

Can agencies create fresh work that improves clients' bottom lines?

 By [Charisse Nel](#)

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I hate the word "advertising". Whenever I am at a social event and someone asks what I do, I mumble something about working in an advertising agency and hope I don't get the usual barrage of judging looks and comments about working for an evil team of brainwashers.

Lost its allure

Somewhere along the way, advertising lost its allure, its sense of glamour and its credibility as a service that solved business problems. It has become all about awards and ego fluffing. Almost every business problem presented to an agency is solved with an expensive television ad that may or may not give the business return on investment (now, I know I am painting a very grim picture but you get the idea).

Of course, there is no real way to really measure ROI in advertising. Yes, there may have been a spike in sales for that period but has any long-term brand loyalty been created for the millions spent on creating the ad, then the millions spent on flighting the ad? Who can really tell?

In a world where money is constantly fluctuating because of global and technological developments and social movements that are taking the world by storm, marketers have become even more cost-conscious than before and those three words RETURN ON INVESTMENT are heard in every meeting I have, and rightly so.

Harsh realities

Paired with the fact that every person with a Mac has become a 'designer', and everyone with a Facebook page is a community manager, it has become harder and harder for advertising agencies to justify their costs. If you can get a logo from a freelance designer for R500, why pay agencies ten times that? These are the harsh realities that we within the branding landscape face.

Advertising as we knew it is no longer. Gone are the days of overseas shoots for TV ads showing the joys of smoking. *In a world where we are being called to be more accountable*, it has become imperative that agencies put the needs of their client first - to stop chasing awards and rather chase bottom line improvement.

Clients and stakeholders need to know that you are treating their budget as your own. If it were your R5 million, would you spend it on a TV ad? Would you really?

Strongly instilled

This is a belief I have held for some time and it is something that the rest of the company directors and I have strongly instilled in our agency culture.

A lot of agencies discount the client; they find them inhibiting, they prescribe too much, they hinder the creative process - but at the end of the day they are the ones paying and are held ultimately responsible for the brand. There is nothing more valuable than that sense of responsibility.

So here're are some tips:

- Stay up to date with what is working in the industry currently to ensure that the media you offer actually works for your clients' brands. You will be amazed by the platforms that are now available in a world that is fast innovating. If you conceive it and it hasn't been developed yet, source the right partner to make it possible.
- Spend a lot of time doing analysis, research and focus groups to ensure that you listen to the consumer. In the past, often strategy took a back seat but, if there is no intelligence and a reason WHY the brand is doing it, then it shouldn't be done. Period.
- Put your egos aside and offer what is best for the brand, not just for your portfolio. I strongly believe that if agencies are not making clients successful, we are not doing our jobs.
- Put benchmarks and deliverables in place that need to be met. Monitor the campaign, and adjust and react to the consumer response, so ensuring a more considered approach. Measure the success and do post mortems of every campaign to see what worked and why, and apply the same learning to the next campaign.
- Put tracking measures into your elements so that you can see who interacted with the content, and tweak content throughout the campaign to get live results on what works.

If it's right for the brand, is measurable and focuses on maximising budget and interactivity between brand and consumer, then present it to the client - all couched within a BIG IDEA that answers to the need for creative expression.

It's a balance and, if found, one that will allow clients to trust and believe in agencies again. Wouldn't that be lovely?

• Adapted from [original blog post](#) published on 22 March 2012.

ABOUT CHARISSE NEL

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