

Facing Failure

How learning to accept failure will ensure a healthy future for brand communication agencies and long-term brand planning.

Abstract

The future of brand communications agencies is bound in an ability to face failure. There is a rising wave of short-termism, where the urgent takes priority over the important¹, campaigns are not fully examined and the implications for long-term business growth often ignored. By re-framing and better understanding the shortcomings of campaigns in the present we can defend the models of thinking that promote a longer-term view. The fruits of these labours will enable us to hero brave, long-term pragmatic thinking, develop effective approaches whilst reducing threat from other industries venturing into the traditional brand communication agency world.

Introduction

Our industry, as with nearly all others celebrates success. The fact is that 1 in 7,000 marketing campaigns wins an award at one of the Gunn Report tracked awards² demonstrating that there is clearly a huge number of campaigns that haven't delivered, or have been shy of being outstanding. 'Success is easier to measure than failure'³ and therefore stands as the goal for client and agency alike. What most parties fail to acknowledge openly and with more pragmatism, is how the number of failed or slightly less successful campaigns have taken us to a place of success when, and if, we do achieve it.

With the velocity of business increasing⁴, we have less time to stop and think, yet to fail to build in an acceptance of any kind of failure in campaign planning is naive and dangerous. To ignore

¹ Quote from future of strategy doc

² Binet & Field find source

³ Adam Morgan 2004 The Pirate inside

⁴ The Hare and the Tortoise, Ebdy, 2015

failure is the driver to fail at an even greater level⁵. Failure for businesses and the employees responsible for managing brands can be framed as anything that doesn't deliver in the short-term with movements against any specified key metrics.

I believe to ensure a future for brand communication agencies an approach is required whereby agencies and their staff learn to be braver, look deeper and think differently when assessing marketing campaigns in their immediacy. This will help protect the long-term brand building planning and thinking is proven to deliver for brands⁶. Taking this further I believe that in certain cases it would be prudent to exhume 'long dead' campaigns that were part of greater narratives in terms of a brands life too. This is 'black box thinking'⁷ applied to brand communications, the practitioners in this case the agencies staff. The result being that we better equip and prepare and protect ourselves and our employees to attempt to make our future more certain.

Businesses are fueling the fear

The communications industry has a problem with failure. It is not something that sells, that is put on websites, it is not something that wins pitches. Despite our tools and many clients coming from Silicon Valley, we are not, neither do we live by their mantra; 'fail fast, fail often'⁸. The fundamental reason is, agencies are positioned as experts who will not take risks to find the golden goose backed by a swathe of investors, but who can help deliver results for clients.

The website rhetoric of media agencies refers to the agency as providers of '*expert advice*'⁹ or that they possess the ability to '*move things on... to maximise value*'¹⁰. That is exactly what is

⁵ Gemma Greaves, Market Leader, Quarter 2, 2017

⁶ The Long and Short of it, Binet and Field, 2012

⁷ Black Box Thinking, Syed, 2015

⁸ Fail Fast, Fail Often, Babineaux & Krumboltz, 2013

⁹ <http://www.mediacomedinburgh.com>

¹⁰ <http://goodstuff.co.uk/#filter=.Difference>

required, and what a marketer would expect to see, but the length of time in which this is expected to be delivered in can be vastly different, and increasingly is becoming shorter.

The difference here; Scott Brenman suggests is due to a differing view between agency and client boardroom. Agencies look to sell *“the promise of business growth, but boardrooms prefer to buy against business failure”*¹¹. With a lack of understanding between client and agency we can begin to understand how even trying to communicate failure as something to adopt for the benefit of future campaigns may be prohibitive. It would appear that if we were to consider Stephen King's 'Scale of Immediacy'¹² as a seesaw; clients are shifting to one end, whilst agencies are trying to hold on to the other but are in many cases being pulled towards the client for risk of falling off.

This fear of failure and understanding where business momentum is heading is compounded further when looking at the makeup of a typical executive board. The CMO is perhaps in one of the least stable positions. Their first responsibility will be to prevent damage to margins and sales volume, building brand over the long-term comes second Brenman¹³ suggests this is because long-term brand building 'doesn't sound commercially aggressive enough' to a board.

