discuss brand much greater coverage – still without any media spend. The intention now is to make the Discuss brand a channel for lively debates.

The debates have now moved to a larger venue, Manchester's newly remodelled Central Library, who were so keen on the concept that they provide space free of charge. This alone is a significant proof of success, as this venue more than any other reaches out to and recruits members of the public to the events – people who were just visiting the library have been inspired to come along.

**United by a passion for participating in "celebrating and stimulating intellectual curiosity."**



**theguardian live**



## Summary of results

# Attracting speakers

Another objective that the project met was attracting high-calibre speakers.

To date, speakers have included Polly Toynbee from The Guardian, Tristram Hunt MP, Derek Hatton, Steven Woolf of UKIP, Martin Vander Weyer from The Spectator, and Hardeep Singh Kohli.

One particular event ('Whatever the problem, HS2 is not the solution. Discuss.') attracted a very diverse set of speakers – Sir Richard Leese, Leader of Manchester City Council, Mary Robinson, Conservative candidate, Cheadle, Joe Rukin, campaigner for Stop HS2, and Marion McNaughton of Warburton against HS2, through whose garden HS2 is proposed to run.

Furthermore, the event 'Private schools should be abolished. Discuss.' numbered speakers including Dr. Martin Boulton, High Master, Manchester Grammar School, Andy Bennett, Former Head Boy, The Grange School, and Helen Pidd of The Guardian.

This diversity is testament to the successful creative execution of the concept, and a willingness for people from all walks of life to get involved.



Martin Vander Weyer – Business editor of The Spectator



Steven Woolf – MEP, UKIP



Sir Richard Leese – Leader of Manchester City Council



'Private Schools should be abolished. Discuss.'

“

**Really exciting.  
Really stimulating.  
Fantastic.”**

Polly Toynbee – The Guardian



## Other influencing factors

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### Did media coverage drive awareness of the event?

No. There was zero media budget. Awareness of and engagement with the events was driven solely by the clear, straightforward and engaging execution of the brand, particularly through the tone of voice that infused the website, social media and newsletters.

### Wasn't it just the actual debates and speaker who attracted the audience?

No. Whilst more high profile speakers did attract greater numbers, the design solution and tone of voice informed both the content and the staging. The solution inspired spiky headlines, provocative debates in controversial subjects, attracting both the speakers and the audience.

### Wasn't Discuss just attended by members of Manchester's intellectual and cultural cognoscenti, and the students and alumni of Manchester University?

No. Survey research that True North carried out among audience members after one year, in June 2014, revealed that only 4% came from the affluent M20 postcode area that Mintel and Acorn Profiling initially suggested would make up the majority of attendees of such an event. In fact, postcode research confirmed that a much more demographically diverse group of people were coming to the events. Even more significantly, 39% identified themselves as 'coming along to their first ever debate.' Whilst 40% of attendees did not have a university degree.

### Research resources

Initial audience research conducted by MediaCom and based on Mintel and Acorn Profiling.

Audience research in June 2014 conducted by True North and New Economy Manchester.

### Did the City Council provide substantial funding?

No. Manchester City Council provided only £2,000 of one-off seed funding to enable the Discuss concept to be proven. In fact, unlike the vast majority of 'festivals' or cultural providers, Discuss has not been able to rely on the patronage of a large public sector funder such as City Council, Arts Council or similar. The unique appeal to a mindset based on intellectual curiosity and the tone of voice established for Discuss have underpinned its success in attracting both an audience and sponsorship.