BIZCOMMUNITY

The rise of the in-house creative agency

By James Hunt

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Two things strike me as the word ‘advertising' is increasingly replaced with phrases such as ‘branded content', ‘native' and ‘content marketing'. The first is that we media types love to use two or three words when one would usually do, and the second is in an industry where disruption is now the new norm, how difficult it's becoming to accurately define its continued evolution. And even harder to then deliver on it.

Whichever term is used to describe what marketers and content creators do, what isn’t in doubt is that to cut through in such a cluttered landscape, an agile approach is paramount to create the content which is necessary for the multiple platforms and different audiences that now need servicing. Focusing on a particular format or singular style just doesn’t work, and will be even less relevant in the future as tech and product innovation continues to offer more and more places and ways for people to consume and engage with content.



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Publishers, as well as an ever-increasing number of brands, have responded to this by setting up their own in-house creative studios to service their own marketing needs, as well as the progressively complex creative solutions for their clients. Results have been mixed, and there has been a number of very public failures, but there’s no doubt that in-house agencies are here to stay. The best examples seem to be where a publisher’s in-house capabilities have grown organically over time, and whilst we certainly have our own challenges, that’s something we're very proud of at CNN.

When I joined late last year, the brand studio within Create had already been around for well over a decade. Born out of a rudimentary need to make a high-quality 30-second TV spot for several CNN clients, who didn’t have the in-house expertise or agency support to do it themselves, our capabilities and know-how have advanced in step with the changing industry, and the requirements of our clients over the same period. Such that today we’re as comfortable developing and producing an immersive VR branded content digital hub, as we are at devising a fully integrated brand campaign for one of our Ministry of Tourism clients.

Getting the right balance of in-house versus external resource remains the biggest challenge and we credit much of our success over the years to the internal know-how we've accumulated, but we also put a lot of emphasis on encouraging external collaboration. This could be working side by side with a client's in-house creative team to utilise existing assets, or working with a third-party when integrating emerging tech such as VR or AR. That spirit of collaboration needs to extend internally as well, so while we take the church and state divide between commercial and editorial very seriously, we also work closely with our editorial colleagues to understand the approach they may be taking with a sponsored show or digital series to ensure the branded parts sit well in context, particularly when it comes to creating engaging native.

There are undoubted challenges ahead, but the in-house creative agency is here to stay. That is until we decide to call it something else.

ABOUT JAMES HUNT

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