

Keeping it in the family

-The way forward for agencies in the new 'mediascape'-

The subject of who is best placed to develop a brand's strategy has been in the news in the last couple of months – it's an old argument that bubbles from time to time. Ad agencies still accuse brand consultancies of coming up with brand strategies that are cumbersome to translate into advertising. Whilst brand consultancies suggest that those agencies are threatened by the role branding is playing above traditional communications.

The strength of feeling we've seen from both sides shows that there is clearly an enduring distrust between the ad agency and brand consultancy. And to a point, it's understandable. The world of brand communication is changing so fast many of us are still catching our breath. Things used to be so simple. There were fewer brands, fewer agencies, fewer channels and therefore fewer messages to reach a consumer who was less confused than he is today. The relationship between brand and consumer was more straightforward. We all know the story from here. Media fragmentation combined with a savvy but time starved consumer means that brands need to cut-through the thousands of visual messages we are bombarded with everyday. And this standout can no longer come from traditional advertising alone.

In this context, 'branding is like a maze'. Clients need our help more than ever as they are trying to plot a course and then take the correct route. Competition for stretched marketing budgets is fiercer than it's ever been and our clients are constantly looking for ways to get value for money from the agencies they choose without compromising their creative muscle.

That's why it's important that we move this debate on. The situation this summer between BBH, Wolff Olins and Sony Ericsson shows us that true and open collaboration between ad agency, brand consultancy and client is not yet common practice. This is despite the fact that consumers actually **converge** all the different messaging and presentation they receive into one assessment of the brand 'in the round'. As we know, they don't care where the ideas come from – they just judge the result.

Take a closer look at any ad agency or brand design consultancy and you will find ex-ad people mingling with brand architects and design faithfuls. Witness the fact that Graham Wood of Tomato moved to JWT NY, Peter Saville joined Saatchi & Saatchi and Jon Turner who plays such a key role at Boots (his remit touches most brand programmes). I myself joined Enterprise IG as global CEO from JWT. In light of this convergence – why isn't it more commonplace and working better?

Traditionally, both the ad agency and brand consultancy have been quite closed in the way they work. Both would claim that they are in a quest to find the proverbial big idea!

There is no doubt that bright ideas are our lifeblood. But finding a way to share and collaborate around a combination of strategic thinking and creative envisioning may be the key to resolving this tension.

Old arguments surrounding who should be responsible for brand strategy - advertising agency or brand consultancy – are redundant. The answer is that neither of them is.

I believe that the genuine brand guardian must be the client – it's great that agencies and consultancies feel emotional ownership but genuine accountability starts and stops with the client. Interestingly, in many client organisations it is the procurement department that is demonstrating an even keener interest and exercising authority over brands (definitely a topic for another day!).

We sometimes mistake our 'storytelling' skills and perhaps even more worrying for all agencies is the fact that its clients have a duty of care for the finances and they work hard to try and understand what an investment in the brand means in terms of its return. The client's role is to champion the brand, but also to understand and respect the expertise that exists in each of their agencies. Our job, as agencies, is to help clients understand how we can work together as a team to solve their problems.

Clients need their agencies to understand their business intimately and see their problem in this context. As brand consultancy and ad agency we need to use our collective expertise and experience to help our clients find their way out of their particular problem. More often than not this means unlocking a client's thinking by taking them on a creative journey that ends with those all-important bright ideas. And the more collaborative and inspiring this journey is the better. This is in addition to all those other things that we know that our clients need from us – a relationship they can trust, vision and insight and crucially, an ability to envisage success. Proving that what we do is effective, with hard evidence where necessary, is vital to building a client's confidence in our abilities.

At Enterprise IG, we are finding that the development of an integrated offer is increasingly expected by our clients. Evidence of this is the work we do with SABMiller. According to my colleague and Chairman Dave Brown (who is also global creative director for SABMiller) our approach works because it all hinges on the brand story – the vein which runs through everything that we and the communications agencies do. This is because we are in a position on this business to partner with Ogilvy and as a result the two of us are charged with the responsibility of coming up with a complete solution. Ultimately, the relationship is about sharing the same desire to deliver the best consumer experience ever.

Of course, there are many cases where the brand is much more virtual - with little physical manifestation – yet these brands have 'significant shape' in the consumer's mind. I'm thinking 'Google' or perhaps 'YouTube' – these represent the very synthesis of both advertising and branding happening, real time.

Let's face it. The new mediascape is very different to the old marketing landscape and agencies – from 'adland' to 'brandland' – need to embrace it or lose some of the biggest and most exciting projects around.

Prepared by Simon Bolton, Global CEO, Enterprise IG

Enterprise IG

Enterprise IG is one of the world's leading international brand agencies that has the resource of nearly 600 people, covering 23 offices in 20 countries.

Enterprise IG believes that great companies and their brands are built on a Compelling Truth™. A truth so powerful it is transformational – building preference and differentiation with consumers, customers and employees. At Enterprise IG we partner with our clients to find the Compelling Truth™ that underpins their company, product or service brands.

We provide first class Strategy, Design and Engagement advice to major multinational and local blue-chip clients. Our extensive range of skills and experience, engaging both internal and external audiences, ensures that the Compelling Truth™ is delivered at all touch points – from identity, brand architecture and communications through packaging, product design, POS, brand language, retail manifestation, brand experience, brand environment, live events and interactive media.