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Marketing and Media RSS

Agencies, build your own brands

Ad chiefs are worried about the shortage of good talent to service robust growth

Ad Value | Marion Arathoon

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Ad agencies are masters at building product and corporate images for their clients. Ever wonder, then, why agencies are their own worst clients? Why have most ad and media agencies failed to build a clear image, positioning and differentiator for their own brands? Why do they all seem to offer the same product — integrated marketing services? We all know that Nike Inc.'s ad anthem is *Just do it* but, ironically, we don't know the tag lines of most agency brands.



Ad chiefs are worried about the shortage of good talent to service robust growth. And their clients are changing their agency partners much faster — a five-year agency-client relationship is now considered long compared with 15-plus years some time back. A defined agency image can definitely help attract and retain clients and mindshare. Clear positioning can also direct an agency on how to spend its time, money and resources optimally, guide its geographical expansion and improve margins on the back of better rates.

In *Take a Stand For Your Brand: Building a Great Agency from the Inside Out*, author Tim Williams says an agency's brand helps determine what clients to go after—based on its strengths, what specialities to pursue, what employees to hire. Agencies have to define their core competency, the audiences they know best, and distinguish themselves by what they think, and not what they have.

I recently asked the global chiefs of Mediaedge:cia —a media specialist planked on active engagement — if they felt they faced any brand confusion with TME (earlier The Media Edge). They didn't think this was an issue, especially with their clients, given their good growth here.

Generally, is it more important to have a clear positioning with clients rather than employees? That's a tricky question, since cutting-edge talent is a strong magnet for big-budget clients, and exciting accounts attract bright employees. Which creative director or strategist wouldn't love to work on Coca-Cola Co. or Cadbury's?

Creating revolutionary processes and tools can build agency brands, as the disruption philosophy did for **TBWA Worldwide**. Agencies built on the creative pedigree of their founders, management and clients also have stronger brand power. It helps **Low India** or **Ogilvy and Mather India** to have a creative superstar as chief. A network's merger and acquisition path also aids differentiation, particularly if prominent specialist and digital companies are among those bought.

Principles and reputation are ultimately an agency brand's cornerstone, in these times of dodgy practices.

Marion Arathoon is Mint's advertising editor. Your feedback is welcome at advalue@livemint.com

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