

A VIEW FROM JOSH KRICHEFSKI

Does agency size matter? We're asking the wrong question

ADVERTISING OPINION PEOPLE

JOSH KRICHEFSKI, CEO, UK 24 AUG 2018

As I scrolled through my emails recently, I was met with a familiar sinking feeling. A bulletin with a survey asking: “Big agencies – love or hate?” My instant reaction: “Why does it matter?”

Now before you roll your eyes, I know I’m the chief executive of MediaCom UK so you might assume I’m going to fall on the “side” of the bigger agency. But my point is – why pick a side? Whether you are working for an agency or a brand, “large or small agency?” is entirely the wrong question to ask.

We need to move the conversation along and focus it on what matters – the work itself.

Big or small – the end-goal is the same

I have no issue with one-man-bands, small, mid-size or our fellow large agencies. Do I feel competitive at times? Of course! Surely we all do. But I'm not looking at any of these businesses through a size-based filter. I look solely at the work produced, the talent within those organisations and the clients they are working with.

My advice to any brand is to do exactly the same.

The truth is, I admire the campaigns some of our rival agencies are producing. I'm always in support of good work delivered in the right way. Great campaigns driven by brilliant content is good for advertising and, in the current climate, our industry needs great work and smart delivery. That is what will engage people and better connect brands to audiences. The size of the agency does not define its ability to deliver that.

Transparency is not limited to small agencies

The argument often made when exploring the difference between a big and smaller agency is that large agencies are less transparent and don't really care about their clients.

The reality is that the entire industry has had a problem with transparency and it will take the efforts of every single agency, brand, network and all that's in between to fix it. I can understand why a smaller brand may look at a group of agencies and query whether they'll get enough attention from a large agency. But honestly, it doesn't make a difference.

Taking MediaCom as an example, we work with huge multinational brands and we work with smaller names, charities and NFPs who have more limited budgets and more niche audiences and goals for their campaigns. We want to do a fantastic job on every account and I'd hope every agency, small or large, would feel the same way.

No agency wants to do a bad job or get one over on a client. Why would we? This is a world in which transparency and honesty are valued above most things. And rightly so. Clients have every right to know how and why their money is being used and transparency is a good way to ensure that.

What defines an agency's success is its relationships with clients. We need to retain them, delivering fantastic work that truly improves and grows their business. A great agency, of any size, prides itself on working in partnership with brands, not pulling the wool over their eyes. A lack of honesty and transparency is damaging and we all need to continue improving.

MediaCom have ourselves reviewed and in some cases changed the way we pitch, plan, manage, execute and review work. I'm sure smaller agencies have done the same.

The questions to ask

Focusing on the size of an agency is unhelpful to agencies and brands alike.

For a brand, it drags their attention in the wrong direction. It insinuates that there may be something wrong with bigger agencies. That they should be wary and consider whether they want to work with a 'faceless giant'. But equally, it insinuates that smaller agencies can only compete because their larger counterparts are doing something wrong.

Neither is true. Small agencies and large agencies compete all the time – both are equally capable of innovating, producing creative work for all size of brand and being honest and transparent in the way they do that. The focus should always be on the work itself.

The question brands should ask is: "Is this a great piece of work that will deliver me the results I need?" If a brand sits in a pitch and is wowed by a large agency's creative idea, brilliant. If it's a small agency, equally brilliant. Always pick the one who understands your brand, its audience and is proposing the right content and execution.

From there – the process should be the same regardless of agency size.

It should start with contract and scope development with guarantees, clarity and transparency in writing, and front-of-mind throughout the discussion.

And it should finish with the delivery and review of a brilliant campaign which has made a genuine impact on a brand – whether that is sentiment, sales or otherwise.

We should also question the creative, the planning and strategy, the expertise, the delivery mechanisms and platforms used... we question everything that will define the success of the work.

The size of an agency does not.

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