

Marketing approach requires radical rethink to align with market realities

 By [Melanie Minnaar](#)

1 Sep 2011

The marketing industry has failed to adapt to fundamental shifts in technology and consumer behaviour that have evolved over the past decade, calling into question an agency model that is well past its sell-by date.

The industry is stuck in a model that was relevant 30 years ago, with the evolved focus having been on agencies specialising in niche media or brand execution activities.

Diminishes credibility

While these agencies are good at their respective areas of specialisation, they tend to pursue short-term creative or sales goals, as opposed to building long-term and sustainable brand value collectively across other client agencies or suppliers. It is the absence of real integration of services that diminishes the credibility of agencies to deliver on marketing return for their clients.

Considering the plethora of valuable new engagement mechanisms and the unmistakable shift to sharing in a conversation, rather than talking to an audience, true brand value cannot be built if the execution of campaigns develops and happens in silos.

While integrated marketing communications (IMC) has been a clarion call for some time now, it hasn't yet manifested itself as the staple of modern-day marketing practice. While the adoption of this approach is inevitable, it requires a fundamental shift from both agencies and their clients.

Clients are equally responsible

Clients are equally responsible for adopting this change as the agencies, with historical relationships having led to inter-dependence and a shared knowledge within too narrow a scope.

Agencies have existed to serve the client's needs and if the client is not visionary enough to demand change from the industry, there's no need to rock the boat.

The perpetuation of this approach is to the detriment of not only the account, but also the brand and the industry alike. Embracing this change, however, is a significant challenge for agencies, as it demands a complete rethink of their business and execution models, staffing and skills.

Blind hope

This overhaul may be particularly difficult for large agencies that have entrenched positions in the market and which may struggle to sufficiently and quickly make the change. In the short term, they may simply opt to continue as always, in the blind hope that they will be able to remain relevant.

Agencies delivering an IMC model require a multi-disciplinary approach, with the brand imperatives at its core. Even large agencies with multiple subsidiaries or partners providing specialist services that cover entire spectrum are at a disadvantage as the bigger-picture brand value is not always paramount.

They are also not nimble enough to adapt the execution to match the pace at which changes are taking place in the market. A core team, confident in its brand strategy and comprising multi-skilled individuals, is in far better position to deliver sustainable brand value by quickly and efficiently adapting to changes without losing sight of the brand objectives.

The right solution

It's not only about the execution, but about the right solution.

The biggest advantage to the client is that activities are aligned with the brand strategy, thereby contributing real value in a sustainable manner that establishes credibility while delivering more efficient and cost effective results. The one rider to this, however, is that the client must buy into integrated marketing as its associated long-term, strategic approach.

The challenge for agencies is to undertake the shift to align their operations, business model and methodology to be able to meet the varied demands of today's fast-changing marketing landscape.

The agency of tomorrow will be as much the custodian of the brand as the client's brand strategy team. It's not just about individual campaigns, but about the long-term view of the brand objectives and building consistent messages that contribute to the brand's credibility.

ABOUT MELANIE MINNAAR

Melanie Minnaar has spent 20 years in various corporate marketing roles, most recently specialising in driving integrated marketing communication, global agency management and group creative strategy. She recently joined independent brand-led communications agency Halo (www.brandhalo.co.za) as MD, where she plans to build a new-age agency that answers her client-based concerns and the marketing imperatives of the current day.

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