

A VIEW FROM SUE UNERMAN

Transforming attitudes to age

CULTURE DIVERSITY INCLUSION

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Most businesses have a strategy for transformation, and if they don't, they probably need one.

When so much is changing and so fast it might be easy to assume that the old guard need clearing out.

It's a mistake to assume that everything and everyone must change. If you lose all the experience from the team, you lose perspective and you are more likely to throw the baby out with the bath water.

At recent judging of effectiveness awards several people commented that there was a great richness of material proving the value of old school branding practices.

Transformation these days may well include restoring well worn paths to excellence that have made way to trendy tactics that still require rigorous proof of concept.

In our industry we may be at risk of losing sight of this.

Take your own team for example, does your team come close to matching the population profile by age?

Probably not.

Most of us think the ad industry is ageist.

One in four respondents to an industry [survey](#) last year said they'd been told that they were too old for a new job.

Age is another face of diversity. Some businesses don't allow people to contribute if they don't fit and don't look the part, and age, like gender, class, sexuality, mental health, disability, and ethnicity is another aspect of exclusion.

This is the real point. The problem is that some businesses are too homogeneous.

If everyone in the office is required to be laddish (and some of the team are not) then some people feel excluded and the result can be overall bad team dynamics.

If everyone is required to be suited booted and formal, then that quells the fun and experimental spirit essential to a growth mentality.

Management shouldn't dictate. You can only create the environment that allows everyone to be themselves.

Of course there's a contract here between team members. You need everyone to deliver as required, to respect differences, to acknowledge each other's strengths and

weaknesses, and to partner for the strongest outcome.

Earlier this summer The Marketing Society held a [debate](#) about ageism.

The Marketing Society chief exec Gemma Greaves finished by saying: “I am not a fan of any isms”. Gemma is right. Ageism is yet another ugly face of forced conformity that stifles difference and limits potential.

In today’s business world no one can afford to waste time on reinventing the wheel or energy on pretending to be anything other than themselves. True value is created when team members complement each other.

In my [blogs](#) about gender I have pointed out the overwhelming disparity between the proportion of women making decisions, directing adverts or taking commercial photos and the proportion of women in the population and shopping decisions made by women. Disposable income sits disproportionately in the wallets of the over 50s, and this is growing. There is plenty of evidence that older people feel misrepresented in advertising comms. Is an equivalent disparity to blame?

The debate about ageism in advertising is alive and well, although maybe a bit tired. It would perhaps like to have a cup of tea on the sofa and a nice afternoon nap. Whoops, there I go being ageist.

Never mind the baby, let’s not throw older people out with the bath water.

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