The average tenure of CMO in the UK can be regarded as a problem point; reported as just 18 months versus that of a CEO whose average tenure according to the Financial Times is just under 5 years¹⁴. Further compounding this danger of exclusion for traditional agencies with clients is the increasing redundancy of the CMO role by the brands such as Coca-Cola¹⁵, replacing them with

¹¹ Reframing the role of agencies: From brand builders to brand immunisers. Brenman, 2016

¹² Practical Progress from a Theory of Advertisements. Stephen king, 1975

¹³ Reframing the role of agencies: From brand builders to brand immunisers. Brenman, 2016

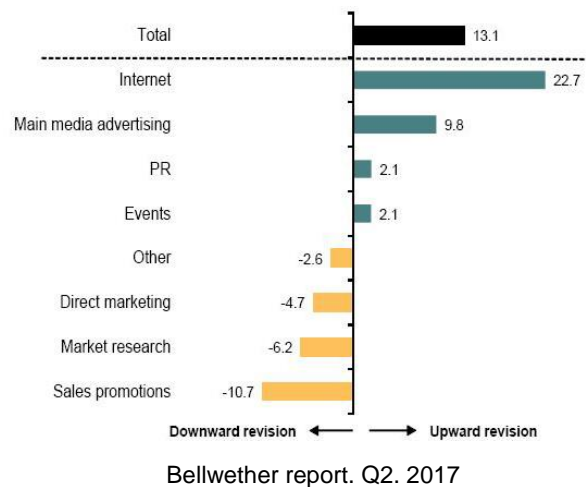
¹⁴ <https://www.ft.com/content/ded1823a-370e-11e7-99bd-13beb0903fa3>

¹⁵ <https://www.marketingweek.com/2017/03/29/chief-growth-officer-coca-cola/>

positions structured around 'growth'. This can be an incubator for short-term fast results thinking, with no room for failure or campaign autopsies that help build brand.

This short-term drive is only magnified if you are on the verge of IPO, something recently witnessed publicly with Spotify¹⁶ as they plan to launch on the NYSE. Additionally, the requirement for quarterly reporting makes life tough for brand builders at listed companies as "*the City wants to see results and fast*"¹⁷. Carmen Bekker, management partner at J. Walter Thompson London.

Compounding these business behaviours is the socio-political turmoil that has been very present across the US, UK and Europe, witnessed through elections where the political pendulum is swinging with greater power than in recent times.



Business uncertainty has only been further exacerbated by the impact of Brexit¹⁸ and a failed snap general election. These impacts have been demonstrated in the latest Bellwether report¹⁹ (Figure 1) which indicates a decline in confidence in media down 4.1% percentage points from the previous quarter, whereas digital continues to grow. With this it is evident that business and agencies are betting against loss by focusing at the bottom of the funnel rather than wanting to take apparent risks with campaigns that may not payback in the short-term. Pushing against this in favour of longer-term thinking is fundamental and being able to build in the ability to not deliver stellar results instantly so that we can over time.

¹⁶ <http://uk.reuters.com/article/us-spotify-ipo-idUKKBN18821T>

¹⁷ WARC Future of Strategy report, Carmen Bekker, Managing Partner JWT

¹⁸ <http://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/brexit-damaging-uk-advertising-market/1422896>

¹⁹ <http://www.ipa.co.uk/news>

The Human Factor

“Perhaps now we’ve all become better at recognising that negative isn’t always bad, but less good at realising that positive isn’t always good” Binet & Carter 2014²⁰

Despite the growing use of automation and AI in aspects of communication agencies output²¹, humans are still central. Whilst the rate of change increases, the fundamental behaviours of humans within our organisations moves much slower. When we consider what the future of brand communications agencies, the role of the human is a fundamental link.

