



We Deserve Better!

In the age of constant “mania,” advertisers and agencies simply deserve better ways to collaborate and successfully partner.

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“We deserve better.” This expression has been used in recent political events. But it’s never been truer for the current state of client/agency relationships in our industry. I’ve been actively engaged in this vibrant industry, at agencies or as a client, for over 20 years. Like you, I’ve seen the good, the bad, and the ugly. Today, the ugly is uglier than ever before. In the past few months, we’ve seen the demise of many advertiser/agency relationships, leading to painful reviews and disappointing results. Look at confectionary brand and chocolate maker Russell Stover, which hired Cutwater as its new agency of record, replacing less than one-year-old incumbent WPP’s VML (now part of VMLY&R). Burger chain Carl’s Jr. kicked off a review of its creative account less than a year after launching its first campaign from its newly-assigned agency Havas. And the list goes on. Have you ever wondered what the symptoms of these broken relationships might be? How did they get there in the first place? Let me share the most common source of tension and conflicts in client/agency relationships.

We deserve better scopes.

Advertisers are notoriously challenged in predicting the type of work or resources they may need to carry out their work and meet their objectives. They are not to blame. In this agile environment, they need to constantly change their aim, adjust budgets, reset scopes, swap resources, and deliver under increasingly tight deadlines. No matter the challenge, we collectively – agencies and advertisers – deserve better scopes if we are to effectively map out a clear path to success and commit to the right resources.

We deserve better briefs.

This is known to be one of the greatest sources of waste by clients. Lacking clear guidance or direction from their clients, agencies are zigzagging to the finish line, having covered a far greater distance than was needed to get there. Guess who’s paying for the extra mileage? That’s right. Advertisers are

unknowingly contributing