

What will impact our industry in the months and years to come?

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It's at this time of year, when we're facing the short stretch to the festive season, that I like to look ahead to what the next year will hold for MediaCom; and our clients.

The future industry landscape will undoubtedly see the lines between media agencies, tech companies, creative agencies, ad tech firms, consultancies, media owners, publishers, social platforms (and more) blur even further.

And the forces that have been driving transformation in the industry will only become stronger: in particular new technology, shifting consumer behaviours and expectations, and the need for the industry to define its purpose.

So how will this trifecta of factors change how we operate and do business in the months and years ahead?

Data and creativity can't be mutually exclusive

First off, the debate about data needs to continue. It may sound like we're covering old ground, but the reality is that there is still a long way to go until brands, agencies and advertisers can say we're using data in the right way.

Data may give us context and the information we need to make an informed decision, but creativity – and the human brainpower that is needed to understand how to best apply data in the real world – is what takes a campaign from the everyday to becoming a cultural calling card for a brand.

The media industry is acutely aware of the power of data. We're already using it to understand brands and their audiences and to deliver content. But it's data's role in informing creative that will be the real driver of growth.

By using data to elevate the conversation with consumers, we can elevate the work itself and ensure it reaches the exact individual it needs to – over whatever channel and platform that best works for them in the moment.

And technology is helping brands to really take creative ideas, and their execution, to a new level.

For example, AI companies – like Picasso Labs, a partner we work with here at MediaCom – can use data to codify each element of a creative idea or campaign, and then use algorithms to understand which element works best to engage audiences, and how this engagement varies depending on the channel.

It's no longer about having a single creative campaign, placed across different channels.

It's about ensuring the data is being used to inform the central creative idea; and that this idea is delivered in a multiple of different ways, depending on the platform, the consumer and the context.

The death of data for data's sake

While we need to use data to inspire creativity, hiding behind the numbers can be all too easy. And it can mean you lose sight of the people you're ultimately trying to engage with.

Consumers, audiences, individuals; whichever word we use to describe them, at the end of the day they are still humans. And the smartest brands will understand this and use data to take people on a journey with them.

A campaign that has a human touch at its heart will have far more impact than one that relies on the data alone to determine what success looks like.

In our efforts to make use of a wealth of audience data, we need to be mindful that we're not selling to 'faceless' people – but people that have real-world experiences and interactions with many brands on a daily basis.

Our job, as agencies, is to use data to help our clients understand how their brand can really resonate and connect with people; and leave a lasting impression.

One of my favourite campaigns of all time showed just how powerful the use of data can be when it comes to engaging consumers.

[Snickers' Hungerithm campaign](#) in Australia elevated the global platform of 'You're not you when you're hungry' to a whole new level – using a hunger-algorithm to monitor the online mood of Australian consumers by analysing their social posts.

And when the internet got angry, Snickers bars became cheaper.

It's a simple, and incredibly effective, use of data analytics, but one that sticks in the memory and really brings the brand to life for consumers.

A big responsibility lies at our feet

It was our own Chief Transformation Officer of MediaCom UK – Sue Unerman – who said that “to create change, we must be the change ourselves and not a bystander”.

[I've previously spoken about](#) how our industry has always been fast-paced. In my 30+ years working in media and advertising, I've seen wave after wave of disruption; and we've adapted each time.

But the need to change the industry for the better is now really coming to the forefront, as question marks still hover around transparency, the role of consultancies in the media process, how companies are using consumer data, and how brands are representing wider society within advertising.

For consumers to trust our clients, and clients to trust agencies, we need to be strong in our commitment to improving how we work; and demonstrate that we are willing to walk the walk when it comes to changing things for the better.

Putting inspiration into action

2020 will be here in the blink of an eye, but we shouldn't let that time slip through our fingers.

With so much creativity and innovation on our doorstep, now's the time to take stock of the work we do for clients.

And this is not only about how we use data or new technology but also how we help brands to connect with their audiences and ultimately show that we, as an industry, are moving forward for the better.

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