

+ INTRODUCTION

Each year we conduct a survey or round table with a variety of representatives from across the media industry to gauge their thoughts on the hot topics, identify the trends they are seeing across the full agency and client sector, and discuss what they anticipate being the key topics for the year ahead.

This year there were core themes around data, creativity, long-term brand building, the client-agency-media owner relationship, cross channel strategies and how reactivity has become the new norm, expedited by Covid. We've segmented our report into those key themes offering our view on each element, supported by commentary from the various attendees of this year's (Covid safe!) round table.

PARTICIPANTS INCLUDED

Alex Kirkley

Reg. Sn. Engagement Director

+ FINECAST

Peter Boler

Director

+ ONE LINK DIGITAL

Vanessa Farrall

Agency Sales Manager

+ CHANNEL 4

Chris Moxon

Deputy Business Dev. Controller

+ ITV

Simon Bollon

Managing Director

+ BOUTIQUE

Simon Taylor

Group Head

+ REACH

Alex Price

Agency Director

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Matthew Hall

National Magazine Sales Manager

+ DC THOMPSON

Lee Shaughnessy

Business Director

+ MOBSTA

Sophie Cork

Senior Account Manager

+ BOUTIQUE

Peter Boler

On behalf of

+ PICNIC

Nicola Mawdsley

Creative Strategist

+ BOUTIQUE

Steph Feather

Media Director

+ BOUTIQUE

Tina McCoy

Regional Agency Director

+ HEARST

With a variety of representatives from across the media landscape, including TV, programmatic platforms, news, and magazines, the breadth of conversation was wide.

The session was opened by talking about the hottest topics and trends. The conversation blended across macro issues such as data and creativity to the micro elements of third-party cookies and attribution. This became the first hot topic of debate

IN AGENCY LAND AND WITH MEDIA OWNERS, DATA REMAINS A PROMINENT SUBJECT. THE REMOVING OF THIRD-PARTY COOKIES, TRACKABILITY OF FACEBOOK AND THE 'OBSESSION' WITH NUMBERS WERE HIGHLY DEBATED MATTERS.

The critical point is that targeted advertising is changing – consumers want more protection over their data and tech giants like Apple, Google and Facebook are leading the charge, leaving marketers worried.

"The depreciation of the third-party cookie and the removal of tracking in IDFA will make it more difficult for brands to attribute success of digital activity."

ALEX KIRKLEY, AUDIENCE STORE

"The key challenges we have faced have been in the data landscape as advertisers and agencies seek to understand how an increased focus on privacy across all identifiers will affect their marketing strategies."

PETER, ONE LINK

It was clear that media owners are moving more towards 1st party data as a solution, with more and more investment going into the owned data space.

"We accepted the need to be more agile and transparent in this area and more innovative with the data we ourselves sit on."

VANESSA, C4

"Our investment in 1st party data enabled us to improve the user experience, personalization, and future content strategy."

CHIS, ITV

"The activation of first-party data is of key importance for us all across the digital landscape and when brands and agencies come together on media planning analytics, creative and insights with the view to achieving objectives is where we've seen the standout performances."

ALEX KIRKLEY, FINECAST

"Although a good interim solution, we can't rely too much on 1st party data – we can't underestimate how much reliance there still is on 3rd party cookies and we also need to consider the way the industry is going – and that is in favour of user privacy. Volumes of owned data are already depleting and could become hard – and costly – to obtain.

SOPHIE CORK, BOUTIQUE

Our MD, Simon Bollon summarised.

Brands and agencies need strong collaboration on this point, bringing together a range of data points and creating one, joined-up picture of performance. Attribution and measurement is only going to get harder and our investment in this area is echoed across the industry'

THIS LED INTO A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE ROLE OF DATA BEING FOCUSED ON SHORT TERM METRICS AND THERE WAS A CONSENSUS THAT WHILST THE BIGGER BRANDS WITH DEEPER MARKETING POCKETS ARE WINNING THE RACE FOR BRAND BUILDING, AWARENESS AND ATTRIBUTION, MANY BRANDS WITH SMALLER BUDGETS ARE REALLY STRUGGLING TO MOVE AWAY FROM SHORT TERM ROI BATTLES AND ARE THEREFORE FALLING FURTHER BEHIND THOSE FOCUSED ON WINNING THE LONG RACE.

During the pandemic, in the need for survival in highly reactive times, many brands shifted focus to short-termism. Although useful for generating quick metrics, many felt that the lack of brand building activity was set to damage brands in the long term.

"A consequence of the pandemic is a shift in focus towards more short-term business results and evidence of TV's contribution to this in the immediacy, rather than the longer-term brand metrics traditionally relied upon. The rapid push to digital across the last year has driven the increase in short term metrics.

