

The future of advertising

I wish I had a magic wand to foresee the future and be able to plan ahead. That would be nice, wouldn't it? For at least. But, fortunately sometimes, to predict the future, it only requires a closer look at the present and some past occurrences.

 By Bogosi Motshegwa 11 Jan 2017



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Having observed both the past and present, I am confident to conclude that the future of advertising does not look anything like what we have today. If that doesn't scare you, perhaps you did not read that statement comprehensively. I shall repeat the future of advertising does not look anything like what we have today.

What does that mean?

The first casualty is talent. In the future, the people or the capabilities that people bring to the current set-up of advertising agencies will no longer be a priority. Human resource managers will no longer have to worry about the types of jobs we have today. If they do, they will play second fiddle to the future way of acquiring talent. Simply put, job specs will look something like this:

“Looking for product designers and actuarial scientists for a big ad agency in northern suburbs of Johannesburg.” – People First (HR Manager, Big Ad Agency)

Secondly, expectations from clients will shift, in fact, they already have. Big agencies have started to lose business to small agencies, simply because smaller ad agencies are more nimble and agile. Clients will need or require ad agencies that deliver more value than just communications. I believe that it is time for advertising agencies to provide more to clients than just a unique selling proposition statement. In the future that will not be a core offering, but an expected service that is just a kickstart to the process of finding *real* solutions for brands and clients in distress or danger of failing.

Whilst technology seems to offer agencies a competitive advantage, the truth is, there can never be a real competitive advantage from something that is open for use to every other agency. For example, no one ad agency can claim a unique competitive advantage from a social media perspective because social media is accessible to every other agency, it is just a matter of who is making better use of it. Neither can a real and sustainable competitive advantage be found from simply having talent. Having the best people does not give you an unassailable competitive advantage, it just gives you temporary leverage, because people move around. What you need in place is a system (which will be discussed below in the form of 'steps') that is self-sustaining and functions regardless of who is part of it.

A different kind of industry

The future of advertising is not about managing brands, it's about leading them. It is not about managing clients, it's about leading them. The future of advertising will not just be about cleverly executed adverts that have catchy lines.

The future of advertising will add value not just to awards cabinets, but to clients, the brands that they lead and the people they sell to. The future of advertising is where ad agencies will have a say not just on how brands are positioned in terms of communication, but also what role the brands play in their respective categories, beyond just competing with other players. In the future, agencies will play a more tangible role where they have a say in other aspects of the value chain from procurement to product development. In Future, agencies have a more meaningful role to play.

Steps to creating ad agencies of the future (self-sustaining system)

- **Hire differently – If you hire differently, you will offer differently, thereby giving yourself a strong competitive advantage.**
- **Dig deeper – Often we tend to offer clients what they want, and that is not necessarily the right things to do.**
- **Offer more than just communication – Often, regardless of what the problem is, the solution will be some aspect of communication, which is not necessarily a bad thing. But, to offer real value, communication alone won't cut it.**
- **Lead your brands – Currently, ad agencies are managing brands and they fail to take charge. That is the reason most agencies complain about doing 'bleh' work that they don't believe in, and the reason for this is simple; agencies tend to take the role of managers and will do what they are being told.**
- **Lead your clients – Similar to the above, ad agencies will need to lead the clients. Leading clients does not mean doing the opposite of what they ask for or forcefully presenting your ideas. It means getting buy-in from them. Building trust. Trust or lack thereof is one key factor that creates a barrier between agency and client, and this results in work that matters not seeing the light of day. Clients don't trust agencies enough to take the leap of faith.**
- **Build mastery and understanding – This is will elaborate on in my next article. But for now, simply explained, mastery and understanding are the abilities of employees to master their designated skills and offerings and at the same time, have a clear understanding of what is happening in other departments. For example, creative people who are concerned about other aspects of the business such as sales and procurement for example. By doing this, you are empowering your employees and equipping them with multiple perspectives, thereby enriching their ability to solve problems.**

In conclusion

The future of advertising is today. Do the above and when the future arrives, everybody else will play second fiddle to you.

ABOUT BOGOSI MOTSHEGWA

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