

Sid McGrath

Who am I?

A proven creative problem-solver, Chief Strategy Officer, agency founder and day-to-day planner that has worked at some of the industry's most distinctive and creative agencies.

What are my specific skills?

Agency, business and brand positioning and repositioning. From HHCL and Partners, to my own agency Karmarama, to my most recent time at Wunderman Thompson, I've successfully relaunched and reinterpreted agencies for an ever-changing market. I find their point of difference or distinction and build a modern positioning and culture around this, transforming the type of work the agency creates, the services it offers, how it presents itself, pitches that work and then, internally, develop ways for the employees to feel a sense of belonging and ownership through induction, training and development programmes.

Creative problem solving for brands and businesses. Throughout my career I've found ways to maximise the potential of multiple brands, businesses and agencies by generating popular, memorable creative work that builds relevance, reputations and revenue. Working closely with Creatives and Clients, I've been able to provide unique insights, clear inspiration and a compelling argument for why an idea or course of action is right, ensuring the very best work is conceived, recommended and made. I've done this both for existing and new business with over 60 competitive pitch wins.

Agency and People leadership. I have a strong track-record of leading people, whether at an agency or department level. I'm able to create a compelling vision, win approval for it and flow it throughout the organisation to every aspect of the business. I guide people, give them a sense of worth and value and help them realise their full potential.

Private equity and acquisition guidance. Guided Karmarama through private equity investment, a succession of business acquisitions in creative and marketing technology, and ultimately to one of the largest industry sales to Accenture Interactive. By creating long-term business and marketing plans and a focus on what an agency needs to be to remain relevant and distinct, I've been able to keep an agency and team engaged, growing and attractive to investors and buyers alike.

Retail expertise. I've worked with a wide range of retail brands helping them define their position, purpose and point, creating marketing and communication plans that work throughout the company. I transformed Iceland from budget supermarket to frozen expert through 'The Power of Frozen' positioning, took Costa Coffee from number 4 in market to number 1, global expansion and ultimately to multi-billion dollar sale to The Coca Cola Company, and helped Lidl to its strongest-ever business growth through the 'Big On Quality' and 'Always Lidl on Price' platforms.

Writer, speaker, presenter. In addition to frequent contributions to industry publications, I've created signature think-pieces that have led to defined agency points of view and new business opportunities, including:

- Planning For Chaos: How to survive and thrive in a never-ending recession
- Beyond Growth: Getting comfortable with unpredictability
- Making Brands Whole Again: Why modern brands are fracturing and how to mend them
- Healing Retail: How to repair fractured retail brands
- Masters of Consequence: Why planners are here for the long term
- Brand Nirvana: Closing the human experience gap

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Wunderman Thompson, Chief Strategy Officer Nov '20 – Mar '24

Working in partnership with the CEO and CCO, responsible for defining and delivering the business ambition, positioning and culture post-merger of the UK's largest communications agency.

Principle pitcher and pitch doctor on main new business opportunities as well as planning lead across advertising-led clients including HSBC, first direct, Kit Kat, Nestle confectionary brands, BT Sport and Chubb Insurance. Regular contributor to industry publications (e.g. WARC) and marketing events (e.g. Festival of Marketing).

Achievements:

- Formulated a 3-year, 3-point plan to make the agency distinctive, relevant and successful:
 1. Created a new integrated positioning for the agency – 'helping to make fractured brands whole again' – that spawned new processes, training programmes, and culture change that founded the 'whole person development' programme. Resulted in winning Campaign Integrated Agency of the Year at first attempt, awarded a Best of British Brand by The Independent, and drove existing client growth as the external market softened.
 2. Introduced a Creative First ambition to the agency to focus on quality of work and the design of ideas and campaigns that 'get the nation talking', leading to a reinvigorated creative department with a clearer sense of purpose and scale of work, and an agency with renewed enthusiasm and momentum.
 3. Introduced and built a social media offering designed to keep the agency modern and better integrate clients into more of the services offered, while creating content that would get talked about and acted on, resulting in a 50% conversion rate from all client introductions.
- Outlined the agency strategy for 3 years, 2021 - 2023, designed to present a clear and distinct offering to current and potential clients, and then aligned the UK leadership team behind it before presenting to and embedding into the agency.
- Pitched and won a wide selection of client business, including first direct, Costa Coffee, Kit Kat (Global), After Eight (Global), Chubb Insurance (Global), Samsung Smart Things (Global)

Karmarama (later Karmarama/Accenture Interactive), Founder, Chief Strategy Officer (and later Accenture Managing Partner) April 2006 – October 2020

As an owner and founding partner, built Karmarama into one of the most distinct communication agencies in the UK, with a creative reputation, culture and client list envied by many. Took specific responsibility for defining the business strategy, agency positioning, cultural values and behaviours, culminating in one of the largest industry sales ever.

Principle pitcher on 50+ new business opportunities, contributor to industry publications and marketing events including Festival of Marketing and SXSW.

Achievements:

- Built the agency from 8 to 300 people while still maintaining the culture, principles, and integrity of an independent, resulting in recognition by The Sunday Times as the best creative agency to work at for 7-years running and regularly delivering £50m+ annual revenue.
- Created a distinct agency positioning around 'Good Works' and the principle of 'doing the right thing' long before other agencies appreciated the value of purpose, leading to continued new business success, winning accounts including the BBC, Lidl, Costa Coffee, The Army, Confused.com, Plusnet, B&Q, Honda, first direct, AO.com and Lastminute.com.

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- Honed the agency skills and reputation around challenger branding, working with some of the most entrepreneurial clients and businesses to create hard-working and memorable work that defined financial odds to deliver significant business growth.
- Guided the agency through private equity investment in 2012 with Phoenix Partners, giving us the funds for agency diversification through acquisitions in Social, PR, Mobile, Data and CRM, and then a trade sale in 2016 to Accenture Interactive that continued the ambition to be 'the most progressive creative company in the world', embracing the value of data and mobile as part of the marketing mix.
- Won Marketing Week agency of the year, and brand of the year with Costa Coffee and BBC, 2-years' running.
- Wrote and published 'Brand Nirvana - Closing The Human Experience Gap' and presented extensively throughout Europe to clients and industry audiences.

HHCL and Partners, Head of Planning (and latterly Managing Director) 1998 – 2006

Head of department at one of the industry's most radical and talked-about agencies, responsible for developing famous work for brands including Sky, amazon.com, Martini, Pot Noodle, Birds Eye, Iceland supermarkets and Mars confectionary.

Became principal pitcher as the agency diversified into more of a 360 full-service offering, helping it achieve its best years of business growth, ultimately being recognised as Campaign's first-ever Agency of the Decade.

Achievements:

- Built department to 30 of the best-of-breed planners, broadening the scope into business strategy as well as communications planning.
- Led agency through a rebrand and integration into a global network, to become HHCL United, opening up opportunities with Coca Cola and InBev.
- Pitched and won a wide selection of client business, including amazon.com, Metz, Martini V2, Birds Eye, Sky Sports, Mars confectionary, Fruit2Day.

JWT, Planner, 1994 - 1998

Learned the art of planning from some of the best in the business, responsible for Nestle Rowntree accounts (KitKat, After Eight, Lion bar, Black Magic, Smarties) and Unilever Foods (OXO and Chicken Tonight).

Procter & Gamble, Brand Manager, 1989 - 1994

Trained in the skills of marketing from a world-renowned company, responsible for Max Factor and Cover Girl as Brand Manager. Previously responsible for marketing Fairy Liquid, Pampers and Dreft.