

The great business/marketing/advertising disconnect

 By [Gillian Rightford](#)

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Ad agencies wish they were taken more seriously by the clients as business building partners. They feel they should have relationships higher up in the organisation and are frustrated with dealing with the lower levels of marketing management; only executing briefs as opposed to solving problems.

However, there's a whole lot of questioning going on in the client world that impacts this wish.

CMOs and CEOs

In these challenging times, we know that marketing directors (chief marketing officers or CMOs in US terms) are under massive pressure. But there's a deeper issue: in a recent multinational survey done by Fournaise business consultants, it was found that [73% of CEOs think CMOs lack business credibility](#).

However, in another recent discussion that [CMO.com](#) had with top CEOs, they want [CMOs to have a 'seat at the top table'](#).

So what's going on here?

Marketing as a business builder

Overall, there needs to be a marketing exercise for marketing as a business builder, not the 'girls down the passage, who organise golf days and t-shirts'.

It's a recommitment to the solid principles of knowing what the customer wants and giving it to him/her in a way that no-one else can.

In some of my executive training, I challenge agencies to get more involved with their clients on issues such as product concept innovation to help the marketer innovate to grow their business. The general response? The marketer they deal with isn't even involved with that. It's done by "product" or "segment" - distant silos in the business. They, too, are only 'implementers'.

Turf protection, not better business

When agencies ask if they can meet the originators of the brief and raise the business discussion a notch or two, the answer is often no - people are protecting their turf rather than doing better business.

Agencies and their client partners should make a combined effort to raise marketing's profile in the organisation, to get that seat at the top table. Agencies also need to embrace measurement and ROI - to talk in language that the CEO wants to hear.

Kimberly-Clark CMO Tony Palmer talks about ['pain points' in an insightful article](#) in *AdAge*, about agency-client partnerships. One of the points he makes is that agencies **and** marketers "have not found a meaningful way to use measurement to elevate and empower creativity and commercial ideas".

That way, it remains ["'arty' and 'fluffy'"](#), as per the Fournaise study, and there's no seat at the top table for that.

ABOUT GILLIAN RIGHTFORD

Gillian's CV is a mix of marketing, strategy, advertising, and leadership. She obtained a Business Science (Honours) degree in Marketing from UCT, worked in marketing strategy consulting, then headed into the creative world, doing account management and strategy for below and above the line agencies, before becoming co-founder and managing director of Hercules/DMB&B, and then group managing director of Lowe Bull...

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