

How agencies will thrive in the connected age

By [Ben Evans](#)

27 Jan 2016

Marketers and agency people operate in an industry rightly obsessed by its future. The challenges to the old agency model that we're facing are significant - mass digitisation, a data revolution, the accelerating need for integration. Whilst all the time, the world is getting more complex and budgets are being compressed.



Agencies the world over, South Africa included, are facing the same fundamental issue - how to stay relevant (and valued) in the fully connected world.

These are the non-negotiables that we will have to embrace to survive.

1. Understanding the customer

The opportunity exists to know the customer far beyond their brief interaction with the brand. We should know the customer's full life context.

The creative engagement opportunities are enormous if we can unlock this potential. Our challenge is to operationalise this systematically. This will almost certainly involve investing in access to new data sources and hiring scientists and mathematicians into our businesses.

Another big leap forwards that we will make in being more customer-centric is to marry psychology and marketing. Leveraging known behavioural biases and defaults should be fundamental to any agency trying to help a client sell to its customers.

Right now the effectiveness of creativity is pretty much educated guesswork. In the future, we will apply much more science

to our creative output.

2. Inventing experiences across the customer journey

We must acknowledge that product, service experience and marketing are ultimately becoming one and the same in the mind of the customer. It's the customer journey that agencies must master - how we can help brands add value to the customer throughout that journey - whether it's a purchase journey or their life's journey.

The experiences that we build to make this happen will not necessarily always be a communications solution - we should allow ourselves to recommend service experiences, branded utilities and product innovations.

In a world where we need to understand channel, we need to practice neutrality. Unless they become integrated, pure play agencies will become at best, production facilities and will lose their seat at the top table (if they ever had one).

3. Great curators as well as creators

The creation and distribution of content is a defining characteristic of the connected age.

The creation and sharing of content will continue to disrupt traditional brand-building strategies. The role of the agency as brand custodian has to embrace this exploding content landscape, as well as the array of continually evolving distribution channels.

Agencies should play a central role - curating content, leveraging emerging ways to distribute beyond the simple paid model - acting like publishers as well as branded content architects.

4. Being investigative technologists

In future, ideas that do not consider technologies devoid of an idea will fail.

Creative teams must understand the art-of-the-technically possible. Agencies must be relentlessly curious, explorers of new technology. We must not think that our own inventions are enough - we must continually search and connect with technology providers and startups in the (global) marketplace.

Curating technology and combining it in novel ways to bring an idea to life will become a fact of agency life.

5. Mastering the algorithm

There are many routes into the connected world; search is currently the front door. Social is a critical route in and a growing part of the brand experience.

Both arenas will evolve to serve more contextually relevant content, which will be accessed and presented in new ways.

Agencies will need to follow changes to these platforms and their algorithms to help brands remain present. This service will be about helping keep the brand visible at the right time, in the right place to the right audience.

6. Partnering with our clients to transform

This is all much easier said than done. There is a tremendous operational challenge and investment required to make it happen.

In the agency journey to stay relevant and valuable, clients need to truly partner with agencies to make this happen. Clients must demand the breadth of thinking and service offering that will help agencies to transform to ultimately create value for

their customers.

ABOUT BEN EVANS

Ben Evans is Managing Director of Ogilvy & Mather's Digital Portfolio. He joined OgilvyOne London as a managing partner in 2010 to head up digital. A key part of the Ogilvy & Mather South Africa team from January 2014, Evans is responsible for leading Ogilvy's digital portfolio of businesses comprising more than 200 people. This portfolio comprises OgilvyOne - Ogilvy's digital customer engagement specialist; Goo South Africa's leading digital design agency, Goo@Ogilvy - a full service creative digital agency formed from the merger of Goo and OgilvyOne in Johannesburg; Neo - Ogilvy's digital media and performance marketing business; and Strike Media - a leading mobile agency.

- [BizTrends 2016] How agencies will thrive in the connected age - 27 Jan 2016
- The 'so what' marketing analysis on the growth of mobile in South Africa - 2 Sep 2015
- The future of digital marketing in South Africa - 15 May 2015

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>