

INSIDER'S VIEW UAE

The United Arab Emirates may be ripe with financial wealth but its ad industry is lacking in creative wealth. Imad Kublawi looks at how it can come to rival its European counterparts

There is hardly an advertising agency in the United Arab Emirates that is not making a lot of money. But is there enough investment to nurture the sector and bring it up to European standards? The jury is still out on this one – and if there is investment, it is not readily apparent.

Any agency will say that the biggest challenge facing the industry is talent. So where is the talent going? Mostly to clients or abroad.

Clients, as always, attract more talent because they know that, by getting the right people, they are benefiting in both the short and the long term. Release an ad for a marketing job and you get a sizeable percentage of applicants from advertising agencies, of course all claiming to be marketers! But is this working in reverse? Are the

agencies attracting good client-side marketers? Hardly.

Another issue is the standard of creative talent that agencies attract. In the current economic climate, we witness a high number of agency start-ups, all promising greater attention and better creative work to their initial client(s). However, they tend to get overwhelmed with work, lose their initial impetus and become just another ad agency.

Good creatives can also give up on working in the region because of the lack of properly trained support teams and clients who don't appreciate good creative work. Eventually these good creatives find a new home abroad.

But is poor creativity to be blamed only on agencies? Definitely not.

Clients too should look into their own operations to check the standards of briefing given by their own marketing staff and the approval process involved in assessing an agency's work.

There are real gains to be made by getting agencies and clients to work together. A better mutual understanding produces better results.

While it is true that property ads consume around 65 per cent of press advertising in the region, this should be seen as a challenge rather than a problem. The main issue is a lack of understanding of the market. Without this, we cannot develop a differentiated, targeted and relevant positioning for the project. As a result, ads copy each other, leaving a lot to be desired creatively.

Another issue here is that clients place pressure on agencies to get rapid results at the expense of quality and with a resulting obsession with media weight. A four-page spread or a 96-sheet poster is the brand's way of shouting loudest in the hope of securing cut through.

The current economic boom is definitely to blame. There is a lot of surplus cash around and it's a culture built on speed and ambition. While it's a gold rush for our sector, it does mean that strategy and the big idea can take a back seat.

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