

BIG THINKING

from the Big Minds Collective

LinkedIn

JULY 2022

Marketing's new mission

Rethinking how brands
and businesses grow



The Disney formula
for creativity

Targeting after the
cookie crumbles

Can media buying
be a force for good?



B2B's creative
commitment issues

Why the world needs
less lonely leaders

How to build an
employer brand

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INTRODUCTION

The New Growth Mindset

Marketers and their agencies are in the business of growth. They create and grow new markets, build brands and grow their market share, turn awareness, salience, consideration and action into a burgeoning bottom line.

Growth has always been top of our agenda—but suddenly it's at the top of everyone else's as well. As economies struggle to emerge from the pandemic and the shocks that have followed it, the importance of what we do has rarely felt greater.

Suddenly, growth doesn't seem so easy; doesn't feel like something people can take for granted. Suddenly, the extent to which societies depend on increasing prosperity is very clear. The world needs experts who can innovate ways to make growth happen even when new obstacles keep emerging.

Innovating new ways to grow matters, because the growth that people demand today isn't the same as the growth they accepted a few years ago. It's no

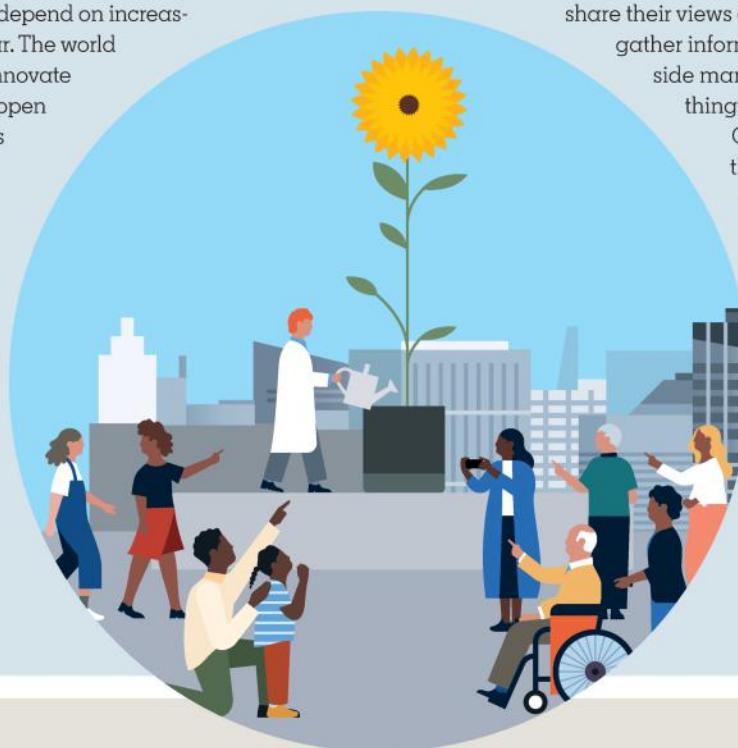
longer enough for a business just to report expanding profits or bigger sales. Growth is not neutral. If it's to be sustainable and sustained, it needs to make a positive contribution to the challenges that the world faces. Audiences of all kinds are making conscious decisions about which growth stories they want to be a part of—and which they don't. A brand's ability to attract customers, talent and skills depends on meeting their expectations.

These are the types of challenges for which LinkedIn created the Big Minds Collective of agency leaders. We encourage those leading media and marketing strategies to share their views on the way forward—and we gather informed perspectives from outside marketing to challenge the way things have always been done.

Once again, we've collected the best ideas and agency thought leadership into this digital magazine.

We hope you enjoy the read and leverage this content to grow your business.

Jane Deehan



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Future in Focus: Making Sustainability a Marketing and Media Brief

Sustainability now sits at the heart of how audiences assess businesses: how they decide which ones they'll work with, invest in and buy from. Helping brands meet the demand for real change will involve agencies deploying a wider range of expertise.

With the impacts of climate change becoming ever more apparent and immediate, businesses are increasingly expected to fill the gaps left by governments—and take responsibility for tackling the crisis. This makes sustainability an issue for every brand—and every marketer.

The audiences that any business depends on for success are increasingly rethinking who they work with—and why. Customers and potential customers, employees and potential employees, investors and other stakeholders: all are asking questions about the impact that a business has on the world, and whether doing business with it represents a sustainable choice or not. If growth strategies don't embody sustainability, they won't deliver growth for long.

For marketers and their agencies, addressing sustainability throws up new kinds of challenges. Audiences,

regulators and the media are alive to greenwashing—and quick to question or call out claims that don't reflect an organization's real impact. Sustainability can't be tackled through updated messaging alone. It demands that marketers review and redesign their propositions and routes to market, engage with colleagues and executive leadership teams to drive internal change, and build new types of partnerships that can scale their positive impact on the world to meet the challenges ahead.

This, in turn, adds new dimensions to the roles that agencies play for their clients. Sustainability creates new criteria for media strategies and demands additional metrics to monitor progress. It also puts the spotlight on agencies as wider experts and influencers, able to advise on what audiences are looking for, and share their experiences of building their own sustainable business models.





Sustainability is critical to growth prospects—and will become more so

"It's not only consumers, but also investors that are looking at a company's sustainability efforts. It's worth bearing in mind that this scrutiny and emphasis will be exacerbated as the effects of climate change become even more visible, and the younger generations become the majority of consumers."

Thiago Correa

*Managing Partner,
Performics @Zenith*



"Our data shows that sustainability is gradually becoming a more important factor for people when determining who to buy from, especially amongst younger audiences. Demonstrating sustainable business practices is a vital concern for the long-term health of brands. However, the cost of living crisis will impact more people in the short term and brands should focus on how to support those who are struggling, while keeping 'bigger picture' sustainability programs running in the background. They can foreground them again when people have more scope to appreciate the efforts."

Clare Chapman

CEO, Carat UK



"The importance of sustainability varies depending on the target market and industry. Sadly, there is still a lot of consumer confusion around what commitments and practices are actually sustainable. That being said, we see this continuing to gain momentum. There will be additional scrutiny and

"Sustainability needs to start at the core, brands can't just sponsor Earth Day and say they support sustainability."

- Stacey Stewart

pressure for brands from the perspective of regulation, and consumer consciousness and spend."

Benjamin Allison

*VP Global Media,
Vayner Media*



Investing in credible sustainability initiatives now can help differentiate brands going forward

"Inform, don't promote."

Sarah Mahoney

*EVP, Healthcare
Communications,
Weber Shandwick*



"Consumers have grown less patient with actions that are not aligned to a clear track history, and so losing credibility on sustainability can have very

negative consequences for the brand and business. Have a track history of committing to sustainability. Focus on building programs and having results first—and invest more efforts into the programs than into the publicity of the programs."

Zaryn Sidhu

*VP Paid Social Activation,
Brainlabs*



"Sustainability needs to start at the core. Brands can't just sponsor Earth Day and say they support sustainability. It needs to start with the company, their core values and even infrastructure, packaging, production. Without getting the core right you will fail and lack the authenticity that consumers demand."

Stacey Stewart

*Chief Marketplace Officer,
UM Worldwide*



“The cost of living crisis will impact more people in the short term and brands should focus on how to support those who are struggling, while keeping ‘bigger picture’ sustainability programs running in the background.” – **Clare Chapman**



“Brands that want to build long-term credibility need to actually be credible: do more, talk less. Do this and you won’t be the only one talking about your credentials.”

Thiago Correa

“The key point is that the client’s business strategy must come first. Sustainability must be embedded into their DNA, not bolted on through marketing activities.”

Clare Chapman

of each constituent element available as marketers pull together plans.”

Thiago Correa

“Agencies can help explain the why—not just the business-as-usual Environmental Social Governance (ESG) considerations, but ensuring that communication acknowledges the role companies play in the topic and validates that climate change is an urgent issue.”

Sarah Mahoney

“Agencies have buying power and influence. They can help to develop standards and evangelize them to marketers.”

Zaryn Sidhu

A sustainable media strategy can be the starting point for wider change

“Agencies first need to first figure out their own sustainability practices and business model, so they can go on the journey together with their clients.”

Stacey Stewart

“A sustainable media strategy involves leaning into trusted media partners that are sustainable business leaders in their own right. It also involves supporting innovative media owners that are looking to build sustainable means of distribution and advertising. That could involve having carbon offsets built into their supply chain or conscious approaches to reduced energy consumption. We can help clients to develop wider sustainable strategies and business models by providing thought leadership and helping to build relationships with organizations and partners that can help support them on this evolution”

Benjamin Allison

“We can help marketers to develop sustainable business models by reviewing our existing ways of doing business and making the information on the impact

New KPIs and skills have a crucial role to play

“Brands should use existing infrastructure in new ways to support sustainable growth agendas. This could involve adding questions into their brand trackers that focus on perception of sustainability, as well as internal growth metrics that provide insight into where, and how, they are addressing gaps in their business operations from a sustainability perspective.”

Benjamin Allison

“We should be focusing on understanding individual clients’ business strategies and what they are doing (or could authentically do) to make a difference. Then ensuring marketing and media strategy in this space flows cleanly from there.”

Clare Chapman

“We need a deeper understanding of disinformation, misinformation, and mal-information and actors in the climate conversation. And we need bravery.”

Sarah Mahoney ■



It's Time to Redefine Value

WPP's Executive Vice President Strategic Partnerships, **Nilufar Fowler** argues that the way we measure growth needs to change.

Nilufar Fowler is an EVP for Strategic Partnerships who spent several years missing her partners—and her clients.

The pandemic left her working extra hard to build the types of relationships that get things done.

"A client or partner relationship should be a convivial as well as a business relationship," she says. "It's a relationship where you push each other to do better together—and it's harder to keep that working when you don't get to meet face-to-face."

The charisma and influence she carries when sharing a room with people is doubly important to Fowler. In both her new role and her previous position as Chief Client Officer for WPP's agency, Mindshare, she relies on persuasion to get things done.

"You don't control, you win by influencing people," she says. "It brings



different parts of your personality to bear in the workplace, which I find quite interesting. I get very bored doing the same thing over and over again."

Fowler needn't worry too much about becoming bored—because doing the same thing over and over isn't on either her or WPP's agenda.

At Mindshare, she helped lead an organization that set itself the goal of guiding clients through an era of transformation—and she's under no illusions about how revolutionary the change needs to be.

