**Transforming client / agency relationships**

**Michael Islip, CEO UK, DigitasLBi, outlines what agencies need to do if they are to continue being useful to brands.**

Many industries, from travel to music to bookselling, have been disintermediated by technology - their layers of middle-men removed, their supply chains crunched as people are able to buy from and use services from businesses directly - and gradually this trend has come to the marketing industry itself.

The agencies that once controlled the one-way bridge between brands and consumers (they bought the media, made the TV adverts, wrote the PR stories) are now challenged by the rise of connected platforms that let brands address consumers directly, but also allow people to talk straight back with a click or a swipe.

The client-agency relationship is consequently changing and there are three areas that need to be set up right if agencies are to continue to be useful to brands:

**The right incentives**. Usually a client pays for its agency’s time and hopes the resulting campaign will bring success. In the digital world, where success can be instantly quantified and plans changed accordingly, it makes sense to be paid for performance and the value that the work delivers (and if we get it right the incentives should lead us to better more connected work too)

**Collaboration**. People move as fast as technology lets them. For an agency to keeps its brands relevant, it must collaborate constantly across the evolving landscape, linking with tomorrow’s technology partners, rising media platforms and fresh start-ups. We need collaborative DNA and the willingness to find the right partners.

**An ever-evolving brief**. And the thing is that today there is often no end point to your digital activity: you are never going to stop trying to improve the mobile experience you give to your customers, you probably won’t decide to stop servicing your customers through social next week and beneath this the technological landscape changes constantly. So a brand requires a relationship with its agency that evolves like technology does, not a project-by-project fix.

A fluid, collaborative, performance-based style of working doesn’t come naturally to all agencies, but disintermediation is an impolite process, and it doesn’t ask permission. The agencies that thrive will be the ones that can continue to evolve as although the change might feel seismic today, we’ve only just begun.