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The evolving role of advertising agencies -- from creators to curators

By Anushree Bhattacharyya, afaqs!, New Delhi, August 22, 2011
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Tim Williams, founder and managing director of Ignition Consulting Group, spoke on the urgent need to re-invent the business of advertising, and on the new role that advertising agencies need to take up in order to ensure a safe future.

Competing is an internal part of any business, be it in the field of selling soaps, shampoos, potato chips or in the field of ideas and concepts. One cannot ignore the changing dynamics of the market, as well as the continuous increase in competition, which further stresses the fact that companies, whether in the space of selling creative solutions or soaps, need to re-invent their business models from time to time. This fact was highlighted by Tim Williams, founder and managing director of Ignition Consulting Group, a consultancy and knowledge bank, at the Agency 2.5 seminar organised by the International Advertising Association (IAA). The seminar was held on August 19, 2011, at the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi.



Tim Williams

Opening the seminar, Williams said, "The nature of the advertising business has changed over a period of time, from the old school of working patterns to entering a period of chaos, where the ad world had little or no idea of its future, to entering the period of integration of practice -- which saw the merger of old and new techniques with the advent of the digital era. In fact, digital has brought a disruptive change in the thought process of the consumers, which in turn, has forced advertising agencies learn everything once again from scratch."

He further explained that the landscape of advertising has changed drastically over the years, with unconventional agencies working in the field of customer relationship marketing, and data-based marketing, overthrowing the conventional advertising agencies. This phenomenon has provided growth opportunities to digital agencies, public relations (also known as earned media) agencies and specialist firms.

"The business of advertising started as agents dealing with media on behalf of advertisers. However, now, the role of the 'agent' is losing its relevance fast as the internet allows marketers to converse directly with consumers," remarked Williams.

According to him, interestingly, advertisers now also want to talk to media companies directly once again, sidelining the role of ad agencies. Therefore, now, media companies are setting up internal creative agencies. At the same time, production companies, too, are getting into the business of creativity by setting up their own creative solutions shops. All this, in turn, has led to ad agencies getting into the business of media, as well as production. So, in the future, there will be little or no difference between all three sets of companies and all three will directly compete against each other.

Williams further added, "There is, however, another path for advertising agencies -- the role of curator. Ad agencies, apart from developing content, will also have to take up the job of helping advertisers to select the right ideas."

Citing examples of internet sites based on the concept of crowd-sourcing, he elaborated that what many advertisers are actually doing is that they are sourcing ideas from sites such as crowdspring.com, which has active participation from 76,000 writers and designers, and, on an average, gives 110 ideas. He further gave the example of a new ad agency, Victors & Spoils, which works on the new concept of crowd-sourcing the entire work. "The agency has recently won the business of Harley Davidson," he said.

Williams emphasised that going ahead, ad agencies will need to have an open approach and will have to play various roles, from being creators to curators, content collaborators, network creators and owners of media brands through the creation of new media channels.

Tags: Agency 2.5, Tim Williams, Ignition, International Advertising Association

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