

Digital Bridges

Early digital pioneers remember the frontier days of the '90s. Looking back, and looking around, who successfully migrated, who struggled, and what can be learned from the journey?

To gain these insights, we conducted a collaborative study with the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) and the Association of American Advertising Agencies (4As), sponsored by Google. We surveyed 294 participants from a wide range of senior marketing executives and professionals across a broad spectrum of advertisers, agencies and digital media companies.

New research uncovers keys to successful digital-media integration.

Our research uncovered reasons why roughly one third of advertisers surveyed responded that they are either “somewhat” or “very” dissatisfied with their progress with integrating traditional and digital media. Four primary issues surfaced:

1. Key people in the organization still don't understand digital. This appears to be a big challenge at companies where senior management is unfamiliar with digital media and lack a basic understanding of how people consume media in the emerging digital era.

In the ANA portion of the research, approximately one third of respondents indicated that very few of their senior executives understand the value of combining traditional media with newer digital media.

They also generally don't understand how digital media fits into their customers' lives. This creates a real challenge for marketers seeking a better ROI by moving traditional media budgets into newer digital media.

2. Advertisers are reluctant to move dollars away from the “tried and true.” This is true even though consumers with Twitter-sized attention spans have moved on. Most major advertisers have many years' worth of data regarding performance of their traditional media campaigns and take comfort in knowing that if they run a network campaign flight of 150 TRPs, they will see a number of metrics move in the right direction.

While digital media often offer much greater ability to analyze the results of the marketing communications effort, the senior managers using the data are less familiar with how to interpret the results. Therefore, they tend to continue investing in traditional media.

3. Organizational silos impede progress. Decision-making in many corporate organizations is often a sort of group process. Decision-making processes can also be complicated when organizationally siloed groups have biases based on their often long-past experiences.

Silos have long been cited for introducing too many players into lengthy decision making processes, which ultimately compromise decision-making. The number of approvers (or simply people who think they are empowered to “just say no”) can further exacerbate the decision-making process.

4. Advertisers lack the metrics to enable them to integrate digital media into the mix. Fifty percent of all ANA research respondents cited lack of access to necessary information as their biggest challenge in achieving more successful integration and better overall results. Underlying challenges included data formats that were inconsistent or scattered across the organization, as well as a lack of resources to work with the data.

The challenge is that most corporations have literally tons of data that could be valuable to marketers, but typically the data hasn't been collected or organized with the intention of using it for marketing purposes.

This spawned what might be described as the 90/10 rule (attributed to Avinash Kaushik, Google's analytics evangelist) which suggests that for every \$10 you invest in tools, you need to invest \$90 in human resources to do the gathering and analytical work.

LESSONS FROM SUCCESS

Some marketers are doing a very good job of integrating their way into the future — what ideas can be learned from their successful approaches?

- **Have everyone sitting at the same table at the very beginning stages of a new project.** Many agencies-of-record still develop campaigns the old fashioned way — with the main creative idea (typically a TV concept) developed first, in isolation. Only afterward are other agencies invited to help develop a more integrated campaign. This is one of the greatest obstacles to effective integration.

By having *all* appropriate parties at the initial briefing session, sitting around the proverbial table, everyone hears the business strategy, campaign objectives, consumer insights and target audiences at the same time, in the same way. All parties are encouraged to think about creative approaches that involve big ideas that can play across the broadest spectrum of media.

In this environment, it is critical for advertisers to communicate specific roles and responsibilities for each group clearly and to foster teamwork. They should also punish parochialism — *e.g.*, when one agency brings an idea forward because they know they could get paid for executing it, rather than every agency being tactic-neutral.

- **Develop and broadly communicate success criteria before the campaign effort is initiated.** A recurring theme from our respondents is that campaigns (especially those with significant digital components) are often judged, after the fact, as failures. Frequently, those doing the judging are not aware of the original success criteria (if any) that existed for the campaign. Therefore, each evaluator is applying his or her own subjective criteria.

To address this malady, marketers should establish detailed, rigorous success criteria, across all forms of media, at the outset of campaign development. It is equally important to communicate those criteria, at the earliest stages of campaign development, across

the entire spectrum of stakeholders. Finally, it is just as important to publish, to the same audiences, objective reports detailing the precise results of each campaign.

- **Advertisers and agencies have to work together to close the knowledge gap.** Most marketing-focused organizations have a keen thirst for digital media awareness and education. Advertisers often have extremely valuable resources available to them that they can tap into. Digital media companies and agencies have considerable intellectual property that they are usually happy to share with clients.

Marketers should develop a robust program of digital marketing education aimed at multiple levels in the organization and leverage expertise from media and agencies involving them as “faculty” for these programs.

Something as simple as a lunch-and-learn session once a month with one specific topic covered each session (*e.g.*, social media, mobile marketing or gaming), can go a long way towards filling knowledge gaps that can lead to better integration.

- **Teams need to include members across a spectrum of traditional and digital media.** Not only do traditional marketing people need to understand digital — digital people need to understand traditional media, too. As a former agency president said during an interview:

“The old guard and the new guard are worlds apart, emotionally ... It's important to have each group really understand what the other does and value that.”

In summary, better integration and better working relationships almost always lead to better results, and increase the likelihood of an advertiser remaining competitively relevant in the eyes of the best business prospects. ■



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