

If it's not about the work, then what's it about?

By [Wouter Lombard](#), issued by [M&C Saatchi Abel](#)

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After spending my first 10 years in advertising working in account management, I moved into the people and HR space as Partner: Talent for the M&C Saatchi Abel group of companies in 2014.



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One of my biggest priorities is to find and attract the very best talent for our agency. I've spent many hours and days reviewing every CV sent to our office and interviewing hundreds of prospective candidates.

Right from the start, it shocked me to discover that in this industry, 'creativity' seems to be reserved for the select few, as only designers, art directors and copywriters bring to interviews a portfolio of work that they have delivered against client briefs. After four years of reviewing CVs and conducting interviews, I am yet to see a strategist or a suit (as someone in account management is also known) proudly submit their portfolio as testimony to their role in helping to deliver brilliant and imaginative creative solutions for brands.

Suits can talk for an hour about their project management and people skills and brilliant relationships with clients. A select few will even throw in their strategic smarts and, if I am lucky, their business acumen, proved by running a profitable account. Yet to date, no suit has ever pulled out their computer to show me some ads as evidence of their hard work. It's almost as if their role and responsibilities are

disconnected from the very reason their job exists in the first place: to get great work done.

This tension becomes even more transparent when I ask them to describe the role of account management. Hardly anyone focuses their purpose around creativity; instead, I will hear things like "my job is to hold the relationship with, and represent the client, in the agency." I bet there's not a single creative who would want another client on the project (as clients play that role well enough). So why on earth would suits position themselves that way?

Mark Winkler, one of our creative directors, summarises the role of account management as follows: "to facilitate the best possible work". I think it's a brilliant lens through which to view the single-minded purpose of account management, because whether you write a great brief, implement a smart process, manage your budgets carefully, present with flair or even write an accurate contact report – it's all in pursuit of the best possible work. And, as such, every suit should equally be able to talk proudly about the work in their portfolio, because they played a critical role in making it happen.

One could even argue that everyone's role in an ad agency feeds into this purpose – to facilitate the best possible work – whether it's in finance, HR, strategy or account management, or as a PA. Because, surely, an ad agency is a creative company, not just a company with a creative department.

So, if you do come for an interview, bring your portfolio of work and let's start the conversation from there. After all, if it's not about the work, then what's it about?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wouter Lombard, Partner: Talent, M&C Saatchi Abel

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