

A VIEW FROM SUE UNERMAN

Forensic media planning



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The new forensics of media will change how we evaluate media, just as forensic DNA revolutionised criminal investigations.

The introduction of forensic DNA in criminal investigations in 1985 revolutionised the field. Before this date, crime scenes relied on much patchier evidence. If the criminal wore gloves, there'd be no fingerprints, so any astute crook could avoid the only sure form of identification for someone unseen.

Dr Henry Lee, one of the world's foremost forensic scientists, [calls](#) 1985 a turning point in criminology. "DNA proficiency has made revolutionary contributions to forensic science," Dr. Lee says. "In the forensic world, its impact has been felt as profoundly as the discovery of fire and the invention of the Gutenberg press."

“Since this breakthrough in the 1980s, innovations and new applications have occurred with breath taking speed. Advances in miniaturization and microchip technologies have been combined with the analytic techniques of DNA analysis to give us impressive new capabilities. DNA science has solved crimes considered otherwise unsolvable.”

Those of us fortunate enough to lack personal involvement in crimes can look on from the side lines, fascinated by the advances, and the iterations of the science. It is a popular form of fiction. There’s always a CSI on somewhere on the Sky EPG and modern crime fiction dominates literature sales on an ongoing basis.

Investigative reporting of real crime is fascinating too and new developments continue to improve accuracy and precision.

In 2009 crime scene evidence from the tragic death of [Sierra](#) Bouzigard in Louisiana led police to investigate a crew of undocumented Mexican workers because of a call made from her mobile. There was DNA evidence too at the scene, all the police needed was a match. But none of the suspects matched the evidence, nor was there any match in the FBI database. The investigation stalled until 2015 when a lead DNA analyst Monica Quaal found a way of conjuring up a physical likeness from the DNA which didn’t require a suspect or a match. This process, known as phenotyping, produced a completely different suspect pool – the murderer was now believed to have freckles, light brown hair and green or blue eyes, of Northern European ancestry. The case is still ongoing, but the police are still investigating and have been knocking on a completely new set of doors, thanks to this new development in forensics.

Media planners are faced with a step change in the amount and quality of evidence they can use to make the case for strategic decisions for a client’s brands.

Our industry must expect to feel challenged by the new technology, but also to find that the new forms of data evidence open up new avenues to decision making. As we move away from proxy audience data, however robust, to big data sets with real time and location evidence, new strategies will emerge in established categories. Just as with DNA how the

evidence is applied is crucial to the outcome. And just as with DNA evidence the effectiveness and efficiencies of the data today will continually evolve. Sticking with the old ways of planning won't do. Nor will shifting from one established process to another unflexible one. An openness and agility that allows for continual re-evaluation of strategic approach is crucial.

OPINION STRATEGY TECHNOLOGY