



Agencies and management consultants are not from different planets

Posted by [Derek A. Lackey, Editor](#) / January 13, 2018

Never before has the advertising landscape looked so volatile. Advertising is less trusted than ever. Digital media is the solution to many marketers's growth asks but is simultaneously facing up to its own challenges around quality and transparency. Facebook and Google are eating up any growth and Amazon is looming large on the scene.

That said, never before has the opportunity been bigger for agencies. As brands all prioritise their own flavour of digital transformation, the opportunity presents itself for agencies to act in a more consultative way to support the shift to a data driven, content-powered future. The regular focus of client and agency conversations today is around connecting audience data sets to inform paid (increasingly addressable), owned and earned media activation and content creation that maps to a customer journey.

The closest analogy I can think of is that of a Managing Partner in a consultancy who oversees C-Level stakeholder management whilst orchestrating their many different disciplines to deliver multi-faceted recommendations. Where a consultancy comes unstuck is they over-index on infrastructure and organisational design but lack the human, or customer, angle. Importantly most rarely go as far as execution, so they are unable to close the loop in a way that agencies can; that advantage is however not leveraged anywhere near as much as it could be by agencies.

In the main, brands lack the necessary skills and resources internally or find it challenging to retain this talent. When looking for support from the outside, there is arguably no single partner today able to provide both the answers and the specialist deployment skills. Consultancies excel in creating digital experiences and deploying

cloud and mobile led solutions. Agency groups are rich with an eclectic mix of planners and specialists, but more must be done to better orchestrate and integrate that talent to align with higher level business priorities.

The agency community must also admit that there remains a skills gap in adland for this brave new world. There are just not enough T-shaped strategic client leaders that get digital, data, content and tech. These will only be created if agencies invest both in developing the leaders of tomorrow from within, whilst also bringing in hybrids from non-agency backgrounds.

To come out on top, agencies must also borrow from the wider business (and consulting) world. Agencies need to be closer to the board table more frequently, which means spending less time obsessing around big ideas and social media and more talking the language of business, commerce and transformation. Elevating the conversations back to a place where marketing investment is seen as a proven driver of growth is business critical. This demands a laser focus on effectiveness in business terms, not through the self-fulfilling lens of its own industry awards.

Doomsayers may argue...

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