

‘Keep the faith’

[ADVERTISING](#) [EDINBURGH](#) [RECOGNITION](#)

DAVID SHEARER - MANAGING DIRECTOR 23 JAN 2020

I’m going to start our first newsletter of the new decade with a plea.... I’m proud to work for MediaCom and I’m proud to work in the advertising industry but I’m worried that this doesn’t feel like a prevailing attitude in the industry today.... we need to believe in ourselves more. Arguably, this is not something this industry has been much castigated for in the past but times have changed.

Back when I started in advertising – in the interests of full disclosure, I have to confess that’s over 30 years ago now – most people were intrigued to discover what I did for a living and certainly had an opinion about it but this was borne more of curiosity or even fascination than disdain.

In recent times, we have been working with the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in conjunction with the Advertising Association on a campaign to restore public trust in advertising. This is in response to their findings that public trust in advertising is at an all-time low. Advertising and the people that work in the industry (yes, that's me they're talking about) are held in lower esteem than estate agents, bankers and politicians! Given most people's poor opinions of our political class, this is indeed harsh criticism!

What has changed? The sheer quantity of advertising to which we're all exposed, a downside to the exponential growth in media choice, has certainly played a part. People feeling that they are being stalked by advertising fuelled by the suspicion that the data they have willingly provided about themselves is being 'abused' in a way they hadn't envisaged. They're now bombarded constantly by too much, irrelevant advertising they've seen before that's trying to convince them to drink more, eat more, gamble more, borrow more and knows more about them than is comfortable.

Extensive news coverage surrounding the insidious influence of media on our citizens doesn't help either: the Facebook/Cambridge Analytica data scandal; major brands' advertising appearing alongside inappropriate content or inadvertently funding terrorism via YouTube; graphic self-harm & suicide content on Instagram; Influencers failing to acknowledge where they have been paid to produce content. The list is long and unedifying.

It is my view that current cultural attitudes where someone else is to blame for societal issues and that individual responsibility for your own actions is an alien concept exacerbates this perception. This is also fuelled by our government's adoption of the approach that the blame for every problem in society should be squarely laid at advertising's front door – perhaps this is facetious but I haven't see any campaigns promoting hard drug use recently yet we still seem to be caught in the midst of an epidemic of consumption these days.

Faced with an unrelenting barrage of negativity, is it any wonder the main protagonists (that's us folks working in the industry) are enveloped in a crisis of confidence?

We need to work harder to ensure that rigorous, accountable checks and balances are in place to mitigate all of the practices I've just highlighted. It won't happen overnight of course but we need to do more to restore people's faith. I appreciate that the likes of Facebook, Google et al claim they're doing everything they can to make this happen but they're not overcoming people's scepticism about them 'marking their own homework'.

When it comes to actual advertising itself, we already have a regulated market where advertising is vetted professionally to ensure that it's 'legal, decent, honest and truthful' – revolutionary idea isn't it? – well, that's what the ASA already do! But more needs to be done in addressing public trust – yes, acknowledge that we're trying to sell stuff but do it properly and fairly.

Most of the best professionals I've encountered in my career believe passionately that advertising is entertaining, emotional, informative and can be a force for good as well as a strong contributor to the economy although they'll accept nothing is perfect. We need to ensure that the general public and the people now working in our industry believe that, too.

ADVERTISING EDINBURGH RECOGNITION