Accepting failure, or even just ‘less’ positive results has been stigmatised for over 2500 years²² therefore we should consider the human propensity to want to acknowledge and deal with bad results going into the future too. It is widely demonstrated how various neuroscientists identify that emotions are the primary driver for human behaviour²³. Whilst this primarily regards ‘consumer behaviour’, these behaviour traits are just as hard-wired and integral to the people and businesses that operate within the brand communications industry.

Kahneman²⁴ draws on the principle of ‘*loss aversion*’; that humans are risk averse and would rather minimise losses rather than profit from gains. Whether we identify a loss or gain scenario as business linked or self-motivated I believe we must stretch the comprehension further. If we are to overcome this, and how we work with brands and their ability to gaze into the future and approach to failure, then we should start with those within the agencies first.

²⁰ Mythbuster DDB: The failure to realise that positive isn't always good. Binet and Carter 2012

²¹ groupM Interaction Report, February 2017

²² Just Culture: Balancing Safety and Accountability, Dekker, 2012

²³ The Long and Short of it, Binet and Field, 2012

²⁴ Thinking fast and slow, Daniel Kahneman, 2011

The main drivers in the avoidance of confronting failure or redressing as something else, something more palatable can be articulated and understood in a deeper context too, to what has gone before. Nassim Taleb's concept '*narrative fallacy*'²⁵ is the premise that we are likely to alter past events and blend them together to help us make sense of the future. Considering this, is perhaps a better way to understand how we might begin learning to accept failure, how we might learn to breakdown the culturally hardwired behaviour traits of accepting success but not failure in staff from their first weeks to last days in employment.

We are currently faced with a problem built out of pseudo self-confidence where because most of what we deliver is acceptable (client or agency), we are conditioned to think that it is good enough, that we are doing well. As a result we are unlikely to face the reality of facts, to be brave enough to put the failings first, to have the hard conversation to aim for the long-term.

Creeping short-termism

The IPA's Media in Focus²⁶, underlines that the continuing trend towards short-termism is harming the long-term metrics for many brands. Gareth Kay, co-founder of Chapter SF²⁷ suggests that this problem is compounded further by the complete '*fragmentation of media*'²⁸ and campaigns are contributing to this too. By cutting everything up into constituent parts, we start to forget what the whole is supposed to look like.

There is a transformation happening, creeping in, affecting the inability to look beyond the most present campaign or look back past what has just occurred. With this there becomes no requisite for deeper analysis into why something hasn't delivered, or bravery when facing problems, as the

²⁵ The Black Swan, Nassim Taleb, 2007

²⁶ <http://www.ipa.co.uk/news>

²⁷ <http://chaptersf.com/>

²⁸ The Future of Strategy, 2017 WARC

velocity of short-term campaigns can mask the results of the last. This is driven by the speed of business, that as Wendy Clark points out is working *horizontally*²⁹ across all aspects of business. Working purely on the short-term small bite sized projects is blinding, potentially affecting our ability to guide clients and brands towards the '*win-win*'³⁰ scenario of short-term sales growth coupled with greater brand strength in the future.

The Hare and the Tortoise³¹ examines the need for two speeds of brand building, and accepts that new business need to move quickly, however this speed of business continues to rise exponentially, even since 2015. Compressing the cycles by which brands and products are developed, brought to market and the results delivered³², arguably with digital media being the catalyst for this speed and short-termism. The Group M interactions report highlights that 77 cents in every dollar is now spent in digital. Factoring this, with the latest Bellwether report and the desire form business to be fast, we are being pulled further down the funnel, in search of instant gratification.

The danger of digital means that it can be easy to move the goalposts to alter what the contribution has been. Campaign data derived from digital marketing is not a *proxy for decision making*³³, it can be misused and reshaped to fit the needs of the report. This isn't to lay blame for short-termism in brand communications, but rather we should accept that we are still perhaps in a '*Beta stage for digital campaigns*'³⁴. We are distracted by the digital landscape, experimenting and with that losing the ability to accept and therefore want to understand what has failed and how.

