



ILLUSTRATION | ARCHMAN - SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Ad agencies adjust to demand for data, analytics

By Matthew Broderick

Special to the Hartford Business Journal

With nearly 25 years of experience in marketing and advertising, Adams & Knight CEO Jill Adams is no stranger to data. In fact, she says data has been an important part of advertising since the Mad Men era of the 1960s.

What's changed dramatically in the past 10 years, Adams says, has been both the volume of data and the diversity of what can be measured, forcing marketing and advertising firms to re-think how they do business.

"There's more emphasis today on measuring engagement versus just impressions," Adams said. "It's not enough to say how many people viewed your TV spot or saw your digital ad; we want to know who interacted with a brand with a download, click, follow, like, post or hashtag."

The explosion of social media and online content has revolutionized how consumers research, interact with and recommend brands. It has also put the onus on advertising and marketing firms to track the effectiveness of social media campaigns through data-driven research.

The need for better and more "real-time" analytics has not only changed the landscape of the advertising industry in general, but has also shifted the way agencies operate. No longer is it good enough for firms just to be creative; they need to know, understand and interpret numbers too.

"We've been bringing new people on board with a focus on social media strategists and data-driven marketers," said Tony Cashman, president & CEO of Glastonbury-based Cashman + Katz. "Today's creative, media and public relations practitioners must be able to better understand the intricacies and nuances of digital and social media while being able to effectively analyze data to explain results, see opportunities and address client's challenges."

Metrics, Cashman said, have become a much bigger part of client needs and expectations.

"Up front, clients want to be able to quantify what elements of a campaign worked," Cashman explained, noting his firm works across a broad spectrum of numbers-driven industries including health care, financial services and consumer products. Some industries, such as retail, place a greater emphasis on data, Cashman said, and the technology to track metrics has evolved as a result.

"We now can access campaign data and results

in real time and can provide it to clients, hourly if necessary," he said.

While it might seem like increased focus on data and analytics in advertising places less emphasis on creativity, Sara-Beth Donovan, senior vice president of media for Avon-based Mintz + Hoke, thinks it helps clients push creative boundaries.



Jill Adams, CEO, Adams & Knight



Tony Cashman, president & CEO, Cashman + Katz



Sara-Beth Donovan, senior vice president of media, Mintz + Hoke

"Having [more detailed] metrics gets clients comfortable with testing new ideas," Donovan explained. "That allows us to create campaigns that are more unique and can differentiate our clients."

That's because real-time data analytics allow agencies to adjust a campaign on the fly, if messaging is not resonating with a target audience, said Andrew Wood, Mintz + Hoke's senior vice president of strategy.

"Data allows us to be more nimble and flexible with our clients," Wood said. "It's about insight and refinement."

Insight, said Adams, is ultimately what clients want data to provide.

"They don't just want 'big data'" she said. "They want someone to tell them what all that data means and how it affects their marketing spend."

Adams & Knight created an insight group to focus on primary research and data analytics to provide better data-based advice about marketing methods most likely to create lead generation, sales or greater brand awareness, Adams said.

And as social and digital channels — from Facebook to Twitter — become more crowded with users and messages, brands will face greater challenges building awareness and engagement. That, Cashman said, will lead to the next generation of marketing and data analytics: increased micro-targeting. "There will be an even greater focus on customized messages at the individual or household level," he said.

Some of that granular targeting is already happening, according to Donovan.

"In certain larger media markets, cable allows clients to send targeted messages by household," she said. "And mobile targeting will become bigger over the next year."

That, in turn, will create even more nuanced data for ad agencies and clients to digest.

"We have to be able to evaluate how various communication vehicles are working together to influence behaviors," said Adams. "That's the only way we'll be able to effectively optimize the total marketing spend." ■

EXPERTS CORNER

The death of integrated communications

By Bill Field

For close to 20 years, integrated communications was "it." Everyone wanted it and every communications firm pitched it. If you weren't integrating your communications, you were lost or plain out of touch.

Advertising programs looked like matching pieces of luggage with a dizzying sea of sameness to them. The basic premise was that all communications needed to have the same brand look and feel and exude the same personality.

That strategy worked for years with ad agency firms and companies alike

extolling the virtues of being integrated. But what was once the go-to strategy has fallen by the wayside in today's digital communications world. A number of disrupt points caused a major disruption to the integrated communications mantra and sent it down the path of communications irrelevancy.

Being integrated meant being a generalist, proficient in all areas of communications — from advertising and collateral to public relations and strategy. Everything housed under one roof was the order of the day.

When network TV, radio, newspapers and magazines ruled the world, integrated communications made great sense. Ad campaigns ran for years with the integrated communications firms responsible for producing them having their contracts renewed year after year.

The explosion of digital communications ultimately proved to be the game changer. Social media closely followed behind. Increasingly, the communications business moved from an "integrated" generalist world to one of specialization. Expert firms that specialized in digital niches exploded — inbound marketing, search marketing and even pure code development.

Many integrated ad agencies and firms were slow to embrace the shifting trend away from an integrated model, or lacked the financial resources to invest in digital talent to fuel penetration in the new media. Young talent, the lifeblood of the communications business, turned away from integrated shops in favor of new world digital operations.

It proved to be a perfect storm. Pitching integrated communications capabilities was falling on deaf ears. It was no longer relevant or compelling and relegated to the advertising and communications graveyard.

The advent of chief marketing officers further exacerbated the decline of integrated communications. Where companies were once content to have one agency being awarded "agency of record" status and tasked with developing all their advertising and communications work, CMOs took the opposite tack. They assumed the role of orchestrating the brand and the



Bill Field

resulting communications work. Being part of the C-suite elevated the importance of metrics return, something that was difficult to measure with an integrated communications promise.

The common operating approach that is employed by CMOs and many marketing and communications executives today is to work with multiple communications firms that are subject-level experts in their specific disciplines. It is readily clear that their desire is for specialists, rendering generalist agencies irrelevant.

The goal that CMOs are seeking is demonstrative results through ideas that work.

In essence, the quest for breakthrough ideas has replaced integrated communications. Great ideas are at a premium and can come from many different corners. Brands that once were all in with the deployment of integrated strategies now employ multiple campaigns across a variety of different media platforms. It is more about connection and engagement than it is about drilling home the same message through repetition that was the model for integrated communications.

Creating an idea is far more complex today. It has to be delivered in many different ways in new and old communications mediums. Instead of one idea, it needs to be a series of ideas delivered in lots of impactful ways that are relevant to all audiences. It's another death blow to integrated communications.

It is still paramount to ensure that a brand positioning and personality are correctly rendered in all communications. The downside risk with a multiple-idea communications strategy is losing the brand voice.

Consumers still need a compelling reason to believe and reason to belong to a brand. Brands are what you think and feel about them, the emotional connection that's often hard to describe. It may be that integrated communications is being cast in a new light through the prism of new ideas and media. ■

Bill Field is the founder of FieldActivate, a Connecticut-based marketing firm.