

Coping with Complexity

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BY STEPHEN ALLAN 08 DEC 2014

Finding the best price isn't enough anymore. Today's challenges can only be overcome by looking at the communications world in its totality

For those of us who started our media careers in the 1980s, today's media world is an amazingly complex place.

If I could have time-shifted from my first job as a media executive at The Media Business to the MediaCom of today, I would have been bewildered at the array of choices we have to make, and the skills our business now needs to navigate those decisions effectively.

To put this into context, my first job involved thumbing through BRAD, a doorstop guide to media vendors that ran three inches thick. That was our planning tool. I also used to

present off acetates and OHPs (overhead projectors for those of you who never got the chance to create real-time presentations!) but I won't dwell on that.

That thick paper BRAD directory has long been overtaken by new and vastly more exciting technologies that have had their own profound effects on our industry.

Today, as recent Google [research](#) has shown, when someone wants to buy a car, they use up to 24 different touch points to help them make an informed decision. That's a 33 percent increase in just two years.

With ubiquitous access to the Internet, communications has now become a fully connected system made up of an incredible array of interdependent parts. Every touch point offers the opportunity for an interaction and every interaction can create further value, whether that be building brand preference or sharing a video.

Against this backdrop of infinite choices and endless ways to communicate, one of our agency's biggest challenges is to understand and action the right opportunities for their clients. We need to understand how many of those 24 interconnected touch points are actually important in the auto-buying process, and what relative value do they offer on the journey to a sale.

When I started in media, our only USP was to find the best price. Today's challenges can only be overcome by looking at the communications world in its totality. Too many of us, clients and agencies, have responded to complexity by hiring armies of specialists and creating division after division that all too often work independent of each other and are more disconnected than ever.

However, if we are to deliver positive business outcomes for our clients' investments, then that needs to change. We need to optimize the entirety of their communications systems, not just the individual channel silos.

In this new world, understanding the system involves looking at the interrelationships between brands, customers and content as well as where they all connect. Only by

examining all these relationships can we find the opportunities that will take the performance of the entire system to a higher level.

At MediaCom we believe that what connects these systems and makes them perform is content, be it TV, press, radio, events, partnerships, branded content, social, search, mobile or new technologies.

Our challenge is not just to advise brands on the type of content they need but also to put in place the connections that guide the content and the target audience they want to reach around the system. It's about having a clearly defined distribution strategy, ensuring there are no dead ends or wastage resulting from disconnected content.

While individual channel efficiencies are still important, we know that continuing to think in silos will only result in incremental benefits. By working to optimize and connect the entire communications system we believe we can deliver transformational communications effectiveness.

Our recognition that complexity and connections demand a different approach from us as business partners to our clients is not only helping us create great work – in the last month we've picked up awards in the U.K., Norway, Australia, Poland, Netherlands and the U.S., to name a few – but also new business.

We've been able to extend relationships with existing clients such as Procter & Gamble and Coca-Cola as well as attract new brands to the MediaCom family, including AB InBev in the US in recent months.

However, just as the world has changed since I started in media, much has also remained the same. When I first started at The Media Business it was made clear that I (and the business) would only thrive if we delivered sales for client base.

Today, we need to continue to ensure that we transform communications to the benefit of our clients' bottom lines, whether the goals are response- or brand-led or a combination of

both.

The solution in the 1980s was to buy media cheap. In 2014 and 2015 the solution will only become clear when we truly understand the systems in which our clients' communications battle for consumer attention.

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