Senior Account Planner

Also known as...

Strategist; Strategic Planner.

The role in brief...

Senior Account Planners represent the voice of the consumer in the agency. They take a lead role within the team responsible for developing the key strategic insights that underpin advertising ideas, working closely with the client to research the market and understand the consumer. In answer to their client's business brief they help formulate a brand communications strategy, followed by the creative brief that will be used by the agency's creative teams to produce the creative ideas. They are then pivotal to the creative development process, able to evaluate ideas against consumer insights, research and the underlying client business need.

Working with...

- Internal: Account Management team; Head of Planning/Planning Director; Creative teams and directors; Researchers.
- External: Client Marketing team; Other agencies e.g. Media, Public Relations; Research organisations; Members of the public, via focus groups.
- Senior Account Planners will report into the Head of Planning/Planning Director. They will often have line management responsibility for Junior Account Planners and Researchers, being accountable for their performance and providing them with professional development opportunities

Responsible for...

- Working with clients to fully understand their business objectives, target markets and communications strategy.
- In collaboration with other roster agencies (e.g. Media), analysing and presenting findings from consumer, brand and market research to support the preparation of brand communication strategies and creative briefs.
- Devising and leading qualitative research e.g. focus groups.
- Commissioning and project managing external research (quantitative and qualitative) conducted on behalf of the agency.
- Leading and championing the creative development process, including briefing and enthusing creative teams and providing feedback in response to consumer research findings.
- Analysing and presenting data to demonstrate the effectiveness of campaigns.
- Keeping up-to-date with current and emerging market research trends and methodologies e.g. Millward Brown.
- Maintaining a detailed awareness of relevant market trends affecting their accounts, and developments in the wider advertising and communications industry.
- Supporting the new business team and account directors when pitching for new business with existing and potential clients.
- Managing the work, performance and professional development of team members.

Those who succeed are...

- Always asking questions and looking for new insights.
- Adept in lateral, analytical and strategic thinking, they are able to apply creative thinking to business problems.
- Experience in differentiating core advertising ideas from their executional treatments, and astute in assessing when these meet the brief and how they will influence behaviour.
- Proven to be capable of guiding and nurturing creative work that meets clients' briefs.
- Highly numerate and able to understand, interpret and use complex and varied sources of data and statistics.
- Strong and persuasive communicators, able to simplify research and strategic thinking.
- Fascinated by human behaviour, social trends, and how ideas influence people.
- Able to give and receive feedback that supports the development of the agency's creative work and improves the effectiveness of advertising ideas.
- Knowledgeable about their client's business and market, and where and how advertising contributes to its success.
- Focused on the personal and professional development of their team.

Where they come from, and where they go...

Senior Account Planners are usually promoted from more junior planning or research roles. Sometimes they may transition into the planning role from an account management position, or from a strategic role in a different type of agency e.g. Media Planner.

Senior Account Planners may then progress into agency management as Heads of Planning or Planning Directors. The effectiveness of their campaigns and their ability to manage a team will determine if and when this promotion happens. In some cases Senior Account Planners may transition into more specialist research roles, or deploy their skills in related organisations such as media agencies. Others may move into marketing roles at client organisations, or ply their trade in a freelance capacity as Strategic Advisors or Consultants.

Suggested Learning

IPA Qualifications: Eff Test, Advanced Certificate
IPA Courses: Strategic Planning, One Day Masters in Strategic Business Planning

Suggested Reading

Sharp, Byron, How Brands Grow
Feldwick, Paul, The Anatomy of Humbug
Collins, Jim, From Good to Great
Gladwell, Malcolm The Tipping Point, Blink, Outliers
Levine, Robert (2006), The Power of Persuasion. How We're Bought and Sold
Thaler and Sunstein (2009), Nudge

WARC case studies; IPA Effectiveness Papers
Blanchard, Ken, The One Minute Manager, Leadership and the One Minute Manager
Carnegie, Dale, How to Win Friends and Influence People, Carnegie Associates (2011), How to Win Friends and Influence People in the Digital Age
Covey, Stephen (2004), The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
Goldsmith, Marshall (2008), What Got You Here Won't Get You There
Merrington, Chris (2011), Why Do Smart People Make Such Stupid Mistakes
Morrell, Margot & Capparell, Stephanie (2003), Shackleton's Way. Leadership Lessons from the Great Antarctic Explorer