The immediacy of seeing clicks, views and short-term sales cannot distract from the overarching long term brand building objectives. You simply cannot build a brand effectively using short term hyper targeting methods."

VANESSA, C4

"Proving effectiveness in the face of short termism is one of the key challenges we are facing. More and more brands are focusing on offer led and less audience focused in their marketing comms and there's a real worry that Brand Loyalty in the market is being less recognized."

SIMON, REACH

At Boutique, we've seen a shift in the last 5 years away from consumers making immediate transactions or responding to adverts immediately, replaced by the longer-term impact of advertising.

"A recent study of our clients showed that only 5% of responses to TV we're immediate. This shows that the impact of advertising is a mix of short-term awareness for those in market and a longer-term impact on business growth. This is nothing new, but we still see too many advertisers focused on the short-term ROI which can often suggest low performance."

ALEX, BOUTIQUE

“Those businesses that have focused on the medium to long term alongside short term have thrived - advertising through the pandemic has kept brands front of mind and also enabled new launches to gain market share fast.”

CHRIS, ITV

“The standout brands have very much found a way to keep themselves relevant and active in the past year. They have kept an investment in brand advertising which leaves them in a strong position as we come through the other side of Covid.”

MATTHEW, DC THOMPSON

Thankfully, the industry is seeing a shift back towards a balance between short-term, direct performance and longer-term brand building activity. *(For more on this subject, see our work on 'assimilation')*

“We initially saw a shift towards short term metrics in 2020, however from Sept 2020 onwards, there has been a fairly even balance between short term, outcome based marketing and long-term brand building”

PETER, ONE LINK

“Many brands focused on short-termism in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic. But once consumer confidence increased, so did that of marketers who recognised that they could not abandon the way people thought, felt or behaved towards their brand. We saw this ourselves with an investment boom in brand advertising over the last 6 months.”

LEE, MOBSTA

“Just as previous pandemics and recessions have shown, those who focus on the long-term brand building strategies generally recover strongly.”

SIMON, REACH

“Balancing the need to attain short term metrics and the longer-term benefits of consistent investment in brand advertising is a common problem marketers face, particularly when at the mercy of sales-focused management boards and tight sales targets. But if brands want to see growth that lasts beyond a challenging time, investment in strategic, brand building activity is essential. Ultimately, brands need dynamic agencies to support them in the face of the unknown - being reactive, flexible and responsive to facilitate unforeseen changes to marketing plans, and ready to support their growth when the dust settles.”

SIMON, BOUTIQUE

THE CONVERSATION THEN SHIFTED TO THE ROLE OF CREATIVE. WHILST BRANDS ARE UNDER PRESSURE FOR SHORT-TERM ROI, THEY ARE ALSO MORE MINDFUL OF HOW TO COMMUNICATE THEIR BRAND AND PRODUCE ENGAGING STRATEGIES THAT SPAN ADVERTISING, SOCIAL AND OTHER OWNED CHANNELS.

"Do not underestimate the importance of the creative - consumers are looking to engage with the message of the brand, which is best communicated through strong, well-executed creatives."

TINA MCCOY, HEARST

"We believe digital advertising also needs to put the focus back on creativity. The industry has become obsessed with technology, data, measurement...for many, the quality of the actual creative the consumer sees is not high enough on the agenda."

LEE, MOBSTA

"Creativity is key. Make strong creative and be clear about your brand and what you want people to feel and think of your brand and what behaviours you want them to undertake as a result of advertising."

CHRIS, ITV

"In terms of changes we'd like to see in advertising this year, it would be better representation for all minority groups which are under-represented on screen. For decades BAME, LGBTQ+ and disabled people (visible disability or not) have not been at the forefront of creative output."

VANESSA, C4

"The Year ahead will carry the diversity and inclusion theme which is so important. There's a real need for brands to be better inclusive in their comms and there's an ever-increasing want from agencies and clients to know more about our large and diverse audience."

SIMON, REACH

"Ultimately brands need to reflect on who they are and what their core message is to create bold, authentic creatives which shows consumers why they should engage with them. Consumers are questioning brands more so than ever; therefore, quality creatives are essential."

NICOLA, BOUTIQUE

A THEME THAT RAN THROUGHOUT THE SESSION WAS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEDIA OWNERS, AGENCIES AND CLIENTS. AT BOUTIQUE, WE BELIEVE IN TRUE COLLABORATION WHEREBY MEDIA OWNERS HOLD RELATIONSHIPS DIRECTLY WITH OUR CLIENTS TO ENSURE THEY FULLY UNDERSTAND THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OUR CLIENTS FACE. IT REMOVES BARRIERS TO TRADING AND CREATES A MORE INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP AND EMPATHY WITH THE BRANDS WE REPRESENT.

