

clear on identity

I Should Be Marketing—But, Just Call Me ‘Agency’

—by Kendall Allen

How we identify ourselves is fundamental in life. As we move about the world, the way we name, associate, describe and align ourselves gives shape and point of connection within the social fabric. While it’s always more powerful to show than to tell—to let your actions convey your essence—the telling does have value. There are fine lines everywhere, however. Don’t browbeat or bait the world with your self-identity; don’t choose your own nickname; and don’t forget that identification is shallow without self-awareness, emotional intelligence and adaptability.

The same is oh-so-true in business. And certainly in *our* business, right here, right now, when, as brands, marketers and models strive to meaningfully evolve during complicated times, one must get clear on identity.

To truly self-identify and take an assured, more expansive position, you have to do some introspection and you have to adapt. And there has never been a better time to get your business identity up to date. Are you a brand marketer? All about performance? Conversion marketer? An ad agency? Creative-led? Search-led? Consumer-led? In the business of delivering creative business ideas?

Given our place in the equation, most of us have long acknowledged that agency models and designations are outdated. It’s not so black and white. But many among us have been complacent about owning the evolution that needs to happen. Within the so-called agency realm, the topic of model-busting is often met with resignation. It doesn’t matter whether we are talking about engagement and solutions development or approaches to client relations and strategic selling -- there is often an air of self-flagellation. “These are just the facts of life in the agency world,” sighs the drama mama, as she recites the latest figures on declining *ad spend* and the woes of the frugal client. What she “does” has been commoditized in front of her eyes—yet does she recognize her ability to own it, to dig in and do things differently? To truly develop business by thinking, conversing and operating like a marketer—more than like a media maven?

To me, this pushback and narrow wallowing drone in some circles is getting more and more uncomfortable. There is no reason to circle there, at the frustrated transactional level.



There is a path forward for the tireless.

I think about this often in my mingled circles -- and certainly as I gear up to convene with my “agency” brethren at a major national “agency” summit next month. Are we all really agencies? What does that even mean today? The prevailing lexicon and identification in the larger community certainly is out of date. So, let’s focus on the substance of the conversation.

The most important conversations are not about buying and selling media, not isolated on the transactional aspects of our business relationships -- client, agency, media seller or property—at all. The most important conversations are about adapting our businesses as *marketing* businesses—fostering brand prevalence and the desired consumer conversion. If we are practically channel-agnostic, and work together to solve real business problems and address opportunities creatively, efficiently and within active consumer engagement—might we just evolve? I absolutely believe so.

Also in our midst, industrious marketers and their agencies, stewards and empowered peeps have reorganized to better collaborate and get the best out of each other; devoted the front end to research and insights; sparked their team environments by bringing in more integrated marketing talent; and generally invested in building marketing businesses by connecting with and mobilizing consumers offline and online—across platforms and channels. And digital is everywhere. It’s not a singular bolt. They get that.

If you count yourself as “an agency,” and your client is asking you questions about consumer influence and conversion models, essentially inviting you to the table to talk about the business and cooperate on solutions, and you are doing it—then take hold of the evolution at your fingertips. Your pat self-identification as an agency is getting in your way. More than the media maven of yesteryear, you’ve become something so much more: a marketer, with a capital M.

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