

R^UND
TABLE

WHITE
PAPER

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Shanice Mears,
The Elephant Room,
Co-Founder &
Head of Talent

'Although the advertising industry has still got quite a far way to go regarding diversity and inclusion, I think it's great that something like this white paper proves that there is a problem. A lot of people sometimes think that these things exist in just places rather than it being an industry wide thing. It's about time we started to think as one, and implement new ways of working. The future of work is changing and now we can finally start owning what that looks like.'

'There is no doubt that a diverse workforce is more innovative. Ideas don't thrive when people agree all the time. That's why at Google we promote diversity and inclusion. One way to include different perspectives and people: Take sprint methodologies known from product engineering and adapt them to the world of brand marketing. It's a fast, collaborative and fun way to work.'

Achim Rietze
Strategy Lead,
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QUOTES from PANELISTS

'This whole project has been fascinating from start to finish! It is clear that people entering the workforce today have very different priorities and expectations from previous generations and that the communications industry needs to adapt quickly if it wants to continue attracting the brightest and the best. Our roundtable provided clear direction on how universities and employers can work together to attract and develop future talent that will re-energize the industry.'

Dan White
Head of Expertise,
Kantar UK & Ireland

Summary

Despite offering exciting, interesting and rewarding career opportunities, the advertising industry is struggling to attract the depth & diversity of talent it needs to thrive.

Young people with the required skills and attitudes are hard to recruit. Some are skeptical of the benefits of structured, permanent employment especially if it means not having the freedom to work on projects they believe in, with people they respect, in an environment that suits them. Meanwhile, prospective employees who are looking to maximize their career success are turning to media giants since they are growing faster, have more money and seem better aligned with the direction which marketing is heading.

Ad agencies are taking steps to address these challenges. They are exploring new ways to recruit talent by networking with creatives who have already proven their potential and by providing scholarships to individuals from under-represented groups. Once new recruits are on board, agencies are working hard to provide them with a great experience, so they can help spread the word about how uniquely rewarding a job in advertising can be.

Universities also have a clear opportunity to help their students and the industry by re-focusing their curricula to develop the skills and mindsets critical to success as the industry continues to evolve. These include the ability to think creatively and critically, work collaboratively with all kinds of people and specializations and learn about the widest possible variety of ideas, disciplines, and aspects of culture.

If universities and agencies can work together on these priorities, we can look forward to more rewarding careers for graduates and a thriving industry.

Objective

On the morning of the 16th October, a carefully selected panel of professionals from the advertising world met in Brussels to characterize the talent the industry will need in the future, where it could come from and how universities could evolve their curricula to nurture it.

The roundtable was organized by EACA in conjunction with edcom and the themes have been assimilated in this paper by Kantar.

Context

Advertising is an industry full of creative and intelligent people making significant contributions to culture and commerce. It is constantly evolving in response to rapidly changing consumer behaviours, media opportunities and client needs. However, there is a sense that the industry is not changing fast enough and is not attracting the kind of talent it needs for the future.

Challenges

The panel identified three challenges facing the industry in acquiring talent:

1. The need for greater diversity
2. New priorities of Generations Y & Z
3. Competition from the media giants

This paper examines the challenges, how the industry is starting to tackle them and what universities could do differently in order to help.

Diversity

The world of advertising has moved on since 'Mad Men' but white males are still over represented, and the industry's lack of diversity is a problem that needs to be addressed. Lorraine Twohill, Google's Global Marketing SVP, has highlighted the issue and is challenging the industry to do something about it. Lorraine points out that in the US, only 37% of people in advertising are women and only 6% are black. Further, a large number of senior managers in the industry come from similar middle-class backgrounds. The situation may not be as extreme as it used to be ('You used to need an Oxbridge degree to get on the strategy team or become an account manager – all of that is over') but this lack of diversity is particularly toxic for an industry whose success depends on connecting with all types of people and drawing inspiration from the richest possible set of cultural sources. The creative process depends on exploring different ways of thinking and coming up with original ideas and this requires diversity. As one of the panelists put it: 'The really interesting thinking happens when you have a misfit collection of people who rub off each other'. At the moment, advertising teams too often comprise people from the same narrow section of society.

