

Reflecting on departing and emerging giants

OPINION

STEPHEN ALLAN, WORLDWIDE CHAIRMAN AND CEO, MEDIACOM 26 APR 2018

The last few weeks have been, for both the media industry and the wider business community, a truly fascinating period and one of great change.

When Sir Martin Sorrell announced he was stepping down from his position as CEO of WPP, our parent company, the reaction was immediate – within the press, amongst the businesses in the WPP family and amongst clients.

From my own perspective, I've had the good fortune of knowing and working with Martin since MediaCom joined WPP in 2004. He remains a truly world-class businessperson. His many accomplishments are well documented but in my opinion, what set him apart was his complete devotion and commitment to the business. His command and knowledge stretched to all parts of the organisation and he wanted to know on an almost daily basis

what was happening in MediaCom, both with our clients and with prospective ones too.

For our clients, as I've said over the last week or so, from a MediaCom perspective, nothing really changes. And that is exactly how Martin would want the business to react. Our clients hire us based on extensive pitch processes and, ultimately, they base their decision on the team who will deliver the work. The creatives, planners, managers and directors who will develop and execute brilliant campaigns.

Take, for example, the Sky re-pitch process which we happily retained [as announced recently](#). The entire process played out over months – from October 2017. And it wasn't only Sky and ourselves involved in that, there were also external pitch consultants who each brought new perspective, new conversation and a truly unbiased view.

That is the process of a modern media pitch. Of course, contacts still matter – that's true of any industry – but ultimately, winning a client comes via a professional, hugely detailed and extensive procurement process.

Within MediaCom, while the news was felt, our approach has been and will continue to be, that it is business as usual. Our goals remain the same – deliver amazing work, recruit and retain brilliant people and focus on continuing to grow our clients' business.

Sir Martin is a huge personality and an overwhelmingly successful entrepreneur who grew an empire and retained the same dedication to it as it went from one to 200,000+ employees.

No-one can deny that he built an incredible business and any leader would want to achieve that same level of success.

It is a common misconception that the easiest position in business is to be a leader with a huge market share.

For us at MediaCom, for example, the position as one of the world's leading agencies affords us the opportunity to be on the pitch lists for major brands and should we win the

business, we get to create ground-breaking work. However, genuine business growth can be harder to obtain and maintain. You also need to deal with increased scrutiny and pressure as your rivals battle with you for position and, in our case, client wins.

Up-and-coming businesses are in a wonderful position because when you are smaller and younger, growth comes thick and fast and expansion often feels like it's happening at a rate of knots. But when you are one of the leading businesses in your sector, how do you replicate that, continue to push for more and drive growth?

Look global and drive true growth

In the media, a lot of conversation is dedicated to “digital growth” – i.e. the expansion of digital services and therefore the revenue coming in from those.

Digital growth is a positive thing because it opens up new opportunities. We all know the world is increasingly digital and with society-changing innovation in areas like Artificial Intelligence and the Internet of Things, that's only going to continue. Consumers will expand their use of technology in everyday life and it's our job to make sure brands are ready for that and can connect to the screen-focussed public.

However, in reality, for MediaCom as a business, digital growth is actually more “revenue switching” where money that once came in through one channel now comes in through another.

For us, the answer to the “how do we maintain growth?” conundrum was in the expansion into emerging markets. When your goal is to increase market share, identifying regions on the verge of a boom in your space is the key to lasting success.

In short, our future as a global leader lay in knowing which regions and nations *new advertising dollars* will come from. Which regions/countries currently see moderate media spend but will soon boom?

MediaCom growth markets

Latin America, China, South East Asia and the Middle East are all markets we have identified as key growth areas for us as a global business. The agency already has a presence in these regions but all have vast and as yet largely untapped, potential as major media hubs.

There are many reasons for this. At a demographic level, each has the population and therefore audience to be vital to all brands. Billions of people who should be engaged with more consistently, creatively and successfully with the right campaigns in place.

Of course, the likes of China are already mature markets but there is so much more to come.

For nations like India, for example, the huge population is coupled with a huge landmass, not all of which enjoys the infrastructure and connectivity needed to really expand its media sector. But this is changing. Ongoing infrastructure development will have a huge impact – making it easier for businesses to move into the market and for communications to reach everyone.

Identifying which regions offer this opportunity is a big challenge and we have put in place brilliant teams across the world to help drive this.

Everyone from local and global leadership to market and audience research teams play a big part in this process. We need in-depth local region understanding and at times, you need to take a risk to find out whether a certain market is really going to boom and bring the returns you hope – for example investing in a small team on the ground to test the waters and analyse the opportunity.

While MediaCom views itself as a global network, we rely on local market experts to maintain that position. Other areas of our business offer opportunity for increased revenue, from digital services to business consultancy. But the biggest growth opportunity for us lies

where new advertising spend can be found. Only this will uncover exciting opportunity for all sides of our organisation and will ensure we retain our position.

So, as the industry responds to the news that a huge presence has stepped down, the reality from within the group is that of course, Martin will be missed – as a person but also as a hugely passionate driving force – but it has to be onwards and upwards from here.

[This post was first published by Stephen Allan on LinkedIn.](#)

Interested in the future of media and marketing?

Get actionable advice, insights and opinion from MediaCom experts every month

[Sign me up](#)

OPINION