Redefining value for a 'Good Growth' era

"We positioned our agency to answer the question of how we find 'Good Growth' for our clients," she says. "That's long-term, sustainable growth that isn't just good for their business but is also good for consumers and for the planet. It's leading us in a fundamentally different direction and we're going to see

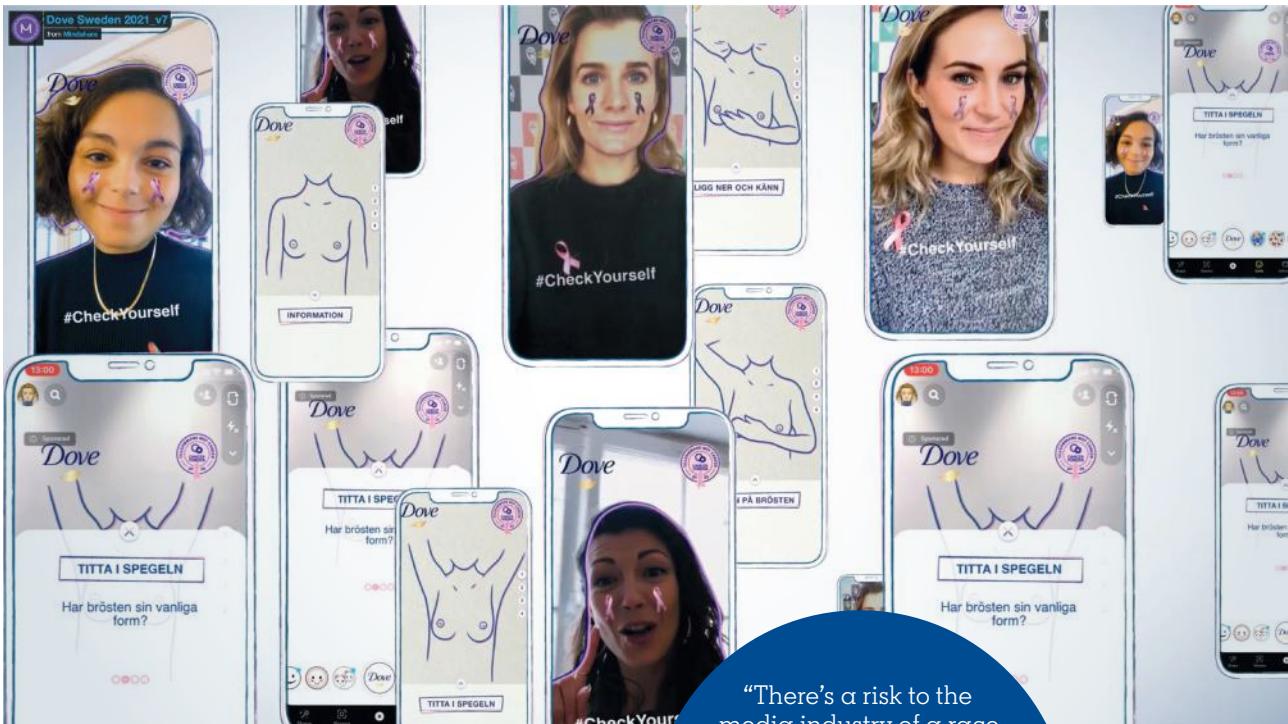
quite a rapid transformation."

That transformation is already taking place, as evidenced by the way that some of Mindshare's biggest clients are now approaching brand and business strategy. "For example, the connection with the 'Good Growth' concept is a key factor in our successful relationships with Unilever," says Fowler. "They are driving for purpose-led growth for their brands because they know that their brands that have a stronger sense of purpose grow significantly faster."

It's this linking of purpose to the bottom line that Fowler believes can drive a revolution in how agencies and their clients operate—but she's clear that there's still work to be done to ensure that it happens. It's work that will involve media agencies such as Mindshare crunching different kinds of numbers, and using them to make a case for alternative media and marketing choices.

"There's an interesting conversation around how you measure sustainable growth and prove its business impact."





Mindshare has been applying 'Good Growth' principles to clients such as Unilever and KFC.

she says. "We all know how to use data to measure sustainable growth in the long-term—but we also need to be able to measure it in the short-term. That way we can start to optimize against good growth measures in the same way you would have optimized against old-world media metrics such as cost per acquisition."

Media and marketing are at a crossroads

The need for those metrics is all the more urgent because of the way that decisions on marketing strategy and media spend are often made. "You've often got very enlightened CMOs who recognize that the metrics of success need to change—but when you get to the pitch stage, the world still retrenches to talking about value in the same way it always has," says Fowler. "There's a risk to the media industry of a race to the bottom in terms of pricing, which ultimately isn't good for anybody. That's why we're having conversations with lots of clients about reframing what value means in media and in marketing."

It all adds up to create the sense

that the industry is at a crossroads, with pricing pressures pushing decision-making in one direction, while forward-thinking marketing leaders are recognizing the need to take it in another. Fowler believes that a well-connected media agency can play a critical role in helping clients choose the right path.

"The digital transformation that we're seeing, and the requirements of doing business in a platform world, means that marketing has a more elevated seat at the table than ever before," says Fowler. "I've seen more and more CMOs and Chief Media Officers coming to us and saying, 'I'm presenting to the board and talking to investors about our brand strategy—can you put something together for me?' That sort of opportunity to shape the conversation is happening more frequently."

Attracting the finest future talent

Another key reason for marketing

"There's a risk to the media industry of a race to the bottom in terms of pricing, which ultimately isn't good for anybody. That's why we're having conversations with lots of clients about reframing what value means in media and in marketing."

agencies to drive this transformation is to ensure they appeal to the best future talent.

"It's the right thing to do to drive growth for our clients and our business—but it's also the right thing for our people, who want to feel that the work they do is beneficial and not harmful to society," she says. "There's been a really significant attrition of talent in our industry in the past 18 months, and making it a better and more responsible place to work is a big part of meeting the challenge. It enables us to bring in fresh thinking from diverse backgrounds—people who can talk to all of the different stakeholders at a client organization, connect across silos and make things happen."

Revolutions have a greater chance of success when they connect to people in all parts of our society. A more diverse media and marketing industry is an industry with real potential to reframe growth for its clients. And those are the types of relationships Fowler wants to be a part of. ■

Big Ideas

Fire Up Creative Thinking the Disney Way

The demands of disruption mean that marketers and agencies need to think beyond their own experience. But how? **Jane Deehan** shares a formula from Disney's former Head of Innovation and Creativity, Duncan Wardle.

Few people are confidently predicting the future for businesses and brands at the moment. However, one thing is certain. Whatever form of disruption emerges next, businesses are going to need a far greater capacity for creative thinking in order to respond to it. They'll be turning to their marketers and marketing agencies to provide that thinking. So where do those marketers and agencies turn to make sure that they can? How about someone who spent six years in charge of innovation and creativity at a company many would consider the most creative and innovative on the planet.

Duncan Wardle, the former Vice President for Innovation and Creativity at Disney, presented The Big Minds Collective with his formula for creativity. Here are his seven principles for firing up creative thinking within yourself, your team and your wider organization:

PRINCIPLE 1:

Make creativity a habit

To Duncan, creativity is the habit of continually doing things in new ways, in order to make a positive difference. And that's a challenging idea. For creativity to become a habit, it can't just be something that we cram in now and then. Rather than something we make time for (in between meetings and deadlines) it has to become a way of thinking that we practice all the time.

PRINCIPLE 2:

Keep asking, "Why?"

What's the big difference between childhood and adult life that constrains creativity as we grow? It's the persistence with which children ask the question, 'Why?' The big difference is that adults will ask, 'Why?', get an answer—and accept that answer.

Children won't. It's their determination to keep probing and questioning until they uncover a deeper truth that makes them such creative thinkers. And that's an instinct that any marketer would do well to re-learn.

If Disney settled for the first answers that its visitors gave, the company would be convinced that people visit its resorts and theme parks because they're excited about new rides and attractions. The reality is much more interesting.



People consciously focus on what's new, but dig deeper and you find that their most powerful reason for returning is the things that don't change: nostalgia, family traditions, and rides that people want to return to year after year.

PRINCIPLE 3:

Signal you want divergent thinking

In Duncan's view, human beings have two modes of thinking: divergent and reductive. Divergent thinking is expansive, innovative and creative. It asks questions, ignores rules, generates new ideas and then builds on those ideas. Reductive analyzes which ideas have the greatest chance of success, and how they need refining.

These modes depend on each other to generate value. However, it's impossible to think in both ways at the same time. The reason that so many people struggle with creativity is because their default thinking mode is reductive—it's

what their organization and their role demand, most of the time. If you want to create a space for creativity, you need to convince people that it's okay to switch modes.

This is why Duncan shares ideas through sketches and flipcharts—never PowerPoint slides. Being presented to instantly tells an audience that their role is to judge ideas.

Being invited into the creative process gives our minds the message that something else is required from them. It's why Walt Disney created the storyboard.

PRINCIPLE 4:

Swap greenlighting for greenhousing

Duncan describes two very different processes for dealing with ideas: greenlighting and greenhousing. The greenlighting process focuses on decision-makers considering reasons not to take an idea forward. If the concept survives all of those challenges, it moves ahead. Greenhousing puts the emphasis on those in authority to add to an idea rather than subtract from it.

Duncan shared his experience of how this works at Disney: senior people give feedback on ideas, but those who own the ideas are under no obligation to take that feedback. It's impressive how quickly the sense of ownership for ideas spreads with this approach.

PRINCIPLE 5:

Create time for play

If you put people in a room and tell them they have an hour or so to come up with a creative idea then it's almost inevitable they will struggle. You're putting them in a situation about as far as its possible to get from the playful flow state that takes the brain to new places. Instead, try briefing in the challenge you're facing a week or so before you need people to generate ideas. That

creates days-worth of subconscious moments (such as the classic breakthrough idea that comes in the shower) that help people escape established ways of thinking.

PRINCIPLE 6:

Find a rule to question

Duncan recommends listing every rule that you can think of that applies to how your sector works, and then picking just one to take away. This quickly leads to audacious questions—and hugely disruptive ideas.

Walt Disney was frustrated by how difficult it was to deliver the experience of the film *Fantasia* that he wanted audiences to have. He asked what would happen if film producers controlled the environment in which their experiences were delivered. Within 15 years, he'd opened Disneyland and invented an entirely new consumer category.

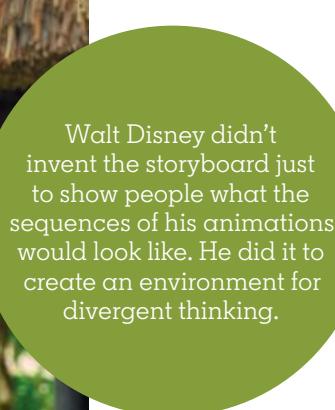
PRINCIPLE 7:

Reframe your challenges

The way that you frame a business or marketing challenge has a big impact on the type of thinking that you'll come up with.