Generations Y & Z

People in their early twenties entering the workforce today are as varied as any generation but the panel felt that the desire for freedom of expression is stronger than in older generations. Rather than working exclusively for companies in a serial fashion, many are choosing to build their experience and reputation through more flexible and varied working relationships and ad hoc assignments. The idea of having a permanent

contract with a large company isn't necessarily attractive. Perhaps job security has become less meaningful since the economic turbulence and redundancies of the last decade?

Attitudes to money also appear to differ from older generations who experienced the growth-driven optimism, excitement and affluence of the eighties and nineties. Gen Y & Z appear resigned to earning considerably less than their parents which might make it more important to find a job that is intrinsically rewarding.

'Before it was about how much pay & benefits but now it's about: Will I have flexible working? Will I get told off if I move away from my desk to work somewhere I feel most comfortable? Do you support wellbeing and mental health? How autonomous can I be?'

Being a big name in the industry may not command the kudos it once did, either. What's often more important to applicants is whether they admire the agency's creative work. The idea of working with someone whose work they identify with can be hugely compelling - 'They're looking for mentors, not managers'.

Management style is something the new generation scrutinizes during the recruitment process. 'It's not about cool and it's not about the brand – it's about how you manage them'. In their first few years, employees are looking to gain a variety of experiences, receive guidance on how to develop their skills and have access to people who can inspire them to produce their best. At this stage in their career, they definitely do not want to be pigeon-holed: 'They want to be a 'Creative', not a Copy-writer or Art Director; they want variety & responsibility'.

The panel noted that the people the industry needs are not necessarily interested in joining it: 'Are we a left-wing industry working for right-wing goals?'. There are many creative young idealists out there but are they prepared to work in an industry they might perceive to represent capitalism at its worst?

Media Giants

Ad agencies have to compete for talent with many of today's richest, fastest growing and high profile companies. Brands such as Google, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat are looking for people who can make sense of data and guide the development of marketing strategy and content – very similar to the skills required for a job in advertising. These companies are grabbing all the headlines because of the high return on marketing investment their precision targeting can yield, and this helps them attract the best talent.

Young people looking into careers in communications may overlook the ad agencies altogether if they feel there are more obvious homes for their talents. The boundaries between creative agencies, media agencies, owners and production houses are becoming increasingly blurred which means that talent individuals will be able to find a role in any of these areas. Access to first-rate creative talent is now so easy that media and production companies together (equipped with the 'Brand Playbook') appear to be able to service clients' needs without any creative agency involvement. 'The Media Companies' tanks are parked all over my lawn!'. The recent acquisition of Dutch digital design production company 'MediaMonks' by Sir Martin Sorrell may signal that the advertising industry should brace itself for further disruption. The company prides itself on working directly with clients. Is this the future or will ad agencies establish a unique and valuable role in the creation of effective brand communication?

If the media giants and production companies are taking the 'cream of the crop', working directly with creatives and offering attractive salaries and influential roles, where does this leave the ad agencies?

How the industry is responding

The good news is that according to the panel, the industry is innovating how it attracts and retains the talent it needs.

Widening the net

Graduates from communications courses make strong candidates for recruitment to the industry but agencies are exploring ways to bring in people from a wider spectrum of society to increase diversity.

For a start, graduates from subjects other than communications have proven to be well suited to the industry: 'Some of the most interesting advertising employees have degrees that are nothing to do with advertising such as anthropology, forensics or physics'. The question as to whether a university degree is still an important requirement for a job in advertising was also raised. If not, it would make sense for agencies to scout for talent beyond universities. Indeed, some agencies are already taking a more proactive approach, especially for recruiting creative talent, by networking with the growing number of creative independents, collectives and 'no-collar' professional groups such as The Dots, Project Noir and Creative Hustle. An advantage of finding talent this way is that the creativity produced can be more daring and original, unconstrained by expectations (accurate or not) of what a Creative Director expects to see.