Honesty, openness, and collaboration are key to a successful agency - media owner relationship. Following on from the challenges faced in 2020 the importance of a strong media owner - agency relationship has been evident.

"The more cooperation there is at understanding challenges from each stakeholder, the better the solution is at driving a meaningful outcome. One real benefit to clients is where media owners and agencies are genuine partners. This leads to a better understanding of challenges and opportunities, an improved focus on leveraging resources...and it's ultimately more enjoyable for everyone."

LEE, MOBSTA

"The better and deeper our relationships are, the more we can work to achieving each other's goals and derive value for each other."

PETER, ONE LINK

"It's also apparent that improved media owner + agency relationships cultivate innovative solutions for the client."

STEPH, BOUTIQUE

"Agencies who put client service, innovation and effectiveness at the forefront of their strategy, who are prepared to be open to the innovation and expertise media owners can offer and bold enough to put big ideas in front of clients will be more likely to gain a reputation for bravery and innovation."

CHRIS, ITV

"We have seen good agency relationships help to develop trust, which in turn has opened up wider conversations and given us all the chance to deliver bigger and more profitable ideas to clients."

MATTHEW, DC THOMPSON

"As an independent agency, we believe media owner - agency communication is essential to create bold, dynamic solutions for clients. Trust has never been more important and creating intimate relationships across clients, agencies and media owners will lead to better results. By working together effectively, collaboration works to challenge the status quo and think strategically."

SIMON, BOUTIQUE

SIMON THEN SHIFTED THE CONVERSATION TO STRATEGY AND EMPHASISED THAT WHEN TRUE INTIMACY IS CREATED BETWEEN AGENCY AND CLIENT, STRATEGY CAN REALLY COME TO LIFE.

"We're seeing a significant shift with clients who want more cohesive strategies and that has meant a reduction in the number of agencies on a client roster and a more focused approach to strategies. This has led to full-service agency growth and more strategically focused agencies outperforming the market."

SIMON, BOUTIQUE

"The value of cross channel integration when planning and executing a campaign must be recognized to ensure strong activation. Moving beyond a siloed approach works to elevate campaigns, as consumers are using more and more media channels. The better agencies (yes, that's us!) are really focusing on the long-term bottom-line impact of what we do."

ALEX, BOUTIQUE

"I would like to see more education given to clients on a multimedia approach to advertising and what the different mediums can offer."

MATTHEW, DC THOMPSON

"We're seeing cross platform campaigns being much better received now, with all parties truly recognizing and understanding brands and audiences as a whole rather than silo-ing into one media."

SIMON, REACH

"Access to more channels via programmatic such as DOOH are exciting developments in the industry and showing the ever-improving ability to target users at an omni-channel level."

ALEX KIRKLEY, FINECAST

"To execute a multimedia campaign effectively, it is imperative to home in on the strengths of different media channels and play them to an advantage. The media mix should work together to elevate the message for the consumer and create a holistic representation of the brand. Ultimately, it all has to be tied to the long-term direction of travel for the brand."

SOPHIE, BOUTIQUE

"People assume that TV is traditional or inflexible, people perceive TV through the same lens as digital media whereas TV cannot be solely based on last click attribution and 2 second views. It builds brands in trusted premium content that emotionally resonates with the nation, enabling your creative message to change minds, shift behaviour and move people."

CHRIS, ITV

"As a Newspaper publisher brand our brands are diversifying more into a more well-rounded offering for clients with podcasts, newsletters and social, the days of just having a newspaper offering has drastically changed."

SIMON, REACH

At Boutique we believe in the value of cross channel integration, which has been reinforced by this conversation. Cross channel integration is essential to target consumers on a larger scale across a number of customer touchpoints, in turn this works to create a stronger brand proposition and optimize the customer journey. Looking forward, brands need agencies to help navigate as media channels/offerings continue to adapt and evolve, and how they can best work together to create high impact campaigns.

ALEX, BOUTIQUE

THE CONVERSATION EVOLVED INTO TACTICAL APPROACHES THAT STEM FROM STRATEGY.

"Brands need to be agile and able to react to the market and current events, and with that keep flexibility in mind with a campaign. Long term strategies and short-term activation tactics must not be confused."

SIMON, BOUTIQUE

"It is important to ensure you plan with flexibility in mind. Whilst the road ahead looks more positive, the past year has taught us that strategies need agile tactics to adapt to the ever-changing external environment."

PETER, ONE LINK

"Speed of activity is a big growth area. Brands need to be nimble and quickly respond to the unique challenges of our time. Agencies and media owners must act quicker than ever.

Those who do well will 'seize the moment' and act fast with clarity, while those who maintain the status quo will get left behind."