Let's imagine you're a marketer for Disney World in Florida, and you need to increase revenues by 3%. There's an obvious and easy solution: increase your prices.

But what if you framed the challenge differently? What if you focused on making it easier for more people to visit—and therefore easier for them to spend more. In 2015, that's what Disney World actually did. The resort invested in 'MagicBands', tech-studded wristbands with radio transmitters that instantly slashed the number of queues and delivered hyper-personalized service. They gave visitors an extra two hours of free time per day to enjoy the resort—and enjoy spending money. Duncan argues that they are one of the biggest revenue-generating ideas ever developed. ■



Walt Disney didn't invent the storyboard just to show people what the sequences of his animations would look like. He did it to create an environment for divergent thinking.



The 'MagicBands' that Disney developed for Disney World in Florida are one of the biggest revenue-generating ideas ever. They came from reframing the challenge of how to increase revenues: from putting prices up to cutting friction out of the customer experience.



Future in Focus

Marketing After the Cookie Crumbles

The demise of the cookie is one of the most pressing issues facing marketing today: a challenge for targeting and measurement, but also a potential opportunity to reinvent audience relationships.

The cookie jar is effectively empty. A combination of government privacy regulation, growing concerns from audiences over the use of data, and proactive measures from web browser providers, has taken bite after bite out of a source of data that digital media strategies once depended on by default. The end of cookie data leaves marketers and advertisers contemplating a very different-looking data landscape—one that has big implications for how they think about measurement, targeting and effectiveness. A post-cookie world will inevitably reshape marketing

strategies. However, it doesn't just create challenges. In rethinking data ownership, audience engagement and the role of digital targeting, there's an opportunity to evolve brand relationships as well.

When a data source disappears, agencies have a vital role to play in providing clients with perspective. They can help marketers to distinguish the uses of data that really matter from those that don't—and focus on filling the gaps that have real significance for brands and their audiences. It's a moment to reassess the value that data generates on both sides of the transaction.





The vanishing cookies also help to remind us that, just because performance is less immediately visible doesn't mean that performance isn't happening. As we focus on deeper ROI metrics, we may well discover that cookie data obscured much of the impact of marketing by illuminating very specific actions and impacts. We'll inevitably look at data differently—but with deeper data literacy and mastery of what really matters, we might well see it more clearly as a result.

The way we think about ad measurement must evolve

"We will need to wean ourselves off the illusion of perfect accountability that existed in Direct Response campaigns previously."

Thiago Correa

Managing Partner,
Performics @Zenith



"Speed and adaptability will be critical for marketers and organizations as a whole. The post-cookie world will bring to the forefront gaps in measurement, targeting, and attribution—and it is critical that marketers embrace these challenges quickly, think critically around what elements are likely just impacting visibility (and not necessarily performance), and to build systems that allow for decision-making when the information available has changed."

We've been highlighting to organizations what they can expect to see in terms of true performance impact versus loss of visibility, and which partners and parts of their marketing approach will be most impacted. From there, it has been about working to identify gaps and prioritize solutions."

Benjamin Allison
VP Global Media,
Vayner Media



"The end of the cookie is forcing targeting and measurement to evolve. We are working with enterprise clients to setup the right Martech for Marketing

Mix Modelling (MMM) and Multi-Touch Attribution (MTA)."

Zaryn Sidhu

VP Paid Social Activation, Brainlabs



Contextual targeting and real-time data signals are the way forward

"I think we will see a bit of a resurgence around contextual, first-party data."

Stacey Stewart

Chief Marketplace Officer, UM Worldwide



"Interest-based targeting needs to take up the slack when it comes to how we manage the buyer journey."

Sarah Mahoney

EVP, Healthcare Communications, Weber Shandwick



"Contextual and first-party data strategies are the obvious tactics that marketers and agencies are looking at. I don't think the platform mix will change—as that is primarily about where people are spending their time."

Thiago Correa

"Ad formats that can capture engagement signals for retargeting become particularly important in the absence of cookies."

Zaryn Sidhu

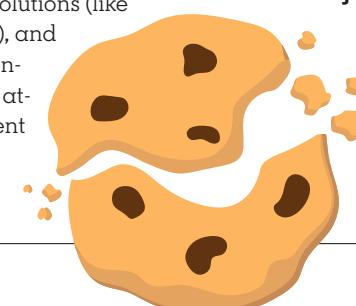
"Platforms and tactics that are naturally contextually relevant will see strong growth. The concept of 1:1, ID-based targeting will become a thing of the past. Measurement will lean into meaningful data signals that can be captured in real-time (such as from native and commerce), stronger 360 measurement solutions (like Match Market Tests), and a complete abandonment of multi-touch attribution in the current form we all know."

Benjamin Allison



"We've been highlighting to organizations what they can expect to see in terms of true performance impact versus loss of visibility, and which partners and parts of their marketing approach will be most impacted."

– Benjamin Allison





The quality of first-party data becomes a crucial brand differentiator

“For brands who don’t naturally own the relationship with their customers, the big challenge is to secure and leverage first-party data. In the absence of cookies, brand site analytics become a lot more important.”

Clare Chapman
CEO, Carat UK



“Brands will evolve away from marketing systems that rely on Data Management Platforms (DMPs). Retrievable

customer profiles, held by the brand, will be a major differentiator from a consumer experience (and marketing) perspective in the next five years. Strong brand-owned data ecosystems such as Customer Data Platforms (CDPs) will become a necessity. Native integrations (lead gen forms, native checkouts) will become table-stakes.”

Benjamin Allison

There’s real opportunity in giving up the cookie

“It will change the relationship between brands and their audiences, but I think there is an opportunity to under-

“For brands who don’t naturally own the relationship with their customers, the big challenge is to secure and leverage first-party data.” – **Clare Chapman**

stand the value exchange between a brand and consumer better.”

Stacey Stewart

“The what isn’t changing, just the how: we’re moving from the age of precision to the age of prediction. I don’t know that the idea of mass 1:1 consumer journey mapping and comms was ever really possible in practice anyway, so this disruption might actually help us to move forward.”

Thiago Correa

“Brands that have consumer data as a fundamental part of their customer value exchange will be well positioned to navigate this new world. Retrievable customer IDs from a CDP will help them provide more consistent customer experiences and grow their customer base in a less contested advertising marketplace.”

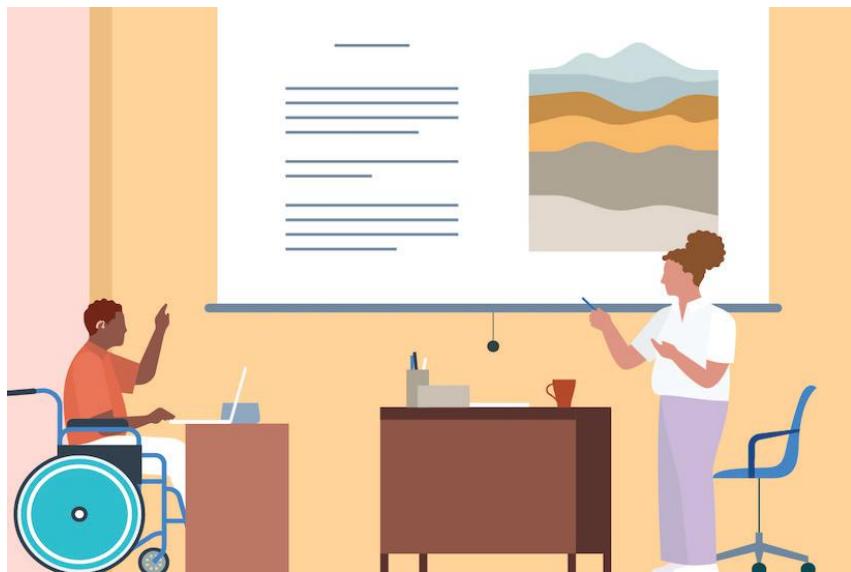
Benjamin Allison

“We’re going to need new approaches to managing the buyer journey and customer experience. Brands need to have a direct relationship with many more customers.”

Clare Chapman

“The end of the cookie will lead us to explore new ways to glean the insights we need, in a privacy centric way. The opportunities include a better system to validate the impact of different channels and platforms, especially the ones that are earlier on in a consumer digital adventure. In turn, this enables us to experiment and test emerging opportunities that are higher up the funnel and harder to showcase ROI for.”

Zaryn Sidhu ■



Stephanie Marks on the Strategic Imperative

The Managing Director for Havas Media UK believes agencies should help promote a longer-term view of brand strategy.

Throughout the pandemic, agencies focused on agility. They negotiated with suppliers to enable last-minute bookings. They responded to briefs in shorter timeframes. They deployed campaigns at a moment's notice. As the Managing Director of Havas Media UK, Stephanie Marks is proud of how her team has responded. However, she's also aware that the acceleration of planning and execution cycles leaves something important behind—and it's something that clients are beginning to miss.

"We've been making it really easy for our clients to do things short-term," she says. "We've had to flex very quickly and it's quite easy to get caught up in that way of thinking. However, we're starting to see clients wanting more of a 'stop and pause' moment—let's take stock of where we are and what it is that we need to do."

The pandemic hasn't been the only factor deprioritizing longer-term thinking. Marks has spent her two decades

in media planning and buying watching a trend unfolding in how media works – and how businesses plan marketing.

Towards sustainable growth

"Media feels more deliverable and accountable because there are more things to count," she says. "Many organizations that have done all their growing so far through performance-focused channels. And they're starting to see that future growth and longer-term value are going to require a change in how they do marketing."

Helping businesses to integrate longer-term brand strategy into their plans isn't a case of convincing the marketing department. Agencies must help marketers build a wider case within their businesses—and that involves

updating the agency model itself.

"So many of the marketers who come to us already know what the answer is—the biggest challenge is making the leap and doing it," she says. "The culture of their organizations is rooted in data and analytics and so that has to come into play, using longer-term metrics that people can understand. Econometric modelling can take a while and it has a hefty price tag. As an industry, we need to think about how we can industrialize the learnings that we have, make them accessible for clients beyond the classic big advertisers—but still make money from those fantastic services."

Updating the model

Marks sees this as part of a wider evolution in what agencies do. Responding to new platforms and new routes to market is a case of addressing emerging business needs, but it also has a vital role in keeping agencies themselves moving forward.

