

# MARKETING

SINGAPORE

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Once an upstart, digital is carpet bombing our senses (and media plans)

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# BREATHING DIGITAL

From the agency glory days of Madison Ave to living, breathing and running to keep pace with digital, Tim Love has seen an industry in transition. **Deepa Balji Jegarajah** talks to the Vice-Chairman of Omnicom Group and CEO of Omnicom APIMA.

If debt brought financial institutions to their knees, the internet, together with the global financial crisis, has brought a metamorphosis to the infamous Madison Ave.

The assembly lines of account executives, brand planners, media planners, copy writers/art directors and media buyers are slowly being erased with the agency model coming under review by one word – digital. So what does Tim Love, vice chairman of the Omnicom Group & CEO of Omnicom APIMA, think?

"The financial crisis brought challenges, but mostly opportunity because there was little doubt the world needed new ideas. The old way of doing things had to change," he says.

"This put advertising more front and centre to help drive innovation and be the engine for economic development it has historically been.

"Clients went from asking their partners to do more of what they had been doing, to instead 'think different'."

With digital technology being the apple of the client's eye – the ability to tailor-make a specific message to a specific person – agencies' fees are heading south. How has Omnicom coped?

By treating digital as the air we breathe, comes his reply, especially "when we communicate with each other. It is not a separate channel.

This is a rapidly changing process due to the accelerating speed of technological advances that digital enables. This means we need to run pretty fast to maintain relevance.

"Relevance in this world requires superior listening skills and being able to maintain a frame of reference that is more intellectually and emotionally in concert with the consumer."

Digital is the oxygen that allows earned media to go further, he explains, but it's only possible when there is superior collaboration between all brand-building services.

Love says this collaboration happens when we share the common objective of taking care of the brand first, the agency second and our individual agendas third, regardless of whether we are all under one roof or countries apart.

"Beyond this, with the enormous amounts of data digital is delivering at our disposal, we have worked with some clients on specific analytical targets for message engagement and linked this to compensation," Love says.

What are some examples? Tribal DDB created a successful launch of superior chicken-wings in China for McDonald's with a digitally delivered coupon offer; BBDO and Gillette created a digitally focused target programme in India based on the idea of "Women Against Lazy Stubble" which was so revolutionary it won silver at Cannes.

TBWA's Media Arts Lab is also digitally integrated and "you can see the way this influences the work on Apple"; PHD's digitally leveraged work for several clients earned worldwide industry recognition; Fleishman-Hillard has made real-time digital listening and dialogue an integral part of its work for many of its clients, along with its sovereign reputation management for government-based programmes.

Love's entry into advertising was accidental. He won a national copywriting contest in 1970 when he entered a press ad that presented an anti-drug argument.

"I did that ad because I was trying to figure out myself why one should not do drugs," Love says.

Two of the content judges were the deans of advertising schools at University of Illinois and Northwestern University and both wrote to Love encouraging him to apply to their graduate advertising and communications programmes.

"I was named a James Webb Young Scholar and received a full-time scholarship at the University of Illinois and later was recognised as the most outstanding graduate of 1972. This helped me realise advertising was a good fit for me."

His first assignment in advertising was for the US Ad Council's public service campaign for the Peace Corps.

"Working with the Ad Council on the Peace Corps campaign imprinted on me that advertising is a noble career which can help improve lives."

Later, he was invited by the US State Department to write a white paper on the issue of rising anti-Americanism following 9/11.

Out of curiosity I steered the conversation to the television drama series *Mad Men*.

Was his experience similar to what was depicted in the fictitious ad agency Roger Sterling Draper Pryce on Madison Avenue?

The representation of the show is 80% true, but 20% exaggeration, says Love, because its depiction is much like the agency Dancer Fitzgerald Sample he joined in 1972 which went through similar

experiences, such as a British company taking it over.

"Martinis, Manhattan or Rob Roy lunches were common. But I did not see stashes of liquor in each office or see people drinking in the office during work hours. Maybe that was more true before 1972, like in the 1960s when the bulk of *Mad Men* takes place, but it is over emphasised," Love says.

He does remember standing outside a writer's office, named Don, when a huge New York City cockroach ran from underneath a baseboard in front of him.

Love yelled: "Hey Don there's a big roach on the floor here." He replied: "Pick it up and smoke it, man!"

Love says the behaviour after-hours spilled into the work environment and he worked with people just like those portrayed: glamorous, dapper, sexist and brilliant. "I do miss some of them, their idiosyncrasies and intellects. They are part of who I am," Love says.

The new young talent Love works with today reinvigorates him. He is inspired by their talent, curiosity and grasp of the advanced media technologies the world has at its doorstep.

"Maybe they see me as one of those weird characters depicted in *Mad Men*. I don't mind at all. You do have to be a little 'mad' you know. It is more art than science." ☐

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