

2007 MARKETERS POLL

CREATIVITY IS VITAL WEAPON FOR SURVIVAL IN 2007

Breakout creativity, better briefs and integrating all communications channels to work together seamlessly are just a few of the concerns of marketers in Asia-Pacific, as Mike Savage reports

If there is one thing that *Media's* sixth annual marketers poll shows, it is that few marketers need reminding about just how important creativity is in sustaining the health of brands and the people who look after them.

Making marketing fresher and more innovative ranks as one of the year's burning issues for many brand managers in the region. Over two-thirds said developing more creative marketing solutions in house is a key priority this year, while over 60 per cent said receiving more distinctive, stand-out advertising from their agencies is a major goal for 2007.

Creativity also underscores many other marketer concerns highlighted by the survey: how to get different communication channels working as one, how to get the best of digital media, how to connect and engage with consumers. "The role of marketing in terms of connections with consumers and offering consumer experiences remains consistent," says Nike's Southeast Asia marketing director, Tim Parkinson. "It's now how you do that, and how each and every one of those connections is invested with the kind of creativity you want."

What the poll also reveals, however, are the occasionally conflicting and equally pressing demands on marketers that threaten to derail their quest for greater creativity. The need to keep costs under control, secure blessing from the board and ensure colleagues and agencies are up to speed on business strategy were also flagged up as major priorities by around half of the respondents.

How marketers manage these important demands will play a large part in determining not only their own future, but that of the brands they manage. "Sometimes, we overload our agencies with too much information," says Rosanna Hon, head of brand development and management, Asia-Pacific marketing, HSBC. "These are the creative guys. The more they know, the less creative the stuff that will appear on the table. They are so bogged down with reading they can't think through and they can't cut through. Not many people have that ability."

One major barrier to marketers achieving their goals is the quality of agency talent — essentially in marrying creativity together with business understanding. Marketers have confronted this challenge for at least a decade and will still be facing it in 10 years' time, unless relationships with agencies change. "Creativity is like a curate's egg — everyone knows they need it, but few can pin it down when they see it," says Greg Paull, principal

Stop and think: Four marketers speak out on what it takes to set alight the creative spark in a fiercely competitive market



Rosanna Hon
Head of brand development and management,
Asia-Pacific marketing, HSBC

You've got to make sure the relationship is beneficial for both sides. For people in advertising, you've got to feel excited to work on the account. I try to make briefs as precise or concise as I can, but always ask myself how much room do I really have to let the guys dance on this one? The more room there is, the better things will come back on the table. I have the means to create some dynamic creative campaigns that will be provocative or get a fantastic response from consumers. I always define the parameters of my circle, but give them room to dance within the circle.



Argha Sen
Head of marketing and CRM
Toys R Us Asia

We try to remember that we sell toys, mostly to kids. We try not to take ourselves too seriously, try not to get too caught up in deep analysis and heavy strategy. We try to think as kids do, watch kids at play, dabble with cartoons, fiddle around with toys and take them apart. All our offices are stuffed with toys that sing, make noises, roll on the floor and create general chaos. This is the attitude we encourage in our own marketing departments and in our agencies. So have fun, because if you aren't, your product or service is not going to delight the child.



Tim Parkinson
Marketing director
Nike Southeast Asia

Our desire to invest this brand with creativity is paramount. We're seeing the traditional way of working with an advertising agency is not necessarily going to get you there — not nowadays. We have deconstructed relationships with creative partners, so now we have a portfolio of people that range from DJs through to designers, architects through to musicians, through to a couple of ad agencies. A whole portfolio of creative partners that we know we can source a range of creativity from. This whole idea of a solus relationship is anachronistic.



Jessica Lee
Director, brand and communications
Aviva Asia

Corporate culture and structure make it harder to allow creative thinking, and ultimately true creativity, in marketing. Sometimes clients hire creative agencies, only to let corporate culture and structure destroy creative proposals and stick with what is safe and convenient. Perhaps change is creative thinking's best friend. As consumers mature, safe and tried processes for campaigns become less relevant. Unwind tradition and existing methodologies, and encourage change. True creativity is always uncomfortable in the beginning and calls for courage.

of remuneration and relationship specialist R3. "It's the number one reason for choosing an agency, but not enough clients invest time to understand it, embrace it and recognise it."

