

Live From Worldwide AdForum, New York, Day 2Day 2, Tuesday

Day two and we're like a bunch of school kids who've decided they're liking the look of the playground today. So off we go on our school bus to the first class, DAS.

DAS is Diversified Agency Services, a group that manages around 190 of Omnicom's marketing services companies and is in fact the largest and fastest growing unit within Omnicom. Proof again that spend is heading away from traditional media? With such a smorgasbord of agencies on offer, the DAS guys did a great job in creating a palatable sample by having small teams from 11 of their agencies. Hosted in the GE kitchen showroom, they used a menu to showcase the various offerings, from the fantastic out-of-store retail space work from (Interbrand) Design Forum to the ambitious China retail mapping from CPM and the mobile specialty by 'Ipsh!'. The DAS offering gives a great alternative to the large agencies who often aim to 'be everything to everyone', by instead being able to create a bespoke 'degustation deal' for specific tastes.

So, after digesting all that (and I promise that's the last of the bad puns) we headed across to the NYC library for a debate entitled 'Digital First and Foremost'. Speaking about 'digital' now as if it's still a new concept feels somewhat like your aging father getting excited about his discovery of this new concept, the world wide interweb. Good thing we had the likes of Jerry Canning from Google, Jane Barratt from Sapient Interactive and Augustine Fou from Digital Strategy at MRM to ensure we weren't a few thousands GBs behind the processor.

One of the immediate challenges for 'digital' is to look at ways to alleviate client fears and concerns in the face of the ever changing ball game. Our expert panel broadly identified these concerns as three-fold: clients' insecurity and lack of understanding of digital capabilities, the lack of benchmarks or case histories to be able to determine costs and how to manage them, and their own internal staffing requirements and experience to be able to handle it. It strikes me that it is the latter of these that can help solve the first two, and in fact talent – on both the agency and client side - is identified by several times throughout the week as one of their major challenges for the near future.

Our panelist from Google shared some great insights as to what consumers' experiences and expectations are of this digital age; based on the three principles of speed, collaboration and trust. Speed in that we expect information in real time. Always on and always the latest. Collaboration; the concept of individually produced content for the good of everyone else. And trust, in that consumers are more skeptical than ever before and in particular have a highly-tuned BS radar (that was one of the less technical terms that we were fortunately all familiar with).

So when it comes to narrowing down the 'first and foremost' question, it ultimately leads to a question of whether digital is next in line to sit in the centre of the diagram (we've had Media, The Big Idea and The Brand right, so it must be time for someone else's turn as strategic piggy-in-the-middle). Some agency-client relationships have already moved to this model and as the number of consumer touch points only increase, those holding the most power in mapping the human experience are surely going to be the winners. With data and therefore accountability also on its side, and surely budgets set to follow suit by accurately reflecting where consumers are really spending their time (and real attention), digital is indeed looking like the prime candidate for the central role.