

# AUTHENTICITY, CREATIVITY AND PRO-ACTIVE NEW BUSINESS

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ADVOCATE INTERNATIONAL 2019



## INTRODUCTION

We live in the age of communication, amazing opportunities lie before us all. An unparalleled variety of ways for us to create, learn and live in a more free, open and ultimately equitable society. Frontiers brought down, messages at the speed of thought, nothing impossible. It's the new age and everyone can have a piece. It's a great bright future for those with the savvy and proclivity to take it, but we must think more creatively, more cleverly than ever before... are you ready ?

The following is intended as an observation of the conditions I find within the world of marketing services both agency and brand side in the UK in 2019. Based on over twenty years at the 'coal face' selling every type of communications cascade, technology or idea, in every sector globally. Whilst this is not an exhaustive piece, it is designed to point out some of the problems facing both brands and agencies in a world turned on its head by both the digital and social revolutions. A world more changeable than ever, with more sophisticated consumers and employees than ever before in history. Where technology has become worshipped as almost infallible, to the detriment of both creativity, originality and human interaction.

## CONTEXT

In the digital age, the tools have become more important than the message and therefore our citizens have lost the ability to take a position and have a definite opinion. These consumers who are also employees, are lost in a malaise of emails, blogs, Snapchats, texts and an unparalleled volume of traffic to their smartphones and their inboxes. This 'blizzard' has made them snow-blind to the real issues and unable, fearful of taking a definite standpoint. Today peoples' ability to communicate directly, especially around a controversial issue, has been taken away; the digital revolution has provided the tools but removed the appetite for and ability to hold a real opinion or commitment to a viewpoint. This removal of conviction is endemic and a problem.

Concurrently, while creativity continues to be an increasingly mainstream focus, for many large organisations, for example, Deloitte, originally a tax advisory firm, now have a creative director ; the cycle of commercial expansion, and job security, seem to have dulled people's ability to think and act creatively.

The break through beyond a tipping point, where diverse and creative teams both of demographics and thinking styles are the established norm at all levels of the organisation, is all too rare across established, multi-national corporations. They are stuck – as is effective, opinionated communication. Authentic creativity can help unlock it.

## THE PROBLEM

There is in general a lack of courage, or commitment to authentic creativity both sides of the client / agency fence. Why? Brand side, because the bottom line of selling more stuff, expanding, providing more services, being profitable and pleasing shareholders, is still THE most important thing at the heart of nearly every company. Business as usual, greenwashing, paying lip-service to diversity and abusing the relationship with the roster of agencies seems to be far more the norm for many brands. Doing pointless beauty parades, in order to placate a talentless procurement department and save money is the usual short-termism we encounter within big companies and their strategy for dealing with creative agencies.

It will remain so for as long as the headlong pursuit of profit is encouraged and, seen as the only way to operate. The problem is that in a fundamentally capitalist society there seems no other way to go. If the only thing of value, perceived or otherwise is profit then that will be the only result. People, (employees) will remain unfulfilled and frustrated, cling to jobs they don't really want, and in the age of AI, understand less and less of their role in the system and their value. With the constant pressure of remaining relevant, and compelling both as an individual and as the body corporate of a global organisation, authenticity and creativity seem more and more like a 'nice to have'. The global MEME of fear and uncertainty has pushed much of the good intentions of companies and their loyal servants to the back

of the line. Survival has taken first place, ironically in order to survive brands MUST adopt new ways of working and dealing with new challenges as well as facing their ever-changing position in the world.

Agency side, however brilliant the campaign, however talented the team, like rock groups, agencies go out of fashion. They are, as they have always been, at the mercy of the whims of which ever CMO from their client is in charge. Also, and this is more alarming, for many agencies, deploying the latest digital set of tools has become more important than the thread of a genuinely original concept or idea. Because genuine creativity requires, a stillness and presence of mind not readily available in the buzzing hubbub of a modern agency, with the free beer and bean bags, there is little of it left. Let's be very clear, the digital tools available are just that 'tools' nothing more. Any agency worth its sort should be able to rustle up a brilliant idea with nothing more than a pen and a whiteboard. However with the rise of 'digital natives', a generation who cannot remember a time without all these tools, more and more agencies are finding cutting through with originality of thought and ideas, harder and harder.

## THE PROBLEM

The tools, however 'brilliant' or sophisticated will never replace a truly original and brilliant idea. Because they are artificial, as the name suggests, without self-awareness they will only ever be able to do what they were programmed to, granted faster and in greater volume, with more accuracy than any human, but without originality. Give a 3 year old a pencil or even a chimp and they will draw something as unique as a snowflake, however unsophisticated or technically proficient. Give the same coloured pencil to a robot arm, attached to the greatest, most powerful AI and even after a thousand years it won't have drawn something truly of its own design.

