

## Data and creativity: fully committed, or just a fling?

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**Campaign and Quantcast bring together advertising's finest to debate the future of data and creativity**

Data and creativity is one of the most talked-about relationships in adland. So, what's going on?

According to a mix of **advertisers**, marketers, creatives, media-agency and **digital** experts, the potential is huge and there's a strong desire to tap it. But how?

At **Cannes Lions' Festival of Creativity**, **Campaign** and **Quantcast** gathered **eBay**, **MediaCom**, **McCann** and **OgilvyOne**, among others, to unpick the challenges and opportunities.

### **Need to 'elevate' data**

In many companies, data just isn't where it needs to be. Dimitri Maex, president of OgilvyOne New York, explained: "People are failing to elevate data and make it inspire. I don't think it's just a creative problem, but a business and management problem. It needs to elevate itself and it's just not happening."

Simon Calvert, chief strategy officer at LIDA, added that "the biggest challenge is managing the complexity and the simplicity of data", while Chris Hirst, European and UK group chief executive of Havas, agreed that, once elevated, data will "transform our entire business".

### **Fundamental shift**

"It's about making sure data doesn't sit on the outside and is not silent," said Verra Budimlija, chief strategy officer at MEC. "Data analysts don't necessarily think about outcomes the way creatives and strategists do, so it's important to bring everyone together."

Phuong Nguyen, director of advertising strategy at eBay, explained the need for cultural change. "I'd like to see a world where the data and creative guys begin in the same room, not only talking about what has happened to our ideas historically, but everyone pitching ideas as to what we do next," he said. "[We must] harness the power of analytically and creatively minded people in the same room at the same time."

"We have data 'riffing' sessions – what interesting piece of insight can we find. And I discovered that crochet bikinis are a 'thing' – there are so many surprising and delightful things you can find if you keep it front and centre."

Budimlija noted that creative use of data is a way of thinking: "Look for what does make sense instead of looking for what doesn't make sense." There are other cultural challenges, around attitudes and incentives. Hirst explained: "A lot is based on winning. Creatives get pay rises by winning Lions – therefore they don't want to do the kind of [data-driven] content we're talking about here. There's a big cultural challenge."

## **Missing gaps**

Data can tell us a lot, but not everything – yet. "It tells us what people are up to, but it doesn't tell us why," said Charlie Wilson, chairman and chief creative officer at OgilvyOne Worldwide. The industry craves what Andrew Spurrier-Dawes, digital planning associate director at MediaCom, called "the motivation behind the behaviour".

Calvert said: "One of our challenges, as an industry, is taking a step back and listening to the data rather than producing it. There's a big difference between the data guarantee and outcome. At least you have something to think about rather than nothing. Strategy is about choices. You look at the two choices and think 'OK, I need to pick the best choices as a result of that.' You can listen to data and narrow options."

At The LadBible Group, they're not always looking for answers from data, but "better questions", according to marketing director Mimi Turner. "It's a challenge accepting that data cannot tell you what you want to know," she said. "That happens a lot, especially with customer interactions and transactions. We're in love with the idea that we can discern something personal. Sometimes we get a long way down the track to find out it can't be recorded."

## **Better storytelling**

Budimlija had one big concern: "We're getting better at optimisation, targeting and retargeting, but we're targeting crap all the time. We need to put data at the front of the creative process,

not the end... Data and analytics can't sit separately from the rest of the process, which it does currently."

Jon Carney, chief digital officer at McCann Worldwide, said data is "making things better". He believes it is driving improved creative and making better consumer experiences at more relevant moments. "But you need to make content valuable," he added, "because it's seen for two seconds on a mobile phone. Data enables that."

Konrad Feldman, chief executive and co-founder of Quantcast, said: "The key to maximising data is through the insights it provides. Only then can advertisers deliver relevant, engaging messages to the right audience. Compelling, datadriven storytelling starts at the beginning.

The top priority in campaign planning must be to set the right goals (or incentives) and measure them fairly. A lot of the problems we talk about today, such as fraud, viewability and ad-blocking, trace back to bad incentives."

Spurrier-Dawes added: "If the definition of an expert is recognising what's missing, the value of creativity is creating a human story."

But it wasn't all big brands and agencies thrashing it out. Samantha Fay, senior vice-president, global brand strategy, at Guinness World Records, had a unique perspective on consumer interaction. The Records have a broad brief, but one constant: the people behind them.

"There's a lot of emotional engagement with breaking records and with surprising and delighting," she said. "One of our key data challenges is multiple audiences. Our most popular Instagram post is the 'heaviest strawberry'. We think things like hoverboards and extreme sports are exciting, but people need a human touch."

Turner added: "What happens when you forget about user experience? They'll come back if you don't mess up their life. It's so tempting, with all the insights and possibilities, to optimise at every opportunity, but once you get it wrong, that's when audiences will switch off."

## **Personalisation**

Frazer Gibney, chief executive of FBC Inferno, saw room for improvement. "I'm shocked by how bad our industry is. We're talking about sophisticated use of data and optimisation, but we've got a long way to go creatively in terms of very simple use of data, like the weather, to make messages more receptive. There are huge benefits from relatively simple things that are widely available that could significantly improve outcomes."

Spurrier-Dawes added: "The challenge we face [is] do we want to build a brand, or do we want viewability? Because we can measure everything, we do measure everything, so our targets are based on measures that do not make a difference.

That's the problem with saying data can do everything, when it can't. To make data in advertising better, we should celebrate data for what it can do and what it can't do, then use humanity to fill the gaps."

Feldman explained that iterating creative makes for a more personal strategy. It starts with a set of creatives for a target audience.

"You develop a plan, a creative and a hypothesis about the audience you want to reach, but if the campaign doesn't work, you're left wondering if it was the hypothesis, or the creative, or the media execution," he said. "If you know you're reaching the right audience consistently, you can know precisely what hasn't worked, take a step back and iterate."

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