

— DON'T PANIC with data

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For as long as I have been in this business there have been headlines clogging up the marketing press about change being the death of things. *'5 years from now nobody will be watching TV, 30 second ads are dead, newspapers are dead, DMPs are becoming irrelevant and the agency model is toast....'* Its simply not true, and the short-termism and sensationalism of such proclamations does a dis-service to our industry. We should still simplify and streamline, but do not need to change the essence of our what our industry is here to do. Evolution is a lot more of an accurate view of our industry than one of an industry that has to change. Particularly when you consider that evolution typically means more than survival, but the thriving and expansion of what breaks through.

Long before I was in this business, Peter Drucker said "The purpose of business is to create a customer, the business enterprise has two—and only two—basic functions: marketing and innovation." This is still true today. And this puts agencies in a very valuable

position for any of its business partners. However, the amount of information on customers and the pace needed to handle this information are currently presenting a challenge in how effectively we can do this. The good news, this is being sorted. Agencies are adapting to service these data needs for their clients. We've always been good at doing this.

I see data as being less of a risk to our industry than the loss of creativity and big ideas. As the focus shifts to answer these data needs, we are potentially overlooking the importance of human ingenuity. In the future, data will be shared. It does not make sense to go head-to-head against the tech-giants in this space. We need our own data, but that's their reason to be in business. It will be more important to be open-sourced and collaborative to distinguish the right data. Simply put, data has always been a means to being more fluent at knowing what customers will be doing, and what they will want, and then translating that into brands and stories that connect with people. In fact, it's this last bit where agencies do well and where consultancies and tech-companies fall short.

Therefore, the future will be about marrying ingenuity and ideas with data. Understanding real behaviour and real decision-making is central to effective marketing and innovation, and it will continue to be more effective than *'the data said to do it'*. It's wrong to say that to date most data has been noise. It's certainly sharpened our capabilities at targeting and driving efficiency. But traditionally it has been weighted more towards short-term available information. This leaves a gap. With marketing budgets under such pressure, what marketers need more than ever before is accurate prediction of where business growth lies. They need to know which new product ideas will succeed, which ads will connect with people, how they will connect, which are worthy of media spend, which packaging and promotional choices will boost sales, and where their brands are headed. These big questions require robust answers, which cannot be based on short-term tactical information. Agencies, and marketers, need to build the resources and talent that can accurately predict which areas of marketing are going to drive profitable growth. Therefore, they must overlay long-term market trends and behavioural science on the data they are currently using to continue source the big ideas and creating customers that businesses need to grow.

Our business evolves, continually, because customers evolve, and in turn the needs of our clients evolve. This hasn't stopped, and it won't stop. It's what makes this a great and exciting business, but also one that is critical to the success of any of our business partners. We have always been an industry that challenges convention. Questioning old habits, discarding unproven methods and killing waste in marketing plans. Sounds like natural selection to me, where more of the right elements thrive, grow and diversify. Therefore, it's not change, its evolution. And in that sense, nothing has changed.

OPINION