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# Building a media industry that represents everyone

STEPHEN ALLAN, WORLDWIDE CHAIRMAN & CEO, MEDIACOM 28 NOV 2018

Away from content, you need to understand how to execute media in a way that resonates with everyone. That means understanding the way local media works, says Stephen Allan.

Like most people working in the media industry, I was delighted to see UK broadcaster Channel 4's recent announcement that it will be setting up a new national HQ in Leeds.

The London HQ won't be closing but the broadcaster will, as part of its '4 All the UK' plan, move around 200 of its 800 staff to Leeds. It will also open creative hubs in Bristol and Glasgow, with around 50 staff in each.

The reason for this decision is, to quote the chief exec Alex Mahon, "to open up Channel 4

to people from across the UK and supercharge the impact we have in all parts of the country.”

## Bursting the London bubble

For years, the UK media industry has been concentrated in and around London. Of course, there have always been “local” publications and “regional” agencies. But even in that sentence, the problem is clear. The media industry has arguably been “London HQ” ... and then everyone else.

However, it’s naïve to think that a solely London-based industry can truly reflect the lives and experiences of the entire country. Within the advertising industry, it’s imperative that we are where our clients’ consumers are, and that the work we produce reflects the lives of all in society.

Away from the content itself, we need to understand how to execute in a way that will resonate with everyone from all corners of the country. To do that, we need to understand the way local media works. And we need to produce content that speaks to and engages audiences everywhere, not just in one city.

There are ways we can try to decipher other areas – research and insights, for example. And of course, we can hire from specific regions. But nothing compares to basing yourself there.

At MediaCom it has always been our belief that, if we are going to deliver content that reaches big audiences and resonates with them enough to prompt action – from generating positive brand sentiment to encouraging people to buy a product – then we need to make sure we are based all around the country, not just its capital. It’s the reason why we have long-established offices not just in London, but in Birmingham, Edinburgh, Leeds and Manchester.

The importance of local viewpoints is something that cannot be argued against. Not just in

media, but in society as a whole. Look at the recent US midterms where political parties fought tirelessly to win over local communities – they went to these areas, spoke to people on their doorstep and it was all about making sure they understood what local people and local businesses wanted.

Our industry is no different. We need to win over local audiences for our clients and we can only do that if we have local-level reach.

## The impact of digital

Across the UK, for many years, work that was meant to speak to audiences around the country didn't accurately represent people in Wales, Yorkshire, the South West, Scotland or anywhere else. And in many cases, the way campaigns were executed didn't suit the local media that can be so vital to a brand's standing in the community, and ultimately its success.

But this used to be more accepted. People rolled their eyes at stereotypes, and our clients laughed at and were sometimes irritated by, the "London bubble's" lack of understanding of their brand and the way it works. But, by-and-large, it was ignored and forgotten.

Yet over the last 10-15 years, the world has changed. Modern media – from TV and film to advertising and brand marketing – exists in an age of hyper-personalisation, where digital technology has enabled audiences to enjoy content and platforms perfectly matched to them.

Just over [36% of the world's population](#) is projected to use a smartphone by the end of 2018 and this will continue to grow, passing the five billion mark in 2019. Using these devices, people are able to design their own ways of living and working. From the apps they use to the set-up of the device itself and the way content is actually delivered to them – every single user is able to personalise their experience. This is the world we live in.

At MediaCom, we've focused on opening and growing offices all around the world but, vitally, not just in one location per country. We have multiple offices in regions such as the

UK, India, Australia, North America, Germany, Spain... the list goes on. Add to that our focus on encouraging mobility for our staff and you create a workforce that truly understands local and regional nuances, resulting in more effective communications for our clients.

This has always been driven by a desire to have close relationships with our clients, truly understand their brand and their audience, and deliver work that engages them. The media industry as a whole will benefit from a less concentrated model where the media represents everyone by being situated around them.

Channel 4's decision is a brilliant development not just for Leeds, Yorkshire and the North West, it's a vital step for the entire media industry.

*[This article was first published on LinkedIn.](#)*

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**OPINION**