"There are different ways for consumers to access products and services, which means there's also

the opportunity for different solutions to selling products and services," she says. "A good conversation with a client is about really trying to get under the skin of what the challenge or the opportunity is, not always assuming that the answer is what's written above our door; it's not always paid-for media. We've really focused on diversifying what we offer in the last 12 months, focusing on e-commerce and on our entertainment business. It's brilliant from a product perspective, but also from a people perspective. It gives people the opportunity to move laterally, learn new skills and try new things."

For Marks, the excitement of working at a media agency gets lost when agencies only focus on execution. The real value lies in the opportunity to think more broadly, look over a longer-term, and challenge clients in a way that delivers sustainable growth. ■



Ali Reed on Unlocking Potential through Data

The PHD CEO sees an unprecedented opportunity for data-driven marketers to create value.

Ali Reed is a CEO on a mission. Less than a year after taking on her role leading PHD, she's steering towards a different vision of what agencies like hers are for. "My mission is valued growth for all," she says. "How can we meet the need for commercial growth in a way that grows the pie for everyone? How can we work with clients, partners and our people to drive valued growth where profit is just one outcome, not the end goal? I know that if I get that right, it not only generates brilliant campaigns for our clients, but also a motivating reason to come to work every day and bring your A-game."

The change department

For Reed, the future for agencies can't be built on squeezing more productivity out of people in order to perform a narrow role more profitably. Nor should that be the main application of the data that the digital transformation of marketing puts in their hands. The real opportunity is to use this moment to expand the scope of what agencies and their marketing clients can do.

"More than any other department in the organization, marketing owns the data, predictions and market trend analysis—and the shift to digital has pushed it into the spotlight," she says. "CMOs can predict change, and they can use that to step further into the operations of the business as a whole and drive it forward. Agencies need to understand this shift to better support their clients."

If marketing has more licence to grow the pie in this way, then it's partly due to an increased appreciation of the value of marketing spend. Agencies have had to answer challenging questions when client budgets come under pressure—but their ability to answer those questions is greater than ever.

Embracing uncertainty

"There's a requirement for faster thinking that's driving far better uses of more sources of data than ever before," says Reed. "Uncertainty is an excellent constraint. I doubt we'd have as many excellent sources of data if the world were more predictable."

Those new data sources aren't just enabling faster thinking—they're also informing strategy, providing the clarity that true agility depends on, and ensuring buy-in from the rest of the business. "Budgets overall are under more scrutiny, as you'd expect," says Reed. "We're seeing a lot more work being done to unlock budget during the pre-brief stage, but that work is actually having a positive effect reiterating the value of marketing back to the business. One lasting impact from the pandemic seems to be the importance that finance directors

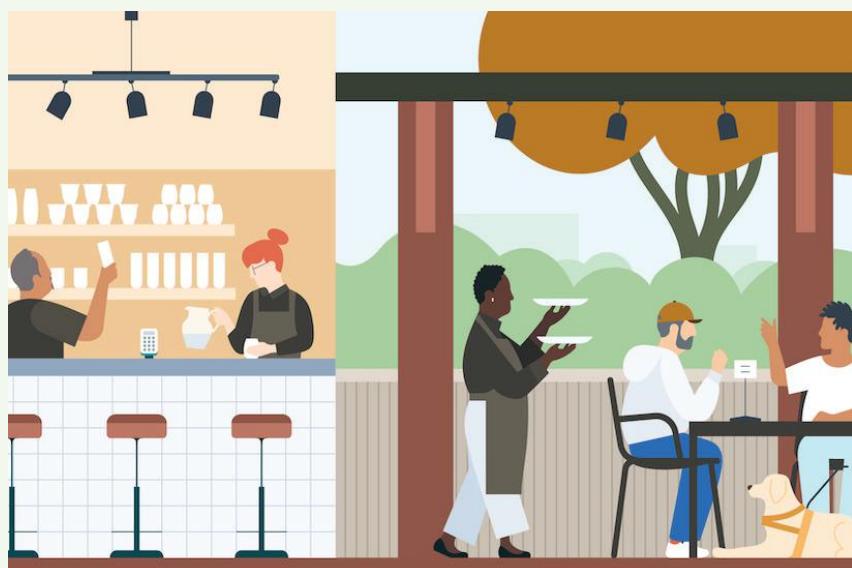
now place on marketing and media spend—and the greater recognition of marketing's value in the C-suite."

A bigger view of inclusion

A more data-driven approach to business and marketing strategy expands the role of an agency. Just as crucial to Reed, though, is the impact data can have on execution. This is particularly true of the need to deliver genuinely inclusive marketing campaigns.

"As an industry we can be myopic, running in one direction to be 'inclusive', but overlooking core sectors of society," she says. "Better data can help to identify where our biases exist and deliver marketing practices that are as inclusive as possible. This goes beyond creative. We're being asked to make sure our media plans are socially inclusive from a targeting point of view, checking our algorithms are not optimizing ROI towards one sector of society at the expense of another."

Reed has a clear-eyed view of the need to use data purposefully, if it's to unlock potential rather than obscure it. A wider view of audiences and possibilities has a big role to play in growing the pie for all. ■



Dan Clays on Investing in Ingenuity

The CEO of Omnicom Media Group UK says rebuilding confidence and innovation in media is vital to re-establishing growth—and he's investing in tech and talent to make it happen.

Media agency innovation doesn't feature much in debates and discussions about overcoming economic challenges. Dan Clays argues that should maybe change. "You can typically link the economic performance of a country to the advertising investment levels that you're seeing," he says. "It's critical right now for driving economic recovery, as it enables our clients to grow and helps them to pivot into new areas."

Clays believes a new respect for navigating the media landscape is expanding agencies' role in creating growth. To grasp the opportunity, agencies themselves will need to evolve.

The fourth emergency service

"One of our clients refers to their marketing function becoming the fourth emergency service for their business during the pandemic—critical for

business intelligence and identifying where they could pivot to," says Clays. "This drives interest in agencies providing other capabilities to marketers. We've got to make sure we have the human capital to execute it."

Clays has identified talent as the top priority for OMG UK going forward. He's focused on creating a new approach to developing the skills that his agency teams need.

"How do we make sure we've got the right amount of talent and the right kind of talent in emerging areas, where the breadth and diversity of services we supply is growing?" he asks. "We also need to make sure we're thinking about the long-term wellbeing

of our staff. And we need to continue to focus on being as diverse and inclusive as possible, as that will unquestionably make us a better business."

Clays sees investment in technology as key to elevating the experience of working for OMG UK. It frees up employees at all levels for higher-value tasks that can help deliver the expertise clients now demand.



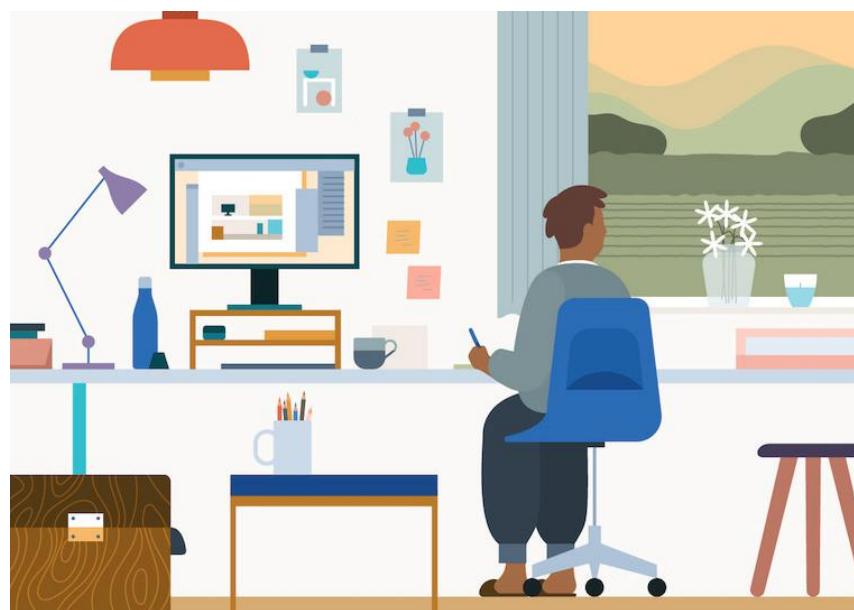
Every agency employee should thrive

"We are onboarding more automation that's going to give our talent more time to add strategic value," says Clays. "Clients are looking to agencies to provide a wider variety of services, but they want to talk directly to the experts that can add value, without a layer of middle management clogging things up."

One area Clays sees as fertile ground for such strategic value is the often-unmapped part of the buying journey between brand and demand. He believes that an innovative, data-driven approach to customer experience can help to multiply the impact of media spend.

"We are seeing so much value for clients now from activity that bridges the area between traditional brand advertising and conversion, and maintains always-on salience," he says. "That's why customer experience is one of the most important areas of focus. The level of insight we now have means we can connect audiences' needs with the helpful, useful or inspiring content and experiences that brands can provide. Some of the best work from brands such as McDonald's and Nike has been in this space. Investment in brand and conversion activity will be that much more effective if you're driving these incremental gains in the middle of the funnel!"

Future growth will involve some intriguing differences in how brands engage with their audiences and create value. If Clays has any say, media and advertising will be at the heart of it. ■





Sue Frogley on Media Evolution

The CEO of Publicis Media UK is embracing new client challenges, new ways of working and new opportunities to change the industry.

How has the pandemic changed the rhythm and scope of the work media agencies do for their clients? How about a project to design and build a state-of-the-art ecommerce platform that was due to take two years—and delivering it in six weeks?

"This was a brand that literally found themselves unable to sell anything when the pandemic hit," explains Publicis Media UK's CEO, Sue Frogley. "Our client would never have believed it was possible to accelerate their ecommerce so quickly pre-pandemic—but we helped them approach it differently. Clients are definitely expecting different things from an agency like ours. Even traditional businesses are expecting us to work faster and with more agility."

The story of the fast-forwarded ecommerce platform shows the value of an agency group. Publicis Media's ecommerce team was able to put in a "handy call" to fellow Publicis company Sapient to get the platform up and running. Yet, it's not just co-owned

businesses that are finding new ways to work together to build a more flexible media industry. The nature of the relationship between clients and agencies is changing, too.

Reshaping the media landscape

"Clients know that if they want greater agility from agencies, then they need to look at how they work as well—so we're actually seeing much more of a partnership approach as a result of the pandemic," says Frogley. "We're having far more meetings with clients about how we work together, improving briefs and getting greater clarity on objectives and goals. It's a really good thing to see."

It's not just agencies that are revisiting their business model to find greater levels of agility. Media owners are as well, changing long-standing

constraints on how campaigns are planned and executed.

