

How to achieve true inter-agency collaboration

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For every familiar digital marketing problem, there is a familiar answer: collaboration. Experience management is not a single skillset. It requires the cooperation of different teams; data, design, delivery, content, e-commerce, SEO, analytics, to name a few. This new world is a candy-store to the digitally engaged marketer. But with endless possibilities come new challenges, particularly when it comes to delivery and choosing the right partners. Given the range of roles and skillsets involved in the managing of any customer experience, it has never been more complex.



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I think we can all agree, gone are the days when creative and design sat proudly front and center, supported by back-office production team. Today we're all equal and it's the interplay between skillsets that can make or break a campaign.

I was recently involved in a project where the team functioned something like this:

- consumer insight consultancy hands over to a
- creative design agency who works with a
- content house to create inputs for a
- web production team that takes requirements from a
- measurement partner who hand insight back to the client.

For even the most digitally savvy, a simple campaign can become mind boggling.

We know that problems get solved a lot quicker when everyone's together, so why not put all the partners in a (virtual) room to solve a problem together? No handovers, no refactoring, just parallel workstreams. Collaboration, when well engineered, poses many benefits exclusive to digital. From experience, doing it this way, means the experience will be creatively designed for easy production, infrastructure built to support commerce and content optimised for measurement from the outset.

But, collaboration, on its own, is not enough to achieve cross agency collaboration. When getting agencies to collaborate on campaigns look out for these common pitfalls that could jeopardise the campaign:

A shared goal isn't enough; you need a shared starting point too

Avoid the temptation to get everyone in a room, state what the goal is, and leave it up to someone to come up with the solution. What do we do? Where do we start? Who decides? Stress levels rise, productivity stalls and only the loudest are heard.

Collaborative teams need tangible starting points which includes a detailed brief to focus minds on the challenge at hand. It also helps to define roles and boundaries. Your meeting room table might be round, but it had better not be empty. Handovers may be gone, but clear roles and deadlines are not.

During these projects, it's also good for leaders to highlight the equal value of all players involved. Nobody's work is worth less than any others' because we're all in this together. Work hard to empower and facilitate good and healthy collaboration with mutual respect amongst contributors.

There still needs to be a decision maker, and they need to be in the room

All too often 'collaboration' used as an opportunity to shirk leadership and responsibilities. A collaborative, open project still needs decisions need to be made, and a lot faster too. In an agile project - with no handover periods or review phases - questions, issues and escalations are intentionally unscheduled. Unscheduled challenges, however, can be kryptonite in otherwise productive projects if there is no clear decision maker. A good leader needs to be empowering, but more importantly demonstrate active participation and an ability to expedite solutions.

Temporary should never mean unsustainable

Collaboration is often used as a tool to get a lot done in a short space of time. When tight deadlines call for drastic action, leaders often resort to co-location and collaboration. This allows leadership to apply pressure on the whole team uniformly to deliver results. If everyone is in the same room, nobody can say they didn't get the message.

However, in these scenarios, the thought of post go-live is often left unaddressed. It's essential to the morale and collaboration of the team, not to mention the success of the project, and future work, that every party understands what the desired future state looks like. Without any thought to the future, team members may not see the value in supporting others. Even if the project has short term goals, the view of the team and ways of working need to be timeless.

With all the above in place you'll be able to create effective collaborative teams. You'll encourage immediate momentum, a respectful, productive and sustainable environment, and you'll be able to resolve blockages or bottle-necks with empowered decision-making.

The result of true inter-agency collaboration? Exceptional consumer experiences, delivered at the right time, in the right format, targeted at the right people.

Written in collaboration with Alex Mogull - consultant at Cognifide with a focus on Agency Enablement and Digital

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