LEE, MOBSTA

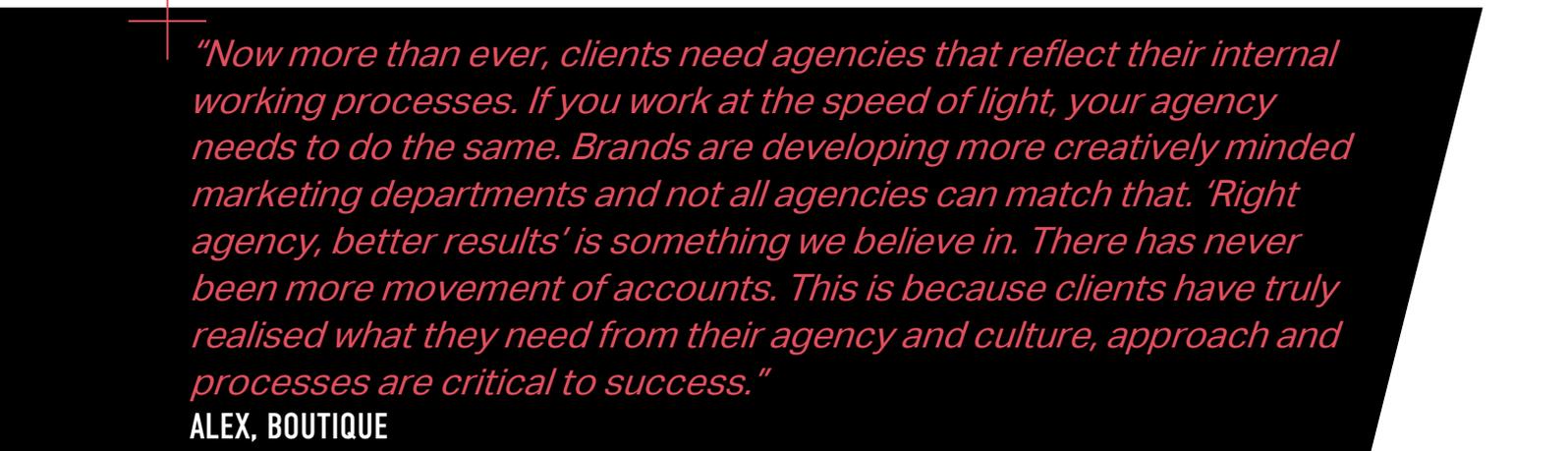
"We fast tracked a number of support mechanisms to back businesses in terms of flexibility."

CHRIS MOXON, ITV



“There’s a reason that the bigger, networked agencies have struggled out of Covid. Their business models are around scale, process, and straight lines. The last 18 months have created a new mindset and approach for marketers were reacting to changing consumer behaviour and the ever-changing landscape of media has seen become the norm. Independent agencies have different trading models and are truly structured around client needs creating nimbleness and cultures of entrepreneurialism.”

SIMON, BOUTIQUE



“Now more than ever, clients need agencies that reflect their internal working processes. If you work at the speed of light, your agency needs to do the same. Brands are developing more creatively minded marketing departments and not all agencies can match that. ‘Right agency, better results’ is something we believe in. There has never been more movement of accounts. This is because clients have truly realised what they need from their agency and culture, approach and processes are critical to success.”

ALEX, BOUTIQUE

“Be it the changes in the data landscape or the ever-evolving technologies that are becoming available across all channels; the best agencies are the early adopters and ones that see change as an opportunity rather than a threat.”

PETER, ONE LINK

“Brand categories and sectors that have thrived the most in recent times have done so by reacting to the changes in consumer behaviour and consumption, during the pandemic in particular.”

PETER, PICNIC



+ SUMMARY

The last 18 months have driven real change. Media owners and clients have a collective desire to be more creative, more reactive and see a more cross channel approach to marketing. That's put an emphasis on clients finding the right agencies that can offer that level of creativity and strategic thinking.

Marketing has shifted back to having a seat at the top table and our fastest growing, most successful clients are those who tie marketing to the bottom line with a natural focus on tactical, short-term ROI but a strategic focus on long term objectives.

Data was an issue 10 years ago and remains so. But we're certainly seeing more focus on short term ROI data but long term qualitative and quantitative metrics for business success, tied to marketing.

At Boutique, we've focused on working with clients across long term strategic growth tied to business objectives and the impact of bottom-line growth, whilst tactically focusing on producing, creative, brand-first innovative, data led short term tactics in an environment of entrepreneurialism.

We do this across core disciplines in media buying & planning, digital marketing and PR. Our D.I.S.C.O model wraps data around strategy and channel activation from a team with deep executional expertise across all disciplines.