To promote greater diversity in the industry, Cannes Lions teamed up with Google to launch the 'Creative Campus' this year. The scheme takes on 50 young talents, at least half of whom come from groups marginalized in the industry, and provides talks, practical training and career support during the Cannes Festival and for a week at Google's HQ in Mountain View. Ten participants are awarded a scholarship to make attending affordable.

Providing a great experience

Providing a rich and rewarding experience for new starters in their early years can be a big help in attracting future talent.

At Publicis France new recruits to their Academy enjoy a high profile within the company. They are given the freedom to act as change agents, charged with 'challenging established beliefs and processes and embracing change' to the benefit of the agency & its clients, using their naivety and fearlessness to ask the kinds of questions that lead to breakthrough thinking. Members of the Academy are highly positive about their experience and their passion for the business shines through when recruiting new team members; they are involved in identifying quality candidates and act as advocates to convince the best to join.

Bringing in creative talent to an agency can be particularly challenging because of the appeal of working as a freelancer or within a collective. Ad agencies are overcoming this by providing something that's hard to obtain as an independent: mentorship. Everyone needs someone to help them identify where their true talents lie and the skills and experiences they will need to acquire to make the most of their potential. Agencies that are able to provide inspiration and guidance from an experienced role model can be an attractive employer for ambitious creatives.

Promoting the industry

The panel felt that the industry's reputation has become tarnished in recent years. Privacy breaches, A.I. biases and inappropriate media placements mean the industry needs to improve its image to make it a more compelling career choice.

There is no shortage of advertising professionals who are passionate about their industry and the social value it can provide. Advertising helps social causes by raising awareness and essential funds. In the commercial sector, advertising at its best provides social value by creating experiences people find emotionally powerful and connecting them with brands whose values and purpose they believe in. At a time when the media side of the industry is being accused of using A.I. to make all the decisions, the creative side has the opportunity to champion the human component.

Promoting the advertising industry should not be a difficult task when you consider its fascinating culture, colourful personalities, abundant invention and intellect. One of the panelists had recently visited her child's school to talk about her career and was told that of all the speakers (including medics, scientist and firefighters) 'We've never had anyone with a such an exciting job as you... you've inspired so many children!'. A job with one of the digital giants has its attractions but the reality doesn't always live up to expectations so there is an opportunity for ad agencies to court talent by highlighting the unique experience on offer.



How universities can help the ad industry thrive

Universities are constantly evolving their curriculum so that students leave their courses well equipped for a career in advertising. To guide further development, the panel identified the areas of focus below.

Mental Flexibility & Curiosity

Marketing technologies, challenges and opportunities are changing continually so advertising professionals need to be able to learn quickly and think flexibly throughout their career. Graduates with a fixed mindset are of little value to the industry: 'some students come already stuck in their ways... I need their heads to work in a different way, I need their heads to explode!'

Highly successful Swedish school 'Hyper Island' believes that adapting to new ideas and solving problems creatively are top priorities for students and this is reflected in their educational approach. They focus on providing transformative learning experiences designed to equip students with 'an open mind and relevant skills they will actually use' so that they are well equipped to 'adapt to rapidly changing times'. This resonates strongly with the needs of the advertising industry.

Exploring & explaining ideas

Students need to appreciate that ideas are the currency of the advertising industry. Ideas build value for clients and reputations for those able to work with them. As one panelist expressed it: 'whatever part of our world you go into, you have to sell and explain your ideas'. Yet graduates often seem only capable of articulating their ideas superficially and struggle when asked to explain them more deeply. Graduates who relish unpacking an idea to fully understand it and are keen to play with an idea to explore its potential are the ones who really stand out. 'It's like opening a piece of paper; rather than get stuck when they reach the edge they just keep unwrapping'. In an ideal world, all students would finish their courses with the confidence to analyze an idea critically yet sensitively and use lateral thinking to inspire even better ideas.

