

SCAMMES LIONS

We were lucky enough to present at Cannes this year and share the research we'd done in China on agencies. There's more and more pressure on China agencies. Relationships are now as short as 2.5 years (13% lower than when we last surveyed) and agency compensation is under threat – with procurement now involved in 40% of negotiations.

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Cannes is an amazing event, continuing to grow in size and stature, due to major clients such as P&G and Unilever (and their agencies) taking it more seriously, and big names such as Rupert Murdoch, Mr Sorrell and M. Levy speaking about changes in the industry.

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But with so much pressure on agencies, one well wonders why agencies invest so much of their time and energy creating and celebrating work that has never run. Surely, the message from clients is clear – focus on creativity *for us* and help *us* be more effective. While Cannes thankfully avoided the scam challenge this year, it seems the local Asian shows could not. My friends in India tell me that 90% of GoaFest this year was work that no one had seen before. And AdFest similarly had a huge amount of work like this.

How can the industry get out of this?

1. Change the criteria

Fixing scams is very easy – award shows simply have to require a minimum media spend for a campaign of (say) US\$50,000 – with all other entries competing in a ‘Small Budget Category’ (now *that* would become a competitive category!). Don't worry – I already know this idea is just a pipe dream, because by nature, award shows rely on revenue *from entries* – the fewer of those, the less money the shows make. So short of charging four or five times the price to enter for an award, creative shows are destined to become scamfests forever, as agencies continue to ‘encourage creativity’ from their teams. Unless.....

2. Make the award mutual

This is by far the simplest and best idea to re-focus everyone's energies.

Make the awards mutual. Have the client of the campaign up on stage and in the book, along with the agency. A wise man once said that the best work comes from *collaboration* between a client and an agency – so why not celebrate this? The winner of Best Film at the Oscars, for example, is handed to the producers - the ones who came up with the money – not the creative auteur without which the movie would not have won. Bring in the clients, and let's see if they are so pleased to walk on stage for those three print ads that ran in the Philippines Fishing Digest or not.

3. Change the currency

With more pressure on results, the Effie Awards continue to rise in profile – Asia recently hosted the first global Effies, and effectiveness contests are being run to strict judging criteria across most markets. If you ran an agency, who would you rather hire – a multiple winner of AdFest print, or someone with multiple Gold Effie Awards? Who are the creative stars driving effective ideas forward? Perhaps its time to rethink what makes an agency 'creative'. In our China research, effective creative was ranked equally as high as original. And finally, "An Agency that Wins Creative Awards" was ranked dead last of fifteen criteria for selection. Awards are no doubt crucial to attract talent – but clearly not to attract clients

4. Celebrate success

Where there truly is breakthrough thinking, it should be celebrated and shared. The teams that win a Titanium at Cannes or a Gold Effie need to be treated as the heroes that they are. Take a look for the case study of Halo 3. Microsoft and McCann created one of the most complete and cutting edge marketing programs possible – and the result was not just the biggest videogame launch ever, but with more than US\$150m in sales in the first weekend, the biggest launch ever, ahead of Spiderman and anything else you could throw at it. These are the campaigns to talk about around water coolers. These are the stuff of legend.

In a world beyond scams, all of us will sleep a lot more soundly.

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