"Clients used to set their media budgets for the year and we would know well in advance when they wanted their peak expenditure to be," says Frogley. "Today there can be uncertainty about when they're going to spend their budget, because approval can come very late. Last year we had a client call us on a Friday wanting to spend several million over the following two weeks. That was unheard of before, but we're now ready for it. We've put in the processes that mean it can happen. As an industry, we've recognized that this is how clients now need to operate."

From efficiency to growth

Frogley believes there's been a fundamental reappraisal of marketing's role in business growth that reverses many of the trends of the decade leading up to the pandemic.

"From the global financial crisis onwards, it was all about efficiency, efficiency, efficiency," she says. "Now we

are seeing clients looking for double-digit growth, asking how that can be achieved, and realizing that the marketing piece is the key driver. We're seeing a new respect for the fact that, if you're going to get the huge growth that companies need, it's going to require that marketing ad spend."

The diversity opportunity

Frogley sees securing talent as the next big challenge for her industry. Increasing the diversity of agencies has a big role to play. "Diversity is on everyone's agenda—every single client," says Frogley. "We have some for whom it's literally the number one KPI for their advertising. They won't do anything unless it's diverse and inclusive, and it's a demand they have of our agency make-up as well. Business leaders now have a real opportunity to turn a talent shortage into an advantage and change the face of their organizations by making diversity the priority when hiring." ■





Big Ideas

Why the World Needs Less Lonely Leaders

Former MI5 Director General, Baroness Eliza Manningham-Buller, believes that expectations of leadership need to change. **Tobi Demuren** explains why.

We're conditioned to think of leaders as standing apart, taking the weight of others on their shoulders, making big decisions under huge pressure. Whether we see them as heroes or villains, we almost always imagine them making decisions alone. And for Baroness Manningham-Buller, that's where things often go wrong.

She argues that, most of the time, the qualities required of an effective leader are very different. They require people to step down from the pedestal that their organization expects them to stand on, reject the 'lonely leader' idea and seek out a wide range of different

thinkers to keep them company. For Baroness Manningham-Buller, modern leadership has to be pragmatic, flexible and team-based.

Here are some of the thoughts that the Collective discussed at our session. They add up to a framework for the type of less lonely leadership that the world needs right now:

The way you've always done things isn't a good guide

One of the first principles that Baroness Manningham-Buller shared with our group was the need for leaders to accept that they are now operating in a rapidly evolving world. What's tough

for them to accept is that the principles and experience that have served them well on their route to the top might be less valuable to them now that they're there. The world in which they ascended and built their reputation isn't the same world in which they now have to lead. The way you've always operated can be a misleading guide to what the situations you now face demand of you.

Leaders don't have a monopoly on valuable ideas

Acceptance that the value of their own experience is time-limited helps leaders to realize that they and their senior colleagues don't have a monopoly on

valuable ideas. Those ideas are just as likely, in fact they might be more likely, to come from someone who joined your organization in the last week or so. Challenging received wisdom is crucial for an intelligence operation—in fact, for any organization that's trying to get to the truth of things. It doesn't mean that every idea from someone who's just walked through the door is going to be gold dust. It does mean that you need to keep encouraging contributions and then find a way to distinguish between those that are worth taking forward and those that aren't. A structure for sifting through contributions from across the organization was one of the first things that Baroness Manningham-Buller established at MI5.

If you want an agile and imaginative organization, you need to cultivate a culture of diversity

This organization-wide approach to thinking doesn't just involve embracing ideas from all levels of seniority. It also means actively recruiting people with diverse backgrounds and ways of thinking. Baroness Manningham-Buller recalled

how many of the best ideas generated at MI5 came from people who were neuro-diverse, unconventional in their ways of thinking. Organizations are more agile when they can identify and recruit people who will come at ideas differently—and when they consciously design a culture in which these people feel empowered to contribute.

When there's time, doubt can be a positive

Leaders don't like the idea of doubt and they certainly don't like admitting to it. We've been trained to see uncertainty as a weakness, both in ourselves and others. In a rapidly changing world where uncertainty is a fair reflection of the situation around us, this has to change. Baroness Manningham-Buller describes how knowing

the state of your own ignorance is really important—and that it's a crucial strength to be able to say at certain moments, "I don't know." Out of doubt comes better decisions.

This was an idea that struck a resonant chord across the Big Minds Collective, with several members stepping up to discuss how to build a culture that has room for doubt. The simple answer is: it has to start from the top. Admitting ignorance, and using it to dig deeper rather than settling for a simple answer, is a behavior that has to be modelled by leaders themselves.

The role of a leader is to be aware of gaps in knowledge—but take decisions anyway

There's a caveat to the principle that doubt leads to better decisions: sometimes there just isn't time for doubt. One of the most important principles of leadership in a rapidly changing world is identifying the moments when you have to take a decision on the basis of incomplete information—and being prepared to make a choice that might be wrong. It's not arrogance—and it doesn't have to take place in a lonely office in the style of a Hollywood movie. It's simply a case

of recognizing that there are moments when a leader has to take responsibility and be prepared to choose under pressure. Being able to balance this with self-awareness about the state of knowledge you're basing the decision on is a crucial skill.

Empathy is what gets things done

Empathy emerged from our discussion as a superpower within the intelligence community—indeed, a superpower for anyone who has to rally different groups of stakeholders around a sense of direction. Baroness Manningham-Buller talked about the importance of putting oneself in an opponent's shoes, how understanding why someone might become a terrorist is essential for your ability to gather intelligence on that person effectively.

However, she also talked of the value of digging into the motivations of those whose support you need. When it came to dealing with government ministers, understanding their needs—and the way they answer to constituents, cabinet and parliament—makes it far easier for an intelligence chief to give them what they need and move discussions forward.

Data and transparency can change the game

Geopolitical crises aren't the only test of leadership today. As a former chair of The Wellcome Trust, Baroness Manningham-Buller is also keenly aware of the need for global leadership as the world tries to emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic—and deal with the almost inevitable pandemics yet to come. In this and other areas, she sees changing attitudes to data as crucial. She understands the misgivings people have about sharing health data publicly, but points out the crucial role that this can play in establishing which treatments are effective for a new condition. Earning the confidence to use data in new ways could have a vital role to play in the world's ability to respond to the next crisis.

Radical change is often more effective than gradual change

In all of these areas, whether establishing a new culture, adapting to change or innovating with digital technology and data, leaders have a choice between proceeding gradually and incrementally, or trying to shift everything at once. It often seems intuitive to take the slow and steady approach—but Baroness Manningham-Buller argues for the opposite way forward. Radical change is often more effective for the simple reason that it clearly communicates a sense of urgency to your entire organization. When you present change as a series of tweaks, it's far less obvious why it needs to happen. Motivating an entire organization around the direction you need to take is what the future of leadership is all about. The more successful you are at this, the less lonely a leader you will need to be. ■



Baroness Manningham-Buller





Future in Focus

How to Build an Employer Brand

Employer brands aren't a new concept—but they've never felt more valuable as a marketing objective than they do today.

Employer brands have been around as a concept for about 30 years now—but during most of that time they've felt like a side-hustle for marketing departments. That's all changed with a Great Talent Reshuffle that's resulted in the number of people changing jobs increasing 28% year-on-year—and businesses racing to keep up with rapidly evolving demand for skills.

Behind the intensifying competition for talent is a phenomenon that's come to be known as 'Covid Clarity'. It's a global moment that has led people to question how, where and why they work. They're doing this in the knowledge that remote working has given them many different options when it comes to how they answer these questions. It's created an imperative for a strategy to engage existing employees—and a far wider

pool of potential employees as well.

The changes that we're seeing to the talent landscape are a marketing challenge—and also a marketing opportunity. Addressing them effectively by building compelling employer brands is becoming one of the most significant ways that marketing can contribute to growth. This is starting to influence the scope of the role that agencies can play for their clients.

Employer brand marketing makes a significant strategic contribution

"Access to quality talent has always been a critical component for any successful business. Recent pressure on pipeline has highlighted the importance

—and forced businesses to think about the relationship that they have with their employees.”

Benjamin Allison
VP Global Media,
Vayner Media



“We’ve seen talent as a business objective skyrocket. And we’ve seen corporate communications and storytelling become the solution for the challenge, rather than just recruitment marketing.”

Sarah Mahoney
EVP, Healthcare
Communications,
Weber Shandwick



“We see more brands coming to our agency that want to amplify branding against future hires. Audiences do not distinguish a brand based on their need to buy from them or work for them, so it’s important to consider the employer branding halo effects of brand media. It’s also important to remind your employees why they are with you”

Zaryn Sidhu
VP Paid Social
Activation, Brainlabs



“Marketers need distinct strategies for their brand and their employer brand. They need general brand positivity and then, underlying that, a clear sense of what it’s like to work for that brand.”

Clare Chapman
CEO, Carat UK



“Marketers need to push their organizations to think about the strength of the brand, and the value that the business provides for its employees and workforce beyond compensation. If these two components feel strong and in-sync, then distinct

Distinct but complementary—the secrets of an effective employer brand plan

“Building an employer brand needs to involve some level of distinct strategy.”

Stacey Stewart
Chief Marketplace Of-
ficer, UM Worldwide



“I think employer brand is a distinct exercise, although it is undeniable that overall brand comms will have a huge impact on the perception of potential and existing employees. I see employer brand as a second-order effect of a brand’s core values and how they live them, rather than an explicit goal of consumer marketing.”

Thiago Correa
Managing Partner,
Performics @Zenith



“Audiences do not distinguish a brand based on their need to buy from them or work for them, so it’s important to consider the employer branding halo effects of brand media.” – **Zaryn Sidhu**



employer branding strategies are less likely to be needed. Brands need to pursue employer branding in order to help reframe perceptions and ensure quality talent pipelining if there are changes that need to be made in either of these two areas.”

Benjamin Allison

“Marketers should separate brand and employer brand strategies—as each audience has different motivations and needs from the brand. Messaging and media strategy need to be aligned to that.”

Zaryn Sidhu



Employer brands aren't just for your future employees

“It's more important than ever to market to existing employees.”

Sarah Mahoney

“There's an opportunity for HR teams to connect with marketing teams more as they begin to grapple with the challenge of marketing to existing employees—and engaging remote workers.”

Thiago Correa

“Getting internal comms right is so critical. You need your existing employees to be advocates. This really came to the fore for lots of companies as a result of the pandemic and efforts are being made to keep it up.”

