



BRING MEDIA PLANNERS BACK INTO THE AGENCY FOLD

This Time, Make Them Equals to Creatives

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By [Scott Donaton](#)

The notion of media planning being reunited with creative at ad agencies has, when voiced in recent years, been mostly the wishful (and wistful) musings of executives at big traditional agencies.



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Who can blame them? They've seen their strategic ties to clients weaken as they're knifed from every imaginable angle -- by digital specialists, media agencies, creative boutiques, management consultants, in-house units, even media sellers (witness the transformation of Time Warner's corporate group under John Partilla and Mark D'Arcy into an idea-based, marketing-driven organization that recently won a creative assignment from Johnson & Johnson).

You can understand why the dream of getting media planning back under their command would appeal to beleaguered creative directors and their CEOs. But agency media executives treasure their hard-won independence, and have scoffed at the notion of returning to the fold. Until now.

A more viable option

There's a third way, and it looks increasingly viable, that could even be the rare example of the sum adding up to greater than its parts. It involves a new form of organization in which planning and creative come together -- only this time as equals. OK, it may not be a third way so much as looking at an earlier way from a different perspective. But perspective is a powerful thing.

I'll try to explain. Until now, media agencies have resisted a reunion with their creative brethren in part out of the fear that it would be a step backward, a return to the secondary role media has historically had within agencies. (You remember, right? The days of first create the campaign, then tell the media department where to run it and let them negotiate price. The days of the media director as last presenter at the pitch -- if there was time left after the creative team's extended display of brilliance.) Nobody wants to go back there.

But you can look at it from another viewpoint, one in which media had to separate before it could return, had to gain independence, confidence and stature as a stand-alone discipline. Now -- bigger, stronger, more sure of itself -- media can be linked again to creative, but as an equal rather than secondary discipline.

How to do it

There are a number of ways to accomplish this. One is to take planners from the media agencies and physically situate them at creative agencies, which is already happening at some agencies on select accounts. The media person remains an employee of the media shop but sits alongside creatives and account execs at the creative agency. Another way is to create more formal alliances between creative and media agencies, and market them jointly to clients. (This also already happens on some new-business pitches, but such tie-ups could be recast as strategic partnerships rather than opportunistically arranged marriages.)

There are complexities in each of these models. Marketers want the freedom to choose best-in-class partners in each discipline and might balk at a re-bundled offering. And any combination of a media and creative agency would have to somehow allow each to avoid conflicts and keep serving clients they've won independently.

Keep buying separate

Media buying will, and should, remain separate and aggregated to maximize the clout of the agencies that do it. (That said, the splintered alternatives to broadcast TV will ultimately lessen the importance of muscle mass.)

Still, there's something enticing in the idea of planning and creative coming together as equals, working side by side instead of top to bottom. Suddenly it doesn't seem like a step back, because it's not. It's not a return to the full-service agency of old, either, but the creation of something new.