

Hey, Agencies: Marketers Are Pretty Clear About What They Want

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Date : April 18, 2016



In the movie “What Women Want,” **Mel Gibson** plays an ad executive who, after a freak accident, discovers he can hear women’s private thoughts. He of course uses this great gift to his own advantage to score with “da ladies.

Perhaps it’s time for agencies to collectively gain the ability to listen clearly to what marketers want. Because last week a number of very senior marketers were very clear about their wishes.

Marc Pritchard, chief **brand** officer at **P&G**, was asked what he wants from his agencies. He acknowledged that the agency ecosystem has gotten way complex, and that he's looking to his agencies for solutions to decomplexify (a word I just made up) the situation. He was quoted as saying “Frankly, your complexity should not be our problem, so we want you to make that complexity invisible.”

Most agency ecosystems have organically grown into the monstrosities that marketers now struggle to manage. When websites were the thing, agencies offered specialist functions to develop and maintain websites. Then search came along, and in came search agencies. The same happened when **social** media became the thing, and again with mobile, messaging, e-commerce, and so on.

I am a firm believer and supporter of free and open trade, so one could argue that those agency solutions simply cater to a new need in the marketplace. But Pritchard is also right to place some of the blame with the agency holding companies which, like airlines, started pushing every addition as a separate service (and profit center) where it wasn’t before. Clients, under pressure not to be seen as outdated dinosaurs, happily signed on each new addition to the agency holding Christmas tree.

This has made it more and more difficult to develop and distribute integrated content. And that is where Pritchard is pushing: He wants his agencies to seamlessly orchestrate **marketing** communications. Other marketers might want to take on the orchestration role themselves, but they, too want the same level of seamlessness Pritchard envisions.

There were other voices last week as well. Lou Paskalis, senior VP/enterprise media executive

at **Bank of America**, echoed a call to action from Pritchard about ad-blocking. Marketers understand very clearly what consumers want, he noted: less intrusion, less irrelevance, less over-the-top frequency and other tactics that are driving consumers to ban **advertising** from their lives. Marketers are looking to their partners to come up with solutions to address this issue.

The problem is that as long as the industry keeps on focusing on efficient delivery of messaging, ignoring effectiveness beyond delivery, and as long as we keep telling marketers to focus on and incentivize cost performance, we will have a hard time moving to where marketers say they want to go. Paskalis put it this way: "Somehow we have divorced efficiencies and effectiveness." Agencies and marketers could certainly find common cause around this issue.

So if I were to have the gift **Mel Gibson** has in the movie, I would start to develop solutions that address these issues. And I bet conversations that address what marketers say they want (need!) could go a long way toward repairing marketers' trust in agencies, a trust that is currently at an all-time low.

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