

Agency Scope Insights: Trends on the path to new world agility

By [Johanna McDowell](#)

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As preparations get underway for the fourth Agency Scope study to begin in May 2021, Johanna McDowell, Scopen partner and director for the UK and South Africa notes that some of the trends seen in the global research will be a barometer for the pressures, proficiencies and pandemic recovery in South Africa...

Off the back of our plunge into rapid, monumental change, marketers will be tasked with facing a number of complex issues in 2021 and beyond. Scopen co-founder and global CEO, César Vacchiano's research in overseas markets shows that the amounts of work during Covid-19 lockdowns grew, at fees that remained static.

The pace at which strategic changes had to be made and implemented through Covid spilled over to agencies and work picked up as marketer's demand grew, giving rise to a remarkable trend:

“ Where agencies used to pitch two or three ideas to marketers, the time constraints forced them to pick one to present. ”

Vacchiano believes this will become the norm and agencies will back their best work, forcing marketers to choose from fewer – but more considered – ideas.



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Then, there's the growing complexity of the communications world, which has led to new models of in-housing of agencies. However, talent available to bring to in-house operations is not always ideal. They are often quickly bored due to the lack of brand and task diversity, and isolated from the typical agency creative hot house, making them difficult to retain.

Carrying the costs of in-house creative salaries on a permanent basis is quite a cost burden, and marketers would do better to hire an agency or work alongside a hybrid model, where teams ideally work between the client and the agency.



The creative-media merge

The industry's next move, however – creatives merging with media agencies – is a trend to note. An amalgamation of this nature will bring together a full-service, one-stop shop able to provide more transformational solutions for marketing and technology clients. With digital in the mix, the move is one that provides brands with the adaptive marketing many are seeking.

Thus, Agency Scope 2021/2022 will be trying to facilitate a deeper conversation around marketers' digital partners such as Google, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram. As social media platforms foster more intimate relationships with people, they meet the needs of marketers looking for those once-elusive interpersonal relationships.

So, are all online platforms ultimately the responsibility of the marketer or the digital agency? What about PR? Surely blogs, vlogs and Facebook community monitoring is public relations?

The agency that goes as “digital” must certainly take ownership of the strategy that combines all online advertising, but why would they incur the expense of, say, writers, when those fall under PR. Who does the social media team on the front line of engaging communities and taking responsibility for brand reputation work with or report to?

To deliver an effective, multi-channel customer experience, there must be deeper understanding as to who owns each relationship and how they dovetail in their respective understanding of their part in a campaign, and the analytics gleaned from it.

I believe that collaboration between several teams is possible and even profitable, providing there's a single point of management – and the marketer is a front-runner for that position.

Startups: Small fish or a good catch?

Another trend we saw as Covid began to take hold was the rapid flourishing of startup agencies. With job losses across the board, many talented individuals brought their services together and have created something of a cultural phenomenon in the industry, which is by all accounts keeping bigger agencies on their toes.

Jason Hall, digital marketer with US publication *Five Channels*, says that even in a pitch, a small agency has a distinct advantage: “Your team won't be distracted by the demands of Coca-Cola next week or Goldman Sachs the week after. You'll be focusing on the client you're pitching to, with very little in the way to knock you off the tracks.”

We are keen to see how these startups continue to challenge the status quo and push boundaries as they impact relationships with agencies – and the number of agencies – that clients are working with. Marketers may well enjoy the undivided attention and element of dedication a small, hungry agency offers.

With a number of service permutations for marketers to choose from, Vacchiano notes that Agency Scope data enables agencies to position themselves and their offerings for high visibility.

As the preeminent tool to highlight an agency's mettle and assist marketers in identifying a good fit, Agency Scope 2021 will continue to give subscribers a global view of what clients look for and a local view of the market.

Noted by Luca Gallarelli of TBWA\South Africa for its "outstanding depth of analysis", we look forward to exceptional data from a particularly interesting industry right now.

ABOUT JOHANNA MCDOWELL

MD of the Independent Agency Search and Selection Company (IAS), and partner in Scopen Africa, with a background that includes being on both the agency and the client side of the fence, Johanna McDowell is well-placed to offer commentary on marketing and advertising in the South African and international contexts. She built her career in marketing and advertising since 1974, holding directorship in both SA and British advertising agencies. She was MD of Grey Phillips Advertising in 1988.

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