

WARC News

Forrester Research Issues Alarm Call to World's Ad Agencies

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CAMBRIDGE, Mass: 'Consumers increasingly do not trust marketing messages.' A seven word statement that could lead to the most fundamental changes yet experienced by advertising agencies worldwide, believes **Forrester Research**.

In a new report, the Massachusetts-headquartered research firm portrays a downbeat view of the current state of advertising.

It believes the industry is now languishing in "a world of hurt" because consumers are increasingly turning blind eyes and deaf ears to the traditional promotional messages which advertisers and agencies continue to churn out.

Although it is a standard ploy for publishers of research reports to home in on controversial issues that will stimulate sales, it could be that Forrester, like the late, much loved comedian *Jimmy Durante*, is the "guy that found the Lost Chord".

The report argues that consumers now rely less and less on marketing messages when in buying mode. Instead they seek guidance from family, friends and others in their respective communities to guide them toward purchase decisions.

While another key factor, says Forrester, is that the proliferation of media choice has consigned the notion of a "captive audience" to the trashcan of history. Save, perhaps, during a major televised sporting event.

It's against this background that research analyst and report co-author *Peter Kim* urges a sea-change in agency thinking, with shops organized around communities, not disciplines.

What he calls "the connected agency" would not only identify certain communities but also be an active member within them.

The alleged peddling of one-size-fits-all messages would cede to voluntary engagement, and ongoing conversations would replace time-based campaigns.

"I can't say there's an agency now that's the agency of the future," Kim accuses. [Which begs the question of whether he lives on Planet Zog?]

But from wherever he hails, Kim envisions agencies comprised of community members – mothers for example, who would help, say, Procter & Gamble to play a constructive role within communities of other mothers.

The report accuses creative and media agencies of clinging to the mass model: either to produce messages or distribute them.

Instead, Kim avers, they should move toward "digital integration", adding that the root of agencies' problems is their organization around specific skill sets.

He has kindlier words for digital shops, opining them to have done more to center their businesses around "interaction." But lest the report's readers fear Kim has developed a soft center, he finds the digirati lacking in the branding skills of traditional agencies.

The report quotes one marketing executive who sees agencies as "a necessary evil," rather than a strategic partner in the growing of his business.

While another fidgety marketer allegedly complains: "Most senior ad execs appear more comfortable with conventional channels, which they claim are 'integrated' because they have tacked on a website."

Is possible these clientside marketers are dumb in both senses of the word?

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