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Imad Kublawi

WHO MOVED WHERE

Joseph Atallah moved from FP7 to Saatchi & Saatchi as "Chief Strategy Officer"

Jeremy Taylor-Riley moved from Photon to Madison Group as "Chief Innovations Officer"

Jason Leavy moved from Future Publishing (UK) to Motivate as "Group Publisher"

POLLS

Mena Crystals 2009 - blazing a trail, or sputtering out?

- This year's winners were the best ever - Lynx has a lot to live up to!
- This year's winners were ok, but we've seen a lot before.
- This year's winners were poor - the region can do a lot better.
- Mena Crystals? They're still going...?

Vote Results

'We're going back to basics'

Written by Ekot Beer, Sunday, 15 February 2009



Regional marketers, at both clients and agencies, need to take their heads out of the sand and start planning for the future, and figuring out how to deliver on marketing, according to Imad Kublawi, former COO at JWT Dubai, and now CEO at IK Consult, and regional partner for Results International.

"The marketers have a new responsibility to deliver – and if they don't deliver, they're also in danger of losing their jobs. Not only agencies are firing people, clients are firing people – and marketers are either going to do it properly or they're going to be out. The only way they can do it properly is to show results for their activity," said Kublawi.

"I don't think they can afford to just keep on thinking – that's what everyone's doing, just thinking about it. Well, people have to do things, not just think about it," he added.

Kublawi is clearly frustrated by, as he sees it, the levels of inactivity in the regional marketing industry at the moment. Too many people have their heads in the sand, as he puts it, and are unwilling to face the "new reality".

He sees the current panic as symptomatic of the same attitude that saw a widespread focus on media weight, and "image building" and "chest beating" among regional advertisers.

"It's that swarm effect: I've seen on Discovery, locust swarms, and I think it's a great analogy. The locust is running away, trying to catch the legs of the locust in front, while at the same time trying to protect its own legs from the locust behind – they're all coming in madness, into a path that no one knows where it's leading to," Kublawi explained.

As well as having to deal with a changing marketplace and changing consumer attitudes, agencies will also have to tackle their own internal metamorphoses, according to Kublawi. For big agencies, this means seeing more talent come in from elsewhere in the network, and shaking things up.

As Kublawi puts it, network bosses will want to keep their big, and now unaffordable, talents and focus them on regions such as Bric (Brazil, Russia, India and China) and the Middle East, which still have viable markets.

For independent agencies, Kublawi suggested looking at either a merger with another indie player, or acquisition by a suitable corporate entity: "Independent agencies are better off with the safe harbour of a corporate owner, and belonging to a network – or, consolidate or merge with another agency. But not a problematic agency – or they're going to have one big problem, instead of two small problems.

"Not because I'm a consultant, but they need to use consultants – M&A or corporate financial consultants – to first get into shape, look at what they're offering, look at the areas they're offering, see if they need to add or take away or refocus their strategies – and then look for the right partner. Going back to where they came from would probably be a disaster, it's not going to work – it's like jumping from the frying pan to the fire," added Kublawi, who also claimed to be scouting out independent agencies for possible acquisition, on behalf of larger players outside the region.

So how should marketers evolve their strategies to cope with the new economic environment?

First, they need to recognise that consumers are now looking at the world very differently, according to Kublawi: "Consumers are in an apprehensive state, an angry state, an unhappy state – what they need is certainty, they need reassurance, they need these values that are still not being addressed by the marketers."

Next, image building needs to go: "If you look at what's happening in advertising, whenever anyone has an announcement, they still go out chest-beating, and everything – the world has changed, the consumer has changed."

Then, segmentation: "The other thing we have in this region – or rather, we don't have – is segmentation. How many times do you receive SMS messages in the wrong language? Where is the segmentation? I get messages about kids' vouchers, God knows where, which has nothing to do with me whatsoever. So they have to learn to segment more."

Finally, no announcements, more creativity: "You have to understand the insight, to understand the work – not blanket coverage, not announcements. We're still into announcement mode – and it's got to finish. If it doesn't finish now, it's not going to produce results. There has to be more emphasis on creativity."

Kublawi clearly understands, and sympathises with, the need to panic and seize up, but insists this needs to stop now, for the good of the industry.

"People are either in denial or in shock – and this is normal. But they've got to get out of it and start doing things, and start doing things quickly. There's no point doing things they way they used to do it in the past – it's not going to work. They're wasting their money, they're wasting their time. They have to do things differently, which means a new mindset, looking at the new reality, which will never go back to what it used to be," he concluded.

COMMENTS

Name: Company Man

Image Gallery