Time, and creativity, face a formidable opponent, however — ever intensifying business pressure, something marketers around the region know only too well. Despite the disparate challenges presented by a rich mix of categories, audiences and markets, what marketers in Asia-Pacific have in common is a pressing need to prove how well their campaigns are doing, while stepping up originality and innovation at the same time — a far from easy juggling act.

"Business is increasingly ruled by the tyranny of the quarter," says David Shaw, director of brand and integrated marketing communications for Lenovo Asia-Pacific. "The stock market has no patience for slow-burn initiatives that will take root and bear fruit a year out." Imagine the pressure a marketer is under to enable sales and deliver re-

sults by the month or the week, Shaw adds. "Every marketing dollar has to be optimised. You need to manically track your campaigns and double-down on the winners, while pulling the plug on your dogs. Marketers, by and large, aren't very good at that."

The increasing flurry of private equity firms buying and relaunching undervalued brands underlines just how much of a business marketing has become. Marketers, and agencies, who are unable to link creative ideas to business drivers are going to find themselves left behind.

"As senior marketing leaders, we have to be able to sit down with CEOs to talk about the value of marketing from a business perspective — X dollars in will result in multiple-X dollars out," says Coca-Cola Pacific group marketing director Darren Marshall.

"It's our role to drive this culture through the organisation; not eliminating the creative spark, but identifying the business levers and focusing the creativity against them."

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Rosanna Hon, head of brand development and management, Asia-Pacific marketing, HSBC

Less than half of the marketers questioned feel they are doing a good job of promoting the value of marketing to the board, although less than 50 per cent also cited this area as a priority. Less of a surprise should be that trying to measure marketing effectiveness rates high on the agenda for 70 per cent of marketers in the region.

With procurement on the rise, ROI is often the last line of defence in the battle to stop marketing from becoming a line item as a cost centre. With so much at stake, the crux here is that few brand managers think they are doing a good job — less than one in three, according to the poll.

Breaking out and quantifying creativity is an imperfect science at the best of times, says Nike's Parkinson, who counts himself as one of the many dissatisfied with their measurement of marketing effectiveness. Fast-changing consumer attitudes and media habits furthermore, are constantly moving the goalposts. "It's not going to get any easier over time," Parkinson

muses. "It's getting more complex."

Shifting consumer attitudes and media habits are also effecting change internally, with some advertisers becoming increasingly disenchanted with internal functional silos on the grounds that these perpetuate traditional solutions. "The biggest implication is on the talent you hire," Parkinson says. "Talent not necessarily defined by functional expertise, a PR expertise or whatever it may be, but talent that can focus on the consumer and work from there; and understand what the best way to tell the story to the consumer is."

Advertisers who are serious about following a consumer-centric path must be prepared to nurture prospective talent, he adds. "There are people with the potential out there, but if it's an agenda you want to pursue you've also got to help them get there."

Around one in three marketers are looking to boost their marketing team with extra headcount this year, according to *Media's* survey. Generally,

rises in brand investment are outpacing media investment, with increases in marketing budget tellingly focusing on areas that help marketers cultivate a deeper understanding and relationships with consumers — market research, PR, CRM and online (see table, page 24).

Over half think their agencies should focus on improving their ability to come up with and execute integrated campaigns as a major priority this year. Less than one in three think their agencies did this well in 2006.

Marketers which *Media* spoke to felt that agencies were failing to keep up with advertisers' own internal initiatives to facilitate multimedia campaigns that think about the consumer first, the medium second. "Integration happens in the client's office, rather than the agency's office," says HSBC's Hon. "A lot of clients are fighting against the same issue we have," she says, referring to her base city of Hong Kong. "Some of the ideas are great, but are they really making use of any of the

great innovative new media opportunities that are coming out? Likewise, there's a new media opportunity but the creative doesn't fit in."

The unbundling of media has created very real challenges in providing an integrated service, Hon adds. Savvy clients can manage the input from various specialists and knit it together themselves, but agencies have to step up too. "The agencies have to start to take the initiative. Clients are more vocal, demanding integration now."

The appetite for integration is being stoked by the growing number of portfolios marketers have to oversee points out Jessica Lee, brand and communications director for Aviva Asia, making it even more difficult to deliver what marketers want.

"The job of the client is to keep educating the agency — the target audience is changing. However, it's a two-way street," she says. "Agencies have to start upping the ante on the kind of advice they give, because marketers are getting smarter."

What marketers really worry about