²⁹ ARF Annual Conference, March 2017

³⁰ The Long and Short of It, Les Binet & Peter Field, 2012

³¹ The Hare and The Tortoise, Charlie Ebdy, 2015

³² Branding at Speed, AdMap Magazine, October 2014

³³ Wendy Clark, ARF Annual Conference, March 2017

³⁴ Bridget Angear, AMV BBDO, The Future of Strategy, 2017

Need to Evaluate

The Ehrenberg Bass Institute identifies that; “*in evaluating failure, we may also begin to understand whereby a brand has looked to act on its distinctive assets but failed*”³⁵. Distinctiveness is a trait that requires a long-term view however. The report goes on to identify that through evaluation of campaigns with a more fine-tuned focus agencies and marketers can further push for a developed understanding of which elements are weak, and which elements have unrealised potential. Whether it is AI, human or a combination responsible for such campaign evaluation data it is still down to human and business understanding to communicate this, accept this and ultimately take this advice and move on.

This concept is built upon by Romaniuk et al (2007)³⁶ who identify that focusing on failure and identifying the assets and or elements in wave after wave of campaigns is key. This isn't to say that entire campaigns will fail in entirety, but the skill in an agency will be in putting a campaign on the slab year after year to truly see what has failed, why and how.

The worrying downward trend in the Bellwether report³⁷ towards research however would suggest that the need to evaluate is being diminished. The fast consumer stats and feedback that digital media and especially tech giants such as Facebook afford clients and agencies direct, appears to quell the true requirement for understanding rather than just numbers. It appears we are at that moment of where ‘*software ate the world*’³⁸ the point at which it is easier to allow an algorithm to inform on what is happening now than what could be.

³⁵ <https://www.marketingscience.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Measure-Your-Distinctive-Assets.pdf>

³⁶ Evidence concerning the importance of perceived brand differentiation” Australasian Marketing Journal, Vol.15 (2) pages 42-54

³⁷ <http://www.ipa.co.uk/page/ipa-bellwether-report>

³⁸ Marc Andreessen, Wall Street Journal, Aug 20. 2011

The idea of needing to put pieces of the puzzle back together again is built upon in The Future of Strategy report³⁹ whereby it is suggested that planners/strategists are the ones who are best placed to help clients navigate what is an increasingly fragmented landscape, where the danger of reviewing the small elements of campaigns is most dangerous.

Anthony Wong, Worldwide Effectiveness Director at Ogilvy and Mather refers to the need for agencies to have 'planners with data skills'⁴⁰, this needs to be driven one step further, so that they can be empowered to cut through the excess data and the false success and deliver potentially bad news properly with the long-term good in mind. This approach of breaking down campaigns into segments as part of a whole, is lauded by French economist Esther Duflo⁴¹, who talks about considering each micro element of an overall and how it can be improved.

Learning to perform the most detailed of autopsies is a behaviour that will become most important to agencies as we progress and go forwards. However in order to pull campaigns apart we need to have an open and understanding forum in which failed campaigns can be safely pulled apart with time and without fear of reprisal from the client.

In failing to become faster and more adapt at creating a path for the future with our analysis we will begin to lose further ground to a new threat. The biggest risks being that of the world of consultancies. The likes of Accenture, PwC and Deloitte Digital have all made inroads by targeting marketing strategy. Accenture acquired Karmarama in November 2016⁴², thereby combining statistical data analysis and business acumen with creativity. A future for communications agencies is one where we have to learn to speak like these agencies, but deliver our own skill

³⁹The Future of Strategy WARC

⁴⁰ ibid

⁴¹ Poor Economics, 2012, Esther Duflo

⁴² <https://www.accenture.com/gb-en/company-news-release-accenture-acquire-karmarama>

sets too. It is clear that the rise of these agencies is driven by the fact clients are valuing their skillsets straight talking and short-term solutions.

Future proofing from inside out

The future of communications agencies, rests in their own hands. The interplay between agency, client, suppliers and beyond is so interwoven that in affecting one element all parties will be influenced. How failure is accepted learnt from and incorporated into planning approaches, and how employees are coached to be able to deliver bad news pragmatically and apply future thinking will be the cornerstone to this.