Another interesting problem in the current age is people impersonate genius constantly. In a sea of mediocrity anyone who can be seen to interpret the future, or be somewhat more competent or conversant with the latest set of digital tools, someone who might be termed a 'futurist' is hailed as a genius a super consultant almost a modern day seer! And boy are people ready to follow and listen to these guys! Why? because they are the only point of newness, the wave of new gadgets is fast replacing new ideas. True genius is reliant on only one thing the mind of whomever is lucky enough for it to visit, however briefly. I hasten to add some of these new tools are brilliant and in many cases creative, but they must not be allowed to dull our ability to be original and think for ourselves.

## THE SOLUTION

Courage is the key to this, for brands, arguably the most influential of all things in this not so brave new world, to stand up and be counted. If more companies could take the example of Unilever for example and actually make tangible, steps towards change in terms of supply chain and sustainability, we would perhaps be in a much different position/ Fearlessness of both ideas and action will go a long way to solving the current malaise of digital and 'influencers' that is frankly dull and uncreative.

Much like the Saatchi & Saatchi pitch for British Rail in the early 80's where they made the client experience the frustrations of their millions of commuters, by making them wait for hours in a smoky, badly ventilated room in order to impress upon them the urgency of the change required on their trains. We need ideas and creativity that is provocative, informed, ground-breaking and behaviour changing, daring and challenging. For what is clear is the status quo from top to bottom of our society needs a shake up and creative agencies are uniquely placed and equipped to do this now!

Another point about technology is 'relevance' there is nothing wrong with deploying technology that is timely, the deployment of which is well- researched and makes the lives of millions of customers and employees easier. The blind adoption of the latest faddish gadget or widget is a useless waste of resources and another superficial attempt to cover up a lack of originality and creativity. Pushing the boundaries when it comes to ideas and remembering you are only as good as your last best work is key for all agencies to remember in order to stop complacency creeping in.

## THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Taking a new stance is key to the fast adoption of new ideas and ways of doing things. In an age without any effective leadership, with plenty of vacuous forums purporting to encourage leadership, whilst doing nothing of the kind. It is down to the individual to take responsibility and take a thought leading position on issues that affect them and the society they are a part of. This citizenship behaviour is key to effecting change of both behaviours and mindsets.

## BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Understanding and listening to people and what they want and struggle with on a day- to - day basis is the key to solving their problems and making them live happier more fulfilled lives. Bringing a human face back into the market, understanding that it is people who are at the centre of the whole marketing world and they must be at the forefront of all our creative and technology deployment decisions. From serving them useful content to serving them quality products and services. Creating a valuable dialogue with consumers and employees alike.

For we must remember that the majority of our customers and consumers are employees, understanding how to communicate effectively with the whole person as both a customer and an employee is key to effective behaviour change. If you cannot speak to the person who spends 35% of their lifetime at work, you are missing not only key influences on that person but key factors in their decision-making as a consumer and a potential customer. The key to all of this is selling without selling, creating maximum brand exposure with lots of benefits by curating compelling content and experiences that are so powerful people are willing to invest in them with both their time and money.



## PRO-ACTIVE NEW BUSINESS CUTTING THROUGH IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Getting the attention of a brand manager or prospect with a compelling approach is nowadays, a prerequisite to beginning a dialogue. The more original, innovative and compelling your approach the more likely the prospect within a brand is to open the door to you. Much like the uniqueness of a handshake, a smile or a signature, the way you approach a prospect needs to be unique. I once heard a business owner say 'nothing is unique'. These mantras of mediocrity are exactly why people, struggle to be original in their dealings with brands. From the tone of voice you adopt, the vocabulary you chose in your speech, to the way you write an email, the timing of your second email, or your fourth phone call, the nuisances of the way you emphasise certain words, the way you share a joke with an EA before they put your through, or the inventiveness and relevance of a stunt or thought leading article hand delivered to the prospects office on papyrus! All of these subtle but all important techniques, skills learned over a lifetime selling, add up to what makes you compelling and interesting enough to take a meeting with.

This preamble, before you have worked with a client is what you are judged on , think of it as your audition, before you get the part. It's make or break, and so few people have the skill or subtlety to do it well. One of the most powerful ways to get a response is a hand-written letter. This, ancient, effective and inexpensive way to communicate has stood the

test of millennia, and, executed well, is still the surest way to securely get a personal message to a client or prospect. The added benefits of this way of communicating are that hand-written notes and letters are such a rarity in the current age, the recipient will be surprised and delighted by the effort made and personal nature of the approach.

The idea of filling out endless RFI's has long since seemed to me a pointless and expensive way to run a New Business function within an agency. Let's face it by the time the RFI comes out and is sent to the ten agencies on the long list it is often as not a foregone conclusion who is likely to get the work. Pitching in this way is expensive and time consuming and judging by the general run rate of 1 in 3 wins per pitch the conversion rate is also poor. Imagine you turn this model on its head, make a short list of 10 companies you would love to work with and are relevant to your sector and discipline experience, You then do some detailed research on both the people you are approaching specifically within the company and the company itself in terms of the general challenges it is facing. (Even successful companies doing well will have either internal or external challenges and pressures that need to be addressed.) You then make a skilful well-timed, well written approach. Even if you do not immediately win a project you will be on the radar of 10 new companies all with budgets to spend on what you do.