Clare Chapman

“Internal communications and marketing is a key element of building and maintaining a strong and motivated workforce. While most of this can be done through existing internal channels (company meetings, emails, offsite gatherings, etc.), there is absolutely a role for external channels when thinking about existing employees—even if it's just sharing company wins and announcements through channels such as LinkedIn.”

Benjamin Allison

“It's important to market to existing employees, especially with the rise of remote working. This can be done using company-owned assets and channels, and paired with efforts for new employees.”

Stacey Stewart

Balancing broad awareness with targeted talent campaigns

“The total addressable market for employer brands is broad. Most brands and businesses need to attract an extremely wide range of people with

different skillsets, whatever category they are in. However, a media plan for reaching potential employees needs a clear brief. Are we looking to attract entry-level people or experienced staff? A particular skill-set? Those who currently work for competitors? People qualifying from a particular course? Get specific!”

Clare Chapman

“Overall, employer brand can be broad, but specific hard-to-recruit talent should have focused activations.”

Sarah Mahoney

“A media plan for employer brand all starts with audience planning. Using tools like GWI, YouGov and ComScore we can understand the audience and build plans with channels and platforms. Skills and previous firmographic info would be key pieces of a targeting plan as well. The context of the business would determine the addressable market, as a tech or engineering role would need to appeal to a very specific profile whereas a large-scale retailer would benefit from a broader approach.”

Zaryn Sidhu

“There is the need to educate and convert individual applicants and potential employees on the specific benefits and values of the organization, but there is equally the need to raise awareness and consideration among a much larger audience. This group may themselves be future potential employees, but also their perception of the organization could help shape the opinion of any primary applicant.”

LinkedIn allows you to target by industry, years of experience, specific skills, even current or former employers, which makes it uniquely valuable when thinking about attracting the right talent. These strategies can be supplemented by broader messaging using other elements of LinkedIn, industry-specific podcasts or digital audio, publishers and branded content, that are contextually associated with your business.”

Benjamin Allison ■

Big Ideas

A LinkedIn Founder's Lessons for a **Brave New World**

LinkedIn's Co-Founder and VP Product Management, Allen Blue recently addressed the Big Minds Collective of agency leaders on how to tackle the brave new world that's emerging from the pandemic. **Tobi Demuren** shares his highlights.



Allen Blue was there when a few friends in Silicon Valley first started kicking around the ideas that would become the world's largest professional network. He's been there throughout LinkedIn's growth to 800 million members and more. And all through that journey, he's kept on thinking: musing about the wrong turns as well as the right ones; pondering not just how LinkedIn has evolved but how the technology and social media landscape has evolved alongside it.

He's still thinking in the same, active way today. Allen spoke to our Big Minds Collective of marketing agency leaders from COP26 in Scotland. Our discussion covered the climate crisis, the diversity challenge for society, talent shortages, the types of value that agencies can bring to their clients, and the value of being alive to the unexpected. I've distilled it down to five key lessons that apply to any leader looking to make a difference to their business – and through their business, perhaps, a difference in the world.

LESSON 1:

You're probably developing a business idea, without knowing you're developing a business idea

One of the most surprising secrets that Allen shared was the fact that the first company he and Reid Hoffman got together to found wasn't the world's largest professional network. It was a dating site. "This was back in the day when that was the only way you could make money from the internet," he says. "We were pretty successful in terms of getting the company off the ground – and that was because we knew people who could help us achieve stuff. By the time we got to thinking about LinkedIn, we'd already had many, many experiences of how

powerful it is to have a network, and we thought, 'what if we could build a product that helps anybody use their network better?' That was really the beginning of the company."

The lesson? Your own experience could well hold the key to a great business idea. You've just got to be alive to the possibility.

LESSON 2:

Look for the behavior you didn't predict – and respond

It's amazing how many technology-driven changes take a form that the creators of that technology didn't anticipate.

"It's thrilling to work on any project which people then use in unexpected ways," says Allen. "The whole idea of hashtags feels so fundamental to the



web right now – but that idea was user-generated. People started using them as a way of indicating a topic, they started using them ironically – and then Twitter saw that and encoded it as part of their overall product. Social networks are like that. They're places where you get lots of interesting, emergent behavior – new things that we had never conceived of when we built the thing."

LESSON 3:

There's a difference between growth and value – know which you're optimizing around

Allen looks and sounds a little embarrassed when he recalls the group

photographs with numbers on a big sign that LinkedIn's team took to celebrate its early membership milestones. That's not because he isn't proud of the platform's growth – it's because he can recognize with hindsight that they were the wrong numbers to focus on.

"It's not our 800 million members that makes our business powerful," he says. "It's value. We've learned that every dollar of investment we put into driving user value returns more than the dollars we put into almost anything else."

There's a natural human bias to measure success by the numbers that are most easily quantifiable – but the real driving force of a business is often hiding elsewhere. And just because it can't be communicated so impactfully on a cardboard sign or a T-shirt, doesn't mean it's any less important.

LESSON 4:

The solution to The Great Reshuffle is the employee-employer alliance

In *The Alliance*, a book he published almost a decade ago, Allen's fellow LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman argued that the relationship between employers and employees needed to evolve. Fast-forward to *The Great Reshuffle*, with employee turnover rising and people questioning how and why they work, and his words seem downright prophetic.

"Businesses need to look at the way that employers and employees dedicate themselves to each other," Allen argues. "They need to take a look at Reid's idea of a relationship based around a tour of duty together. It's a much healthier, much more easily managed way of dealing with your employees."

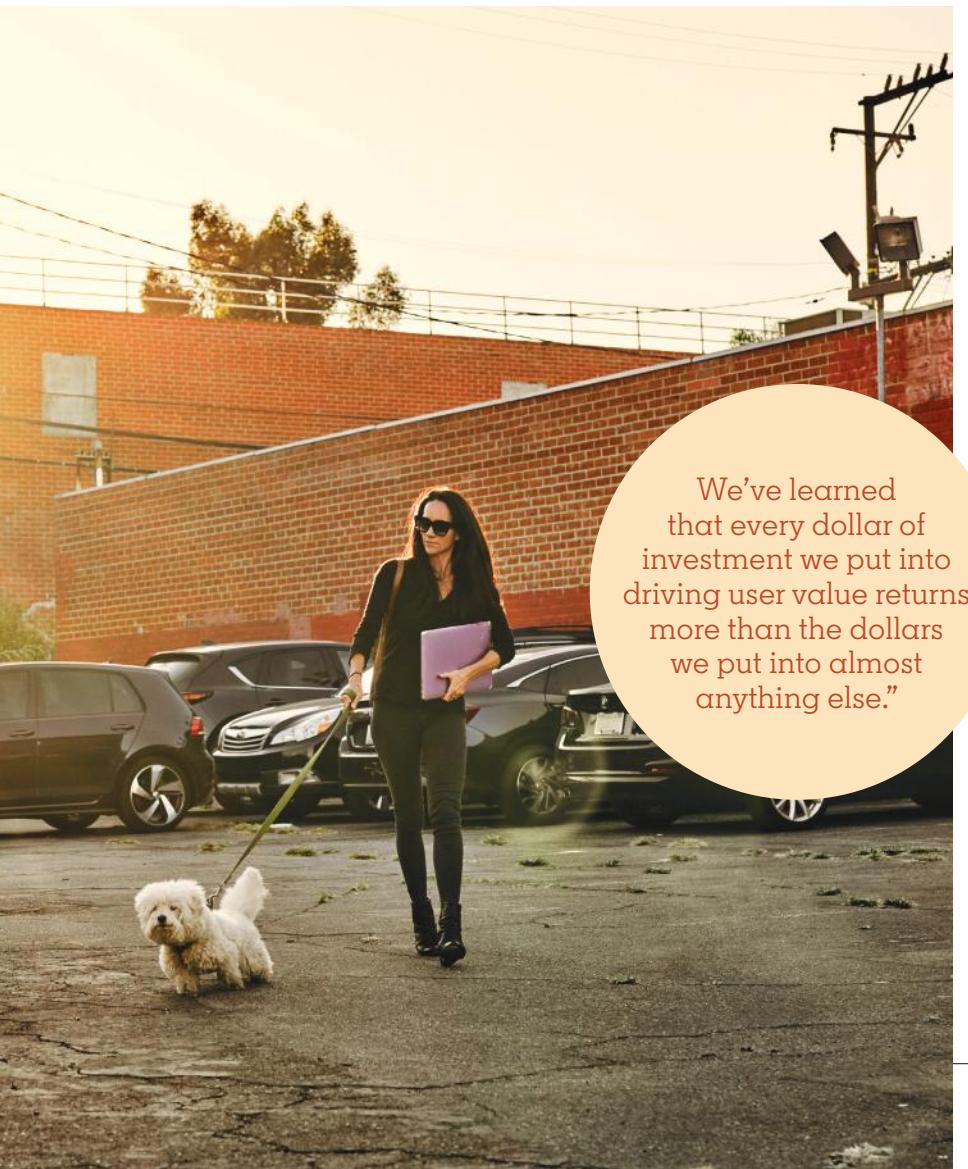
Employer propositions that focus on delivering benefits to both parties in the short term have much more meaning and relevance, Allen argues. "Employers can look at this as a means of making sure they have employees who are very good and are highly aligned to what they do," he says. "It really is an opportunity."

LESSON 5:

Don't be afraid of an evolving team

Allen believes that marketing agencies are a great example of how managing the flow of talent through your organization can bring more benefits than trying to stop that flow of talent altogether.

"I think about innovation a lot," he says. "And innovation inevitably occurs when you bring people from different backgrounds together to work on the same project. When I work with consulting firms and we work on the same project for a while, I want to see it mixed up a bit. I like some new thoughts – and I want to know that the firm is bringing the freshest ideas to the table. A changing variety of inputs might turn out to be a valuable thing for an agency proposition." ■



We've learned that every dollar of investment we put into driving user value returns more than the dollars we put into almost anything else."



Hamish Nicklin on Fixing Marketing FOMO

The CEO of media at dentsu UK&I warns that marketers and their agencies must beware of innovation for innovation's sake.

The pace of change within marketing has never felt faster. Digital transformation is sweeping across sectors, new consumer behaviors are emerging and annual plans are increasingly pencilled in rather than set in stone. In response, marketers and their agencies have had to evolve new ways of working, new ways of engaging their audiences and new routes to market. Innovation is everywhere—and dentsu is no exception.

As CEO of its media business though, Hamish Nicklin believes it's crucial to stay focused on what such innovation is for. There's a big difference between nimble changes that have a clear purpose behind them—and those that don't.