The agency role

The agencies role is the central pivot towards a future of deeper more meaningful campaign autopsies and producing meaning from them. To enable this two factors in particular require change; line of sight and people. Ahead of these two elements though is the need to change the relationship with the client

Setting the stall out early

“To be prepared for tomorrow we need to embrace change, almost before it happens”

Akihiko Kubo- Ogilvy Japan

To work to new levels of honesty in terms of accepting and learning from campaigns that have long-term ambitions but fail in the short-term, there needs to be a level of honesty set out from the start with clients about goals and ambitions. This can I believe in the most immediate future can be forged with new clients relationships first. These either stemming from new business wins, or from clients who are themselves very young. As evidenced in ‘The Hare and the Tortoise’⁴³

⁴³ The Hare and The Tortoise, Charlie Ebdy, 2015

there is a requirement for agencies to consider two speeds of brand building and perhaps two levels of pragmatism and bravery. That with the long established brands who have almost institutionalised ways of working and those who live by new rules of '*permissionless innovation*'⁴⁴. Of course the reason clients come to agencies mostly is for a level of experience and advice that means marketing spend is not misspent and wasted, but if agencies do set their stall out with a newfound bravery then there are greater rewards to be had.

Looking long

To deliver pragmatic longer-term thinking for clients, agencies must improve their ability to look back and forward much further, something Jeremy Bullmore refers to as 'calm reflection'⁴⁵. Employing a zoom in, zoom out strategy⁴⁶ whereby agencies can consider the immediate and the distant is required, for if we cannot look ahead ourselves than it would be remiss to believe that we can expect our clients to.

Looking back should involve autopsies of success not just relative failure. Research by Andy Farr⁴⁷ on copy testing demonstrated that even with campaigns where the consumer take-out or results may have been obvious it was advantageous to go back to campaigns in months and years later to see what had caused longer-term effects on them. Paul Feldwick⁴⁸ in his 1998 article on copy testing and the lack of one single route to successful prediction demonstrates too that to review the past can help between what might be '*accurate prediction or pure judgement*'.

⁴⁴ <http://permissionlessinnovation.org/>

⁴⁵ Market Leader, Jeremy Bullmore, Q3. 2016,

⁴⁶ John Hazel, Deloitte, speaking at WFS Conference, July 2015

⁴⁷ Advertising and Brand Equity, Andy Farr, Admap, 1996

⁴⁸ WARC Conference paper, Paul Feldwick, Jan 1998

Whilst not all agencies and clients may have the luxury of historical data linked to their advertising campaigns (or time and resource), there will still be other sources of data that can be used to help perform more detailed autopsies on past and work. In creating an environment whereby this can be examined and effects discussed with clients the future can be considered and better strategic direction created. This will require agencies to consider revised remuneration models for this work, whilst being able to demonstrate a business linked advantage to the client in the medium to long-term.

The employee

“The world of work is automated... but we have to remember that staff are made of flesh and blood not silicon”⁴⁹ Tracey Follows, 2015.

The employee is the fundamental linchpin to a future agency model, and in guaranteeing a future for brand communication agencies. Technology and automation will make many of the differences between agencies and group indistinguishable, people and talent will make the difference. The talented staff, will become of even more value. Across the next 5-10 years an appraisal of the roles of staff will be undertaken. The key role will be the ‘pragmatic marketing sherpa’ for clients, people who can bravely guide brands through an increasingly complex media landscape, and be honest and future facing around perceived failure

The future star, the future client leader will be an amalgamation of creative planner, strategist, and econometrician. There are a few schools of thought on the ideal employee in the future, yet none of these quite pulls together what agencies will require. Eric Schmidt considers the effect of staff who can combine; *‘technical knowledge, business acumen and creativity’⁵⁰* as the ones who

⁴⁹ The Future of brands in a post-human world, Tracey Follows, 2015

⁵⁰ How Google Works, Eric Schmidt, Jonathan Rosenberg, 2014

can drive transformational change. Admittedly these are broad areas, which within an agency would be across multiple specialisms, therefore an *empathic understanding*⁵¹ is required. A general understanding across areas however as Schmidt also references how technology is enabling the best people to make *bigger differences in the companies they work for*⁵². The concept of the all-rounder is built on by Chris Messina who refers to the full-stack employee⁵³ someone who can combine a myriad of information and concepts and provide clients with opinion and strategic directions.

