

To walk a mile in someone else's shoes...

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Andrew Tenzer's and Ian Murray's recent research* describes an empathy deficit within the advertising community.

It scratched some open wounds.

While it can be gratifying to have one's [prejudices confirmed](#), it's worrying that a lack of empathy is at the heart of problems faced by the advertising and marketing community.

We like to think that brands are an important part of people's lives.

It's even natural to think that what we do for such a large part of every day is important – Not on the High Street's CEO recently stated that people ["...want to know everything about](#)

[brands – engage with them, converse with them, eat with them, listen with them, visit them and know what the brand stands for. They want to get to know their circle and join a community of like-minded customers.”](#)

Except they don't.

People in the real world rarely think about brands at all let alone consider them important.

Trust in brands and advertising is at an [all-time low](#) and it's up to us to do something about it.

But what?

The first step to addressing a problem is admitting that you have one. You might be sitting there thinking “well, that might be true for all those other brands but we're different.”

Except Havas' [Meaningful Brand](#) study suggests that people wouldn't care if 77% of brands simply disappeared.

Remember that you're not the target market. Even if you are the target market you're a sample of one. So you need to get out of the office.

Stop relying on second-hand reports of consumer behaviour you've dug up on the internet. Even commissioned research isn't a reliable source of understanding of [how people interact with your category or your brand](#).

Most research looks for commonalities and averages when all the interesting stuff happens in the outliers and the liminal spaces between one thing and another.

Go and watch people shop your category. Speak to people about what, how and why they buy. Go do the thing yourself. You might be surprised by how much you can learn from standing in a supermarket aisle for an hour or two.

And (this might seem odd coming from a media agency guy) we need to remember that marketing is not (only) advertising. It's one, small, albeit very visible, part of what marketing is.

Media spend might be the largest line on most marketing budgets but it's only one tool in the box. You should almost certainly spend more time than you currently do thinking about your product, pricing, place (distribution), packaging and however many other P's there are these days.

It's also worth pointing out (for the agency types who might be reading this) that it's our job to help our clients think about this stuff. As much as marketing folks over-estimate the importance of their brand in their consumers lives so we too can over-egg the importance of our discipline to our clients – if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

Make your advertising as creative, effective and efficient as possible but remember that it can only partially compensate if the other marketing fundamentals are missing.

Advertising is a thin scrape of icing on a multi-layered brand cake – without it, the cake is far less attractive but nobody wants to eat a half-baked sponge. (I took that analogy too far, didn't I?).

* [Andrew Tenzer's Research](#)

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