"The challenge arises when marketers' quest for agility becomes driven by fear of missing out on something," he says, conjuring the idea of an industry-wide sense of FOMO. "If we're not careful, innovation can become a sort

of holy grail in itself, but knowing when to innovate and what to innovate around is utterly crucial. You need to know the benefit to the customer and your business from the outset. If that's not clear, then what's the point?"

For Nicklin, the key to keeping innovation focused and purposeful involves finding the right balance between agility and strategy. Marketers need their agencies to provide timely insights and a speedier route to acting on them, but they also need those insights to be coherent and focused on a clear end-goal.

Blending agility and strategy

"There's a lot of debate about long-term strategy versus the need to be agile and the reality is that these two things shouldn't be conflicting with one another," he says. "Your long-term strategy should absolutely enable you

to pivot and react in an agile fashion. If it prevents you from being agile, then you've got the wrong strategy—and you've certainly got the wrong people around you."

The way Nicklin sees it, having the right type of integrated expertise available is what prevents marketers and businesses from hurtling from one tech bandwagon to another. It's also at the heart of what agencies should be providing for their clients: an ability to distinguish the changes that matter.

"When it comes down to it, clients are looking for the strategies and insights that will bring them a competitive advantage—and that's what agencies specialize in," he says. "Our role is to try and understand the consumer better than anyone, and extract that unique insight that can bring a competitive advantage to our client."

Whatever is right for the client



For Nicklin, it's the vast range of potential insights and potential solutions that makes life leading an agency so exciting. "Back in my media owner days, if a client came to me with a business problem, the answer I came up with was always going to be *The Guardian* or Google, or whoever I was working for at the time," he says. "Now the answer is whatever it needs to be. The breadth of ways we can solve a problem is what makes this so exciting."

In order to take advantage of that varied landscape, agencies and marketing departments need to prioritize diversity. "One of the greatest fears that any business has is being left behind the curve when social movements can gain momentum so quickly," he says. "The best way to manage that risk is to have authentic conversations with your entire customer base—and the best way to have those authentic conversations is to increase diversity within your own business."

The agility and innovation that counts most is the agility and innovation that brings a brand closer to its key audiences. ■

Anne Stagg on the CX Opportunity

The CEO of Merkle believes that businesses have a unique opportunity to improve the customer experience.

Anne Stagg admits that the biggest adjustment she's made in becoming CEO of Merkle is fighting the urge to roll up her sleeves and dive into every challenge the agency's clients face. There's certainly been a lot of temptation to resist in her first 12 months in the role.

"We had retail clients that had to achieve in two weeks what they'd envisaged doing over two years," recalls Stagg. "They needed partners that could support them. It's enabled us to carve out really strong, strategic relationships with our clients. However, the real journey starts when we activate that initial digital transformation to really transform the customer experience."

Committing to long-term change

For Stagg, digital transformation doesn't just refer to one process or one period of time. She distinguishes between the immediate fixes necessitated by lockdowns and temporary disruption—and the long-term transformation that marketing leaders should be focusing their organizations on.

"Finding the right balance between short-term and longer-term is really important for marketing teams and the wider business—and it's complicated by the fact that an agency like ours is often involved with an organization for longer than the tenure of the CMO," she says. "It's no good just fixing the stuff that's going to improve the customer experience today. You can't allow that to get in the way of the longer-term



transformation that's needed."

Taking the lead on that long-term journey will require marketers to think beyond their traditional role and embrace new measures of success.

"If you're transforming your business and your customer experience, then you need to change the way you work," Stagg argues. "As custodian of the customer, marketing needs to plan activity to meet increasingly complex needs and expectations. Marketing can't do that if it's not best friends with the chief technology officer (CTO), but it also requires a closer collaboration with sales, customer service, merchandising and product."

Marketing metrics that look forward, not back

It's that clear sense of the end-goal that Stagg believes is essential for building an agile business that can keep pace with technological change. It's also driving a different approach to metrics among progressive-minded marketing teams. When consumer expectations are moving quickly, it's important for data to look forwards rather than backwards.

"Dashboards and visibility of what's happened is one thing, but it's retro-

spective," she says. "The brands that are really winning are embracing predictive analytics and AI to anticipate consumer needs to deliver a personalized experience. You can only really do that if you're focused on the customer and growth, as opposed to campaign silos or channels. It requires a change in the whole approach to planning."

Marketing's emerging transformation mission requires other forms of change as well. Stagg believes that progress on diversity and inclusion is essential.

"It's absolutely critical that we build a workforce that's representative of our wider community and our wider world," she says. "Our clients expect it and it's something we're asked about in most request for proposals (RFPs). The bit I'm really excited about is the way diversity, equity and inclusion brings communities of people together from across our business, who wouldn't normally work together."

A sense of inclusion is particularly vital when your agency is pushing digital transformation forward at a punishing pace. It supports wellbeing as well as diversity—and it provides the sense of purpose that employees increasingly seek. "When people go to work and look for jobs, they're choosing their mission," says Stagg. ■



"As custodian of the customer, marketing needs to plan activity to meet increasingly complex needs and expectations."

Rachel Forde on Media as a Force for Good

With businesses buying into advertising as a growth driver, the CEO of UM says purposeful media choices could be the key to winning hearts and minds.

For most industries, the two years of the pandemic have felt like an unprecedented shock. Rachel Forde, who's spent half of her four-year tenure as CEO of UM helping the agency and its clients to navigate the pandemic, sees things slightly differently. For media agencies, the impact of COVID-19 has been less damaging than it might have been—because of the experience of another crisis just over a decade ago.

"I think marketers have always known that we need to look beyond short-term metrics to the future," she says. "The crucial difference this time is that everyone understands it—and that's because of the impact of the global financial crisis. CEOs and CFOs can see that brands that continued advertising in that recession went on to build long-term brand growth. They understand that media is a long-term driver of business growth, and so marketers didn't panic as much about

pulling spend this time around."

Engaging hearts, minds and communities

For Forde, some of the most exciting applications of that spend involve reimagining how marketing drives growth. She argues that focusing on the balance of brand and performance marketing misses a crucial aspect of the buyer's emotional journey.

"It's about the audience—how do you win those audiences, by winning over minds and communities? That's where the conversations are happening. That's where people are talking about your brands. It's the interplay between branding, performance marketing and the audience that matters."

The need to engage audiences gives an increasingly important role to social media and highlights the value of

advertising that's representative and diverse. It's something that Forde and UM have helped to illuminate over the past five years through the agency's 'UK by UM' research project. Its

purpose is to guide advertisers and agencies on how to address and challenge harmful caricatures and be much more representative—whether that's for the older generation, women, new mums and dads, disabled people, Gen-Z or the LGBT+ community.

"Advertising does have this huge cultural influence, and we do see it as part of our job to make sure we're pushing the dialogue," says Forde.

"UK by UM shows that people often feel more represented by user-generated content channels—and pushed away

when traditional media channels carry a high proportion of stereotyped ads. At the same time, they make positive choices when ads do reflect who they are. There's a huge gap and also a huge opportunity that many advertisers are missing out on."

The power of diverse advertising and media

Forde argues that there isn't just an imperative for marketers to create more diverse advertising. There's real value in a diverse approach to media buying.

"We have a whole directory of media owners that are run by diverse groups and speak to more diverse groups," she says. "It's about making sure they get the advertising dollars they need to survive. Through media choices you can make a really positive impact by keeping those channels open. When brands go into those environments, it's very strong from a representation point of view. It says, 'we're here for you.'"

More brands will have more opportunities to make such statements, thanks to the digital transformation of marketing that's been driven by the pandemic. "We know more than ever about how to speak to our consumers in the right way—in an authentic way," says Forde. "There's a whole lot to be excited about." ■





Chris Bagnall on Digital Transformation

The Transmission founder believes agencies can play a strategic role in helping to connect up client organizations.

Long before he founded Transmission, Chris Bagnall dreamed of being an architect: designing state-of-the-art structures and transforming living experiences. It was when a friend tipped him off about the six years of study involved that he switched his attention to marketing. Having built his B2B agency from the ground up over the past eight years, he's found himself putting in the time anyway. He's now being rewarded with a similar opportunity to design new ways of doing things.

Transmission doubled in size during 2020. It's a period of success that's come with redefining the scope of what a tech-savvy, data-led B2B agency can do for its clients. Bagnall believes that this could be the most profound impact of the last few years.

"Organizations need agencies like ours to do many more, interconnected things for them," he says. "That creates an opportunity to be more useful in more places. Our client relationships have become stronger and more

strategic because marketing teams don't have all the answers internally for the questions that are emerging. When they have needed to accelerate digital transformation, they've come to us."

Transforming marketing through connectivity

The real significance of digital transformation for marketing involves more than switching to digital channels or virtual events. Like a well-designed modern building, the potential is in the way the elements work together as a single cohesive unit. For Bagnall, the key to competitiveness will be the ability of businesses to develop fully connected organizations—and translate those organizations into fully connected customer experiences.

"The sales cycle is so digitally oriented nowadays that any customer or potential customer has the ability to



"In larger organizations, marketing teams can sometimes be too isolated to connect the impact of everything they're doing."

be influenced very quickly and turned on or turned off by the experience that they have," he says. "Five or 10 years ago, we didn't have the technology infrastructure to monitor the component parts of the customer experience. Now we do. Some organizations are quite well set up for it, others need to catch up very quickly. Customer experience has to be a board-level conversation. If it's not a priority, then you're probably not going to be in business in a few years' time."

Designing organizations around greater internal connectivity doesn't just enable them to deliver value. It also allows them to track that value more effectively. "Without connected systems and data, proving the value of marketing is often extremely hard," says Bagnall. "Progressive CMOs are digitally advanced and recognize the need to own the entire revenue growth path—not just the marketing function."

This, in turn, puts more emphasis on the need for effective sales and marketing alignment. "The digitization of everything has made sales and marketing alignment more important, and helped to enable it," says Bagnall. "The data sources available today mean that we can be specific not just about the prospects we're going after but what their intent is and how we talk to them. When you talk to salespeople, this is music to their ears because they're not fishing in a swimming pool anymore. They're fishing in a smaller bucket of interested individuals."

Connected organizations deliver connected customer experiences—and benefit from a connected view of how those experiences flow through to the bottom line. Whether you're an architect or the founder of a marketing agency, the satisfaction that comes from designing those connections is something you crave more of. "Businesses like ours are constantly trying to break the norm and reinvent the wheel," says Bagnall. "It becomes addictive in terms of where you can take it." ■

Big Ideas

How B2B brands can ditch their commitment issues in 2022

New research shows that B2B marketing is the Chandler Bing of creative commitment—and its misgivings about going steady are hurting the bottom line. **Tobi Demuren** explains why it's time to change.