These all-in-one type roles may be seen to appear already, but still these definitions do not consider the real need for bravery and pragmatism in the face of the short-term determined client, and the need to face up to failure. By behaving in this way, agencies and their staff should begin to see how greater levels of involvement and increased 'personal risk' (through pushing for longer-term thinking) will help them achieve what they desire for their clients, as complacency driven by being safe is one of the first steps to failure itself⁵⁴.

It is therefore the agency that can begin to hardwire within their employee's a steely resolve and pragmatic attitude to facing adverse results brought about by brave decision making that will profit and gain from engaged staff and quality output. The need for this no more starkly referenced than by Annabel Venner, Hiscox who recently cited that this leadership and bravery was missing when no-one put their head above the parapet to challenge the team at Coca-Cola when they sought to launch Dasani in 2002⁵⁵.

⁵¹ IPA Future of Agencies, systems and empathy 2017

⁵² How Google Works, Eric Schmidt, Jonathan Rosenberg, 2014

⁵³ http://www.onlydeadfish.co.uk/only_dead_fish/2015/04/the-full-stack-employee.html

⁵⁴ Leading Change, John P Kotter, 1988

⁵⁵ Gemma Greaves, Market Leader, Quarter 2, 2017

With this in mind it isn't to say that a strategist or planners 'bedside manner' will not matter, it will, but only when intertwined with the business type acumen and approach more often seen from the employees of consultancies. In doing this, brand communication agencies should be able to move key employee's further upstream, closer to the entire business functions of their clients so that they can become woven into the business and marketing functions.

Influence with the client

Length of site and brave, pragmatic employees within the agency are one thing, however to ensure the future of agencies, they must also be able to exert changes and influences upon client practices themselves. The concept of planners being further upstream closer to other business functions is one such way. By getting closer to the C-suite and being considered as part of the client function rather than a functional element down the marketing process we can expect to see improved behaviour back towards longer-term brand building where it is required.

To drive a change we have to be aware of what is encouraging short-term thinking and behaviours with certain clients. Whilst every situation will be different it is argued that the greatest obstacle is that clients and marketers are '*stifled by the fear of failure*'⁵⁶. This thought process is paradoxical however is that as Bullmore points out "there is no example of a major company failing due to a high-risk or ill-advised campaign"⁵⁷. But that doesn't mean that agencies should be sending in trusted hybrid planners to be unduly brave and lead clients businesses down '*expensive training courses*'⁵⁸ in the name of brand building.

⁵⁶ Jean-Marie Dru TBWA/Worldwide speaking at AANA Reset, October 2014

⁵⁷ Jeremy Bullmore, 2015 WPP Annual Report and Accounts.

⁵⁸ <https://www.marketingweek.com/2017/02/09>

Future agencies will need to find ways to create environments and ways in which clients can embrace failure where the risk is acceptable and they can learn from it. This will help to fight against the misguided sense that by '*stigmatising failure it will prevent it in the future*'⁵⁹. To fabricate a safe place, to '*foster a world of questions*'⁶⁰ client conservatism needs to change to pace of new world. I believe agencies can look to create this physically for their clients.

Admittedly we are witnessing how some businesses are creating spaces for the appropriate brands, such as Pernod Ricard for Absolut. The vodka brand have a detached 'idea incubator and think tank'⁶¹ based in New York who are focused purely on looking at new tools and tech that could improve nightlife experiences. This hub was born out of failure at a business level, but shows us what forward thinking can deliver. Whilst the function of a space devoted to longer-term thinking and planning would be slightly different, the symbolism of a physical space would still act as a real sign of intent. It could appear a luxury to devote valuable space within an office to promoting and encouraging longer arcs of brand planning, but it will enable a change in mindset and a haven in which strategic ideals can be promoted.

