

Reimagining creativity in a world of data

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Creative companies do things differently - that's a given - but does a road-less-travelled approach deliver ROI, and how do you stand out when some technology demands you fit in? Emma Odendaal, Digital Director at [John Brown Media](#), shares some ideas.



A 2017 study by global management consulting firm McKinsey & Company found that the world's most creative companies financially outperformed their peer firms in revenue growth, return to shareholders and net enterprise value. (The assessment used M&C's Award Creativity Score.)

If creativity and business performance is directly linked, it stands to reason that we would want to protect and nurture creativity within our organisations. But in a data-driven world of test-and-prove, there is a risk that overreliance on technology will dilute creativity and produce homogenised experiences. The McKinsey study highlights that 'with an increasing focus on the science of marketing – including performance marketing, marketing AI, and advanced analytics – it's important not to forget about the art of marketing.' The chief marketing officer (CMO) who allows creativity to flourish will ensure that their brand stands out in a sea of digital sameness.

Reshaping your creative efforts

Most people agree that creativity cannot be automated, but a recent Dentsu Aegis Network survey notes that while 85% of CMOs recognise that their organisations' future business success relies on creativity and memorable ideas to build a brand and create an emotional connection with consumers, just 54% of them trust in their personnel to deliver this.

It is important to understand how data, analytics and automation have changed the role that creativity plays in advertising and marketing and how teams need to reshape their creative efforts. Our challenge doesn't lie in the technology itself, but rather in how we use it to generate light-bulb moments and grow businesses.

Technology is a tool for creativity

The companies that performed best in the McKinsey study were those that demonstrated an ability to innovate and a capacity to translate innovation into business value. They embraced rather than sidelined new technology.

The best ideas come from collaborations between people, and technology can create the environment for this collaboration.

So, consider how automation can absorb mundane administrative tasks to free up creatives' time to do qualitative research, have face-to-face interactions with customers and ideation sessions with teams. Data-management platforms similarly allow the easy storage and rights management for creative assets, managing copyright and legal needs through tech systems.

Understand data limitations

Technology follows a formula, which is why an overreliance on data and tech breeds conformity. Creativity, on the other hand, is an expression of freewill, diversity of thought and taste.

The data may tell us what people are searching for and the types of content they are engaging with on social media, but by the time content creators have analysed and acted upon the data, it is often too late. The trend is, well, no longer a trend.

Creative expertise picks up on intuitive signals to predict what people are interested in long before the data confirms it.

Apply creativity to all touchpoints

According to Forrester (2019), 'your goal should be to work with agencies that excel in both customer obsession and creative differentiation. This is easier said than done, given the uniqueness of those skill sets'.

Not all agencies support true creativity, as they typically lack deep editorial expertise that can interpret the data or they lack the tech stack that can adequately support the creative process.

Creative execution is not an afterthought. Agencies should start the marketing process with customer experience, data, tech and emotive content. The result is messaging that is memorable and makes a connection with the customer, with creativity at the heart of the solution.

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