In a world where brands need to express their ideas coherently across a fragmented set of touchpoints, it's essential that graduates understand the essence of an idea. They need to illustrate how the idea could be brought to life at different stages of the consumer journey using story-telling techniques best suited to each context. Sadly, in the panel's experience, graduates are rarely able to do this and some even present portfolios of work with examples from just one medium: 'I'm gob smacked that they're allowed out into world with books that just have print ideas'. If widespread, this is an issue that needs to be addressed urgently.

Collaboration

If there is one skill it is more important for ad agency professionals to master than ever before, it's the ability to collaborate well with people with different specialisms, personalities, working styles and agendas. Most agency roles will require at some point or another the ability to communicate effectively with brand strategists, data analysts, creatives, production teams, media experts as well as various client stakeholders. Arguably, collaboration is the soft skill that should be hard wired into any course that prepares students for a job in advertising. A key challenge for universities is how to prepare students so they can understand and influence both highly analytical and highly creative people – an essential skill now that the development of great advertising requires multiple, high specialized contributions. Identifying the right creative strategy, for

example, may require a blend of complex statistical analysis and a deep understanding of what consumers think, feel and care about.

Given the importance of collaboration in modern marketing, many ad agencies have embraced the principles of the 'agile manifesto'. 'Hackathons' (in which a multi-disciplinary team works intensively for 1-2 weeks to solve a complex problem, produce workable solution and improve it iteratively) have become common-place so universities should consider familiarizing students with the approach.

Courses from several institution now focus heavily on team collaboration instead of individual effort, aiming to foster and build the skills required to work effectively and innovate with others.

Experiencing real-life projects

The panel was unanimous in the belief that working on real life marketing challenges provides the best preparation for a job in the industry. Some of the ideas for how this could be achieved include:

- Partnering advertisers on live projects

This benefits both the advertiser and student enormously. The university can provide access to the intellect and creative talent of bright, young students, guided by leading academics, to help the advertiser achieve its marketing objectives at a relatively low cost. The Stockholm based Berghs School of Communication is one of several universities bringing live briefs into its curriculum and working collaboratively with ad agencies as a matter of course.

- Supporting students' passion projects

Generations Y & Z seem more likely than older generations to have a social cause they feel passionate about and want to support. Universities could encourage students to use the skills they are learning to support causes they care about in order to boost motivation and the levels of hands-on experience. Indeed, some Universities already encouraging students to choose and work with passion projects of their own choice.

- Agency placements

Placements give the agency an injection of fresh ideas and extra pairs of hands whilst providing the student invaluable practical experience. Both agency and student also benefit from being able to 'try before you buy' when considering a permanent role later.

Curiosity & Eclecticism

A successful career in advertising depends on keeping abreast of all things new including schools of thought, social trends, fashions and technology. Beyond attracting the right students, the more universities could do to foster curiosity and a growth mindset the better. The ideal curriculum would expose students to a wide variety of cultures, creative disciplines, technologies and marketing challenges. Given the need for advertising professionals to have a holistic understanding of consumers, marketing and different types of media, the panel discussed the possibility of a foundation year, similar to Arts courses, to provide students with grounding in a variety of areas before specialization.

Edcom hopes this paper proves useful to the academic community and is looking forward to any thoughts and dialogues stimulated by the findings.



edcom was created by the European Association of Communications Agencies ([EACA](#)) and its academic partners to promote excellence in commercial communications education and research and to further exchanges between the commercial communications sector and academic partners. The institute now gathers 53 members from 19 countries. You can find out more about edcom's initiatives on the [Inspire!](#) by EACA website. Inspire! by EACA is a single hub for education and training opportunities in the commercial communications industry. It brings together academics, students, young and senior professionals in one website. This way, these four important stakeholders are brought closer together and can learn from each other's projects and initiatives.

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