

'Inside intelligence' is the future of advertising

The pandemic has accelerated some of the biggest brands 'in-housing' their creative teams, this trend continues but what does this mean for the future of advertising?



Paul van den Berg, CE for Middle East & Africa at Oliver

Paul van den Berg, CE for Middle East & Africa at Oliver, says that there is an upward trend of companies opting for an in-house or inside agency model. "Dedicated and bespoke agencies that are within the clients' businesses able to integrate with and even influence the client's entire marketing ecosystems are the future," he says.

“ They can bring inside ideas and inside intelligence, providing a faster, more transparent way to fulfil marketing needs with an agile client-agency relationship rather than the client doing it themselves. ”

He adds that with the in-house adoption curve becoming more extreme it's difficult for Brands to suddenly have to build or run their own agencies, it's not within their core competencies. That's why he says that more and more companies will look to companies like Oliver to help gather and garner the companies inside intelligence and make sense of all of the data.



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"Sometimes companies are too close to their own problems, too close to their own business, too close to their own data, so they can't actually see it without the help of external viewpoints that are close enough to understand the business but far enough away as an external business," van den Berg says.

Despite the pandemic, Oliver, which designs, builds and runs bespoke in-house agencies and ecosystems in 46 countries had a bumper year in South Africa last year, doubling revenues and headcount by working for brands like Unilever and Diageo largely because they were already riding the in-house wave in a different way to other agencies.

“Even though we are inside we are an agency and not just a team that is employed. So we can provide the best of both insourcing and outsourcing, to help companies drive that change,” he says.

Tailoring bespoke models for clients

“Building ‘Inside Intelligence’ is a big part of it, which involves tailoring the bespoke model to every client’s business through a blend of talent, teamwork, and technology and then optimising it for speed. This ensures the client gets outstanding creative that’s delivered fast and delivers great results.”

He says the more ideas you generate, the more you understand the clients’ pain points. “This applies when we meet a new client for the first time when we first play the role of consultants. We ask where does it hurt? Where in the ecosystem are your biggest pain points? Where are the throughput issues, the quality control issues? And once we are inside that business, we ask these questions consistently.”



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Clients also ask a lot of questions: “How do we do this? What do we do with content management services? How do we use this data? What are we doing in terms of data content optimisation?”

“As an ‘inside agency’ we are able to be a springboard to the client, sometimes a mentor, and sometimes a change manager. And in this digital revolution, evolution, whatever you want to call it, play a transitional transformational role.”

“Importantly, now more than ever in this age of digital, in-house marketing teams need speed and agility and an in-house set up that can be scaled that’s a lot more rapid and a lot more agile, which is capable of doing all things digital.”

The explosion of digital

And, he says that Oliver’s sweet spot right now in South Africa is the digital ecosystem. With the explosion of digital, the list of skills needed for an in-house scenario could include multi-channel creativity that goes across multiple platforms, SEO and content marketing, UX design (for better agility), social media marketing, data analytics, augmented reality, production, as well as e-commerce and virtual shopper capabilities.

But not all in-house models are the same. He cites Oliver’s client Unilever for which they have set up 22 U-Studios around the world, and while similar with regard to ways of working, each is different in the way they are tooled.

However, in-house does not necessarily mean on-site in these pandemic times. “The realities of the pandemic have meant that our teams and their brands rapidly evolved ‘in-house’ to mean ‘at home’ too,” he says.

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He adds that the company quickly adapted going from everyone being onsite to few being onsite with many 'insiders' working at home and even launched new clients during the pandemic where everyone has been virtual.

For example, Oliver launched Diageo in Nigeria in June last year in the middle of Covid with nobody actually meeting in person. But as soon as people are able to meet in person, he says that Oliver will be on-site again and says that they are already seeing a return to that scenario in the UK and the US, with France and Ireland back to almost 100% on-site.

"More and more companies are considering the in-house model because brands are under pressure from a capital and speed point of view, and everyone's under pressure from a consistency and quality point of view, therefore an in-house agency model is ideal."

The in-house model

He continues: "The in-house model solves the money thing to a large degree, it solves the speed, because you've got dedicated 'always on' teams, with higher degrees of consistency and fast turn-around times, that if necessary, can push out an entire campaign in a day."

"In the creative world when you've got five or ten different agencies doing little pieces of work for you when you take all the pockets of spend brands are spending with a multitude of agencies and you add it all up, they will realise just how much they're actually spending across the entire ecosystem," he says.

"Consolidating the agency outputs, with fewer people working on the brands who are inside the brand teams and thinking in the digital space while tapping into a global network like ours, this brings all kinds of tools to the fore that are needed while effectively doing it faster and cheaper, with consistency, plus you get a bespoke built solution."



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He believes that an outsourced agency like Oliver can bring the best talent in-house who are completely immersed in the client's business, who will push the boundaries, build great brands, win awards, which is what they are paying an agency for.

"And because we are closer to our clients we have a better understanding of the DNA of each of the brands we work with and there is less of a knowledge gap between the brand and agency and we are more invested in our clients' success," he adds.

And, yes, he says that it might be cheaper in the short term to own all the resources yourself and create an in-house agency within your company. But he asks, What calibre of creativity are you attracting? How will you retain grow, develop? How will you retain creative talent?"

Agility is key

Brands are looking for effectiveness and more digital skills are needed than ever before. However, he says that agility is key. "Nothing's simple and nothing is standard. You need to be able to tool up and tool down and retool and reshuffle

people because who knows if in a few months they might need half the people or they might need double the people and this is another reason why the cost-effective outsourced in-house model works,” he explains.

“Not sure the current client-agency RFPs have quite come to terms with this reality but our elastic scalability resourcing can deliver this.”

“We try to drive a lot of what we're doing with our sister companies in the You & Mr Jones Group, the world's first Brandtech group, who help us to be even more effective through our tech, process and talent approach which is further underpinned by our own, bespoke, software management platform, OMG. This enables us to approach brands in a different way, and this, we believe is part of the agency and the way of the digital marketing future,” van den Berg concludes.

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