⁵⁹ www.hbr.org/2011/04/strategies-for-learning-from-failure

⁶⁰ Where good ideas come from. Steven Johnson, 2010

⁶¹ How failure inspired marketing innovation at Absolut labs. Cannes reports. Stephen Whiteside, 2016

Media Suppliers

Agencies must also demand improved behaviour and cooperation from media suppliers to become part of the solution, and enable the changes required. The supplier's role is a future of greater honesty and simplified business linked reporting that is universal. They already do operate to tight and well defined roles, but agencies will need to work with them in even more developed ways that help prove how campaigns work or don't. This will in part require agencies to develop slightly more relaxed deals or approaches that facilitate learning as a result of bravery. It will require suppliers to more pragmatic about the shortcomings in campaign delivery and what they can empower agencies within their reporting to clients. Within this there are two standout fundamental factors that would need to be addressed:

1. Transparency
2. Levels of data provided

As we have already seen from Marc Pritchards⁶² call to arms, clients are looking for the way digital campaigns are traded and reported to be cleaned up, in doing this we will see the momentum of standardised behaviours towards greater openness. This transparency will empower greater more open conversations and should foster an acceptance whereby even in an AI led world we can hold our hands up and pull apart failure.

If agencies are going to rely on key employees to perform greater autopsies and push clients to think longer term, the quality levels of data provided will need to be increased. As we are seeing in 2017 with YouTube in some instances reverting to blind buys with very limited levels of information through many of their offered services. Without these fundamentally being changed we are going to be unable to have conversations based on absolute fact.

⁶² <https://www.marketingweek.com/2017/01/31/mark-ritson-marc-pritchard-viewability-fraud-speech/>

The type of data presented too is of fundamental interest. Media suppliers (and by proxy media agencies) who revert to dashboards⁶³ are in danger of merely fueling short-termism too. They present easy to navigate and fast data but without true contextual relevance to client or agency.

Timescale of change

It would be prudent to believe that the changes recommended can be implemented quickly. Just as adapting client focus back towards an element of long-term brand building, and equipping agency staff with the skills and mindset to be brave are not overnight solutions. These changes must go at the pace of business and the cycles they find themselves in rather than be incongruous to them. There will be mitigating factors such as the strength of the agency, the relationship with the clients and their maturity. Whilst the need for change is not a one-size fits all solution in terms of timelines the speed of business and convergence towards the short-termism should serve as a reminder to agencies that their future resides in their ability to affect change sooner rather than later.

Conclusion

The speed of marketing will not slow down, indeed it will speed up exponentially as technology develops and further automation continues to envelop the world of advertising. If brand communication agencies are to survive and flourish faced with a world of consultancy competition and short-termist client behaviour, they have to adapt to becoming brave and facing failure. In doing this they can push for long-term campaign narratives that deliver longer-term business growth for clients, without fear of reprisal if short-term elements don't immediately payback.

⁶³ Media in focus, Bine and Field, 2017

With automated models it can be argued failure within digital campaigns may be harder to spot due to their focus towards the best performing audiences. But where the real value will reside is in agencies and key employee's abilities to look pragmatically at short-term failures to plot new long-term routes for brands. This may be audiences, creative or an amalgamation of broader impacts than just the trading or copy used. It is somewhat ironic that as many elements of the advertising and marketing world evolve the requirement for very human traits and behaviours will become even more important.

The brave agencies will succeed, forming new ways of working with clients with employees who have developed altered mindsets to cope, confronting problems and side stepping the potential pitfalls of behaving in the same way as they have in previous campaigns and years.

It is not in the normal human psyche to want to admit to or face failure, but in doing so we can enable a brighter future for agencies that enables ideas and distinctiveness in communications to flourish without the fear of reprisals from short-term misses.

Whilst the future does essentially lie in the hands of brand communications agencies themselves, they do need to factor in how they can influence the key stakeholders around them whether these be the clients or suppliers. By working with both sides in unison the quality of work and trust in agencies to deliver over and above will remain well into the future.