Above: B2B's previous role model for creative commitment; Right: Jennifer Shaw-Sweet of the B2B Institute, a relationship counsellor for B2B marketers and their creative ideas.

What's the most consistent characteristic of really effective, really valuable advertising campaigns?

There are plenty of answers that might spring to mind: the creativity of the ads themselves, the power of the brands behind them, the level of emotional engagement they generate, the targeting strategy. And it's true that all of these things matter—however there's one thing that matters even more. It's the willingness of a brand to commit to its creative idea—and stand by it for the long term. Look at the most common models for assessing advertising's impact, look at the brands that score most highly on them, and you'll find an enduring truth. Effective advertising isn't about having

lots of great ideas. It's about having a handful of valuable ones and sticking with them. It's about creative commitment.

Jennifer Shaw-Sweet of the B2B Institute set out the evidence for creative commitment in her presentation to LinkedIn's Big Minds Collective.

She introduced the concept of a Creative Commitment Score, calculated from the budget that a brand puts behind a campaign, the number of channels it invests in running it on and most importantly, the duration the campaign stays in market for. She showed that, as these things increase, effectiveness increases. Beyond a certain level of commitment, it starts to increase exponentially.

Jennifer and the B2B Institute have been working with James Hurman, the





pioneering researcher who recently worked with WARC and the Cannes Lions to develop a hierarchy of the effects that creative marketing produces: the Creative Effectiveness Ladder. Hurman ranked these effects from the least to the most commercially impactful, creating six rungs to his ladder. The top rungs deliver sustained sales success and long-term brand and sales growth. And guess what? They're only reached by brands that commit to their campaigns for the long haul.

The sample set that Hurman, WARC and the Cannes Lions worked with was quite consumer marketing-focused—and this raised the obvious question of whether commitment delivers the same benefits in B2B. Jennifer and her colleagues decided to find out. They worked with Hurman to re-run the research using 435 B2B cases from the last 10 years of the WARC database. Doing so helped them to create a new B2B Effectiveness Ladder.

It won't surprise most marketers to hear that the creative strategies used by the B2B campaigns were noticeably different to those in the B2C analysis. There was less humor, fewer stories and fewer celebrities. There was a lot more informative and educational content and more emphasis on partnership. But in one respect, the analysis was exactly the same. The B2B brands that committed to their creative ideas were rewarded with rising effectiveness.

In this way, the B2B Effectiveness Ladder highlights an opportunity for marketers. However, it also highlights a really big problem. B2B brands don't seem to do consistency. They can't seem to get comfortable with it. They are the Chandler Bing of creative commitment, always looking for a reason to ditch one idea and move onto the next one. And as far as commercial impact is concerned, that's a frustrating existence.

Could B2B BE any more afraid of commitment? Apparently so...

The most commitment-averse of the characters in *Friends* spent 10 seasons leaving his fears of taking the plunge behind and settling down. The problem for B2B marketing is that it seems to be trending in the opposite direction. Jennifer's analysis shows that the creative commitment scores for B2B marketing campaigns have been dropped disconcertingly over the last decade. Brands are putting less budget behind

them and running them for shorter and shorter periods. It's as if Chandler had started out engaged to Monica but then quickly slid backwards towards one-night stands with Janice.

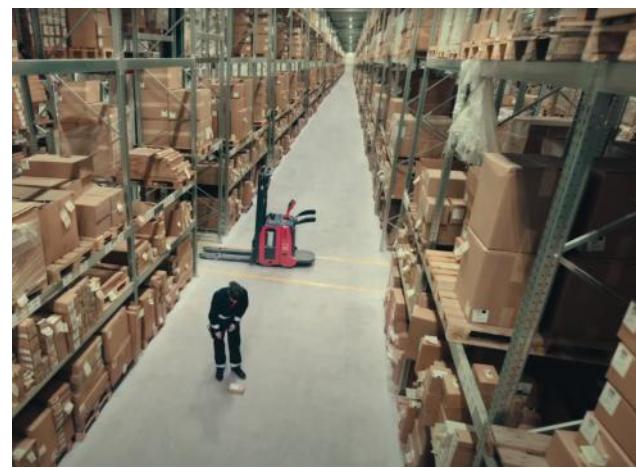
It doesn't help that there are plenty of influences steering marketers away from settling down with one idea. Awards may shoulder part of the blame. They tend to reward creative promiscuity—brands that keep tearing up their playbooks and doing something different. However, the brands that shake things up on a regular basis aren't the brands that chalk up sustained long-term growth. IPA data shows that the commercial impact of creatively awarded campaigns has been dropping away significantly over most of the last 20 years. Playing the field creatively isn't delivering the long-term benefits that brands are really looking for.

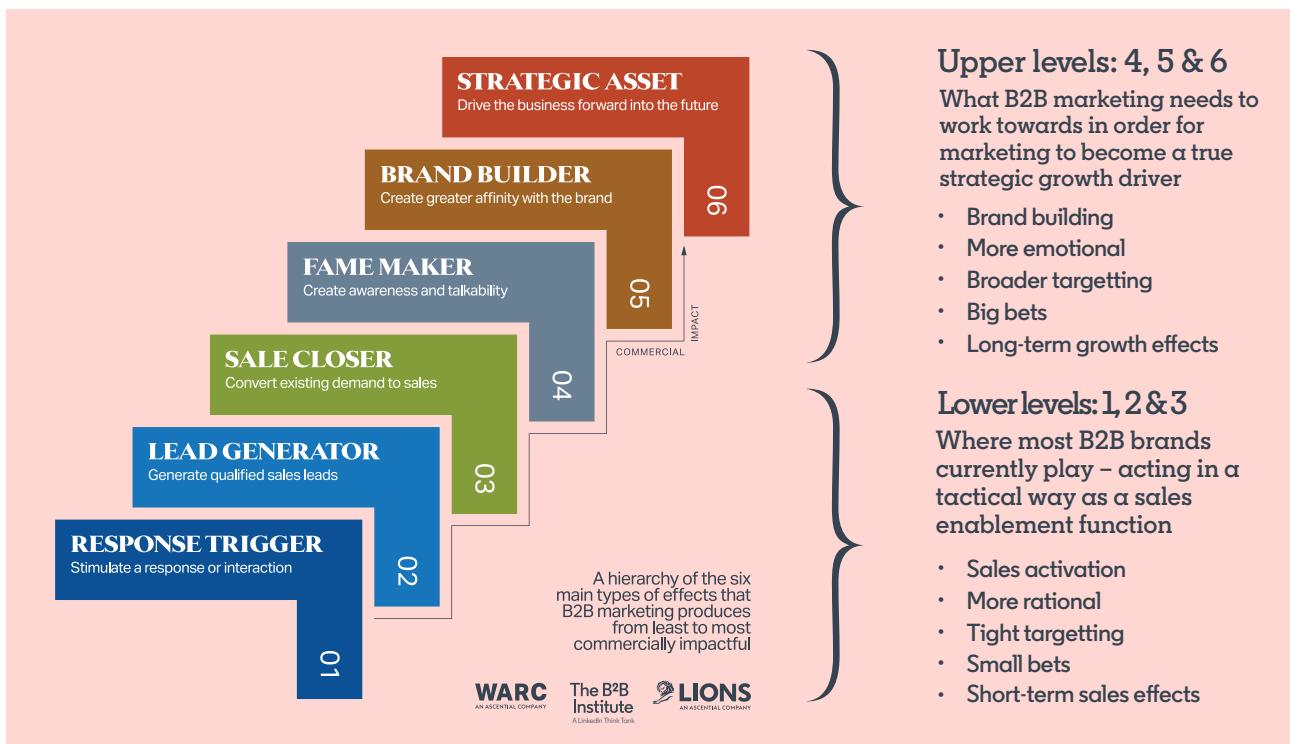
The B2B Effectiveness Ladder helps to focus marketers on the types of effectiveness they should be aiming for.

Chopping and changing condemns the vast majority of B2B campaigns to short-term impact at best—and locks them out of the type of long-term commercial impact that proves the value of marketing.



Maersk's striking brand film, *Disconnected*, is one highlight in a brand strategy that commits to particular styles, colors and forms of content, as well as consistent messaging.





However, it also shows how few B2B campaigns are currently driving such impact. While 76% of B2B campaigns reach step one of the ladder, where they succeed in driving some form of interaction, only 36% make it to step three, where they convert existing demand to sales. Three quarters never create the awareness and talkability that constitutes brand fame and affinity. Only 5% reach the top of the ladder, where they become genuine strategic assets driving their business forward into the future. Chopping and changing condemns the vast majority of B2B campaigns to short-term impact at best—and locks them out of the type of long-term commercial impact that proves the value of marketing.

The characteristics of commitment-friendly B2B campaigns

So how can B2B marketers help their brands get over a fear of commitment and access the type of long-term commercial impact that really pays back marketing investment? The key is understanding that you are looking to commit for the long-term—and focusing on developing ideas that will

enable you to do so.

There are many creative routes to capturing attention in the short-term, stimulating a response and driving immediate sales. Developing a creative idea that can feel fresh and relevant for years is more demanding. The idea needs to be repeatable and adaptable—capable of being used across channels and contexts so that its Return on Investment (ROI) can build over time. As James Hurman puts it, “Strategic Asset campaigns are versatile and enduring creative platforms that are re-purposed again and again, over successive years.”

Ready to commit? Here's how to start...

Consciously designing campaigns you can commit to is a very real creative differentiator in itself. Jennifer shared ideas for the types of insights that such a creative process can be built on. She suggests mining search data for an understanding of category need states and entry points for your market, guiding you towards the language and priorities that will keep resonating with your audience at relevant moments. She emphasizes the importance of identifying the campaign elements

that people recognize and which resonate—and sticking to them consistently. It could involve color, tone of voice, brand characters or particular styles of stories. There are many different creative combinations that can help marketers to climb the B2B Effectiveness Ladder—provided they design them to work over years rather than months.

For an example of creative commitment in action in B2B, look at Maersk. The logistics company has seen its commercial performance increasing on an upwards curve over the last three years, in line with its brand perception. It’s done so by developing a creative ethos and recognizable style that it can apply across channels and across different types of marketing activity. Provocative, futuristic stories, presented in a consistent color scheme and in a familiar font, have become the hallmark of the Maersk brand whether it’s speaking to C-suite decision makers, logistics leads or those doing the shipping. It’s the type of creative commitment that delivers real results. And proof that planning to settle down with one set of recognizable ideas is the route to real fulfilment for marketing. ■

