

Yuvisti Ramgulam of 8909 Digital; Answer the call of the challenge

 By [Emily Stander](#)

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In the past couple of years, we have seen changes in the advertising industry that have demanded adaptive thinking.



Image supplied: Yuvisti Ramgulam, head of client service for 8909 Digital

While Covid has changed how agencies work, leading to a significant rise in social awareness, and with it an increased demand for agencies to be more accepting and viable for the workers in them, client-agency relationships still need to evolve with the changes the industry faces.



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Yuvisti Ramgulam, head of client service for 8909 Digital, believes that the industry has lost its backbone in this regard. “The ‘never-say-no’ principles that many agencies conform to is indicative of a dysfunctional client-agency dynamic,” she said.

8909 Digital, a digital marketing agency, recently won two gold, one silver and one bronze at the Bookmark Awards. Ramgulam is an integrated marketing professional with 14 years of combined experience in corporate marketing management - having been part of client service, strategy, project management and operations roles.

“Walking the daily tight-rope of advocating for both agency and client needs, whilst simultaneously holding both agency and client accountable for the relationship, outcomes and results have formed a part of my personal secret formula over the years,” she said.

How can agencies make changes for healthier relationships?

Moving away from hour-based billing to an outcome-based costing model would ease the tensions behind retainer and budget approval conversations, according to Ramgulam. This would also provide a cleaner approach to a measurable

springboard that helps quantify business value.

The pandemic was also the catalyst for increased agency talent turnover rates by nearly 20%. "Adapt or die as they say... Agencies that are malleable enough will have a huge advantage over their more rigid competitors," she said.

Ramgulam expressed that it is time to say goodbye to the always-on agency teams creating always-on campaigns. It is the advent of the empowered creative that prioritises flexibility, family and holistic well-being.

The solution isn't one that can be summed up in a few sentences. "For example, wellness programmes are great, provided they're supported by better capacity planning, rotational shifts and mandatory time off."

Hiring with diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) in mind would go a long way in breaking some of the barriers that exist between clients and agencies as well as help to retain talent, a major problem in the industry currently.



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"Hiring with DE&I in mind means that certain concessions will have to be made to retain talent, such as improved work-life balance that allows for equal parenting, consciously creating opportunities for women in leadership roles, and even being more intentional in terms of client partnerships – it all plays a role," Ramgulam said.

Overall, the most important step, according to Ramgulam, is the initial assessment of client-agency fit. "It's more about values alignment and the right trust mindset to support each other and grow together through the often rocky marketing and advertising landscape."

From a diversity perspective

Beyond changing the perspective of client-agency relationships, there is also the challenge of making work culture a viable and healthy aspect of life for employees.

"What I find super exciting is that advertising (an industry that has been globally criticised for grotesque lack of boundaries and disregard for employee well-being, burn-out -culture, normalising inhumane work hours and crazy-making stress levels) is now – finally - being challenged right back," Ramgulam said.

From a work culture and DE&I perspective, Ramgulam believes it is essential to do better by the people in agencies. Instead of trying to put plasters on already-existing issues, there needs to be a solution that changes the dynamic of working in the industry as a woman, person of colour and other socially challenged people.



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In terms of women specifically, Ramgulam thinks that the industry has made progress in terms of recruiting women into agency roles - but they are still forced to make career commitments over their families, hobbies and the way they want to live their lives.

“Agencies are accountable for creating the ideal environment and conditions for all staff – not only women - to succeed,” she said.

Her advice to young women looking to enter the industry: “Be the change you wish to see. Culture is everyone’s responsibility - don’t lose your kindness.”

The value of adaptation

At the end of the day, if agencies want to succeed in client relationships and retaining talent, there needs to be a change in the way they work and the culture they create within their space.

The industry is being challenged. It is time to answer the call of that challenge.

ABOUT EMILY STANDER

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