## TENACITY & DISCIPLINE

Now all you need to do is make sure you are completely disciplined in diarising when you need to do the follow ups for these first 10 prospects. However well your new business argument is crafted, often as not the prospect will be too busy to respond. So you must be regular and structured in your follow up. Be tenacious and assiduous in your pursuit of that golden conversation, remembering that a lead is never totally dead until the prospect point blank tells you so and even then there are always other ways to keep on the radar. People tend to give up far too easily when it comes to activity of New Business.

## RELEVANT INNOVATION IN CERTAIN SECTORS

'Innovation' is a word that is thrown about all over the place, like the word 'strategy' or 'digital transformation', these are of course just words, often used to appear relevant and apprised of the situation or current market conditions. However the only way to really understand the market is to look at the specific business challenges facing each sector and then look at the pressures these businesses are under. These will then translate into what is keeping the brand managers and CMO's awake at night and then into the kinds of assistance they need. From increasing footfall instore to making sure employees are engaged and excited within the workplace, being armed with this information makes you immediately relevant. The next step is of course to tailor your ideas in a pro-active fashion and approach the brand managers prospectively with a well-researched solution or idea to solve their specific business challenge.

### RETAIL

Retail is struggling with macro-economic pressures, how do we challenge these and solve them? It is for the agencies that manage to do this that the spoils will go to. Using technology and innovation as well as creative thinking. For example, in retail, use the advantage of having a retail footprint as well as an army of staff. Re-train the staff to be more engaging and entertaining than ever. Make the stores as sticky and compelling as possible to insure footfall.

### AUTOMOTIVE

People are not buying as many cars as they used to. How do we make the act of buying or in many cases leasing a car more attractive? Having a pop up presence in areas of large footfall, airports, etc.. make these pop-ups like lounges where you can get a coffee and recharge your phone. Spend money on small activations that intrigue customers and make them learn about your new range in a more ambient and immersive way.

### FMCG

Customers are worried about sustainability and plastics, create activations and events that showcase 0% plastic usage in a range of new products. Incentivise positive buying behaviours with rewards and money off etc...

Agencies and brands need to work in tandem to reinforce positive behaviours, generate thought leading solutions within the community and inspire consumers and employees with imaginative campaigns and activations that inspire and are valuable.

## ***ADVOCATE INTERNATIONAL*** **WHAT WE BRING TO NEW BUSINESS**

At *Advocate International* we have adopted a best - in class attitude towards winning new and exciting work. We do this by employing a range of techniques and strategies that make our clients stand out in a crowd. We prequalify every lead to insure it is as close to the skills and abilities of the particular agency as possible. We make sure we know as much as possible about the specific prospect within the target company we can so we can tailor the approach accordingly, we look at their interests, speaker engagements, companies they follow, so we can build an accurate picture of what would interest them.

## BRINGING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET INTO AGENCIES

As a clip on resource we, always make sure that we bring something fresh and exciting to the teams we are working with. Generally within agencies there can be a slightly apathetic view towards winning New Business, outside of senior management. We try to bring an entrepreneurial mindset to the process, by encouraging teams to think more laterally about who might be good targets to go for and to approach them with courage and conviction that is infectious to the end client.

*Advocate International* provide a bespoke consultancy on how to run a new business campaign step-by-step. From the formulation of compelling elevator emails and presentations, right through to working out how the team can present in a compelling and cohesive manner, we work to make the teams we work with stand out as authentic and powerful communicators and problem solvers.

## OUR ETHOS

Speed of delivery follow up and execution. We firmly believe that all our activity when it comes to New Business should be done at pace. This ensures momentum of the campaign as well as making sure no opportunities are lost and the flow of the dialogue with the client or prospect stays alive and is not allowed to go dead. All too often, great opportunities are lost because people lack the confidence or do not have the judgement to know what follow up is needed and when. In a world where clients have a million things to do the only way to stay top of mind and relevant is being persistent and chasing up clients assiduously.

## SUMMARY

In order to win new business in a very crowded marketplace it is vital to deploy relevant innovation and creativity in order to keep clients interested and engaged. We must, as agencies solve specific business challenges and not just answer briefs. The pro- active approach that is daring and challenging and actually addresses the business issues of the client is the only one that will win. Even if not successful to begin with, the agency that is consistent in its deployment of brilliant, relevant and daring ideas is sure to impress and stand out from the crowd, eventually winning the clients admiration, trust, confidence and business.

## CONCLUSION

If you are looking for a company that can put you several steps ahead of your agency competitors by engendering and encouraging an entrepreneurial spirit within your teams that looks to solve business issues for clients in a proactive way, *Advocate International* are an ideal partner for both short and long term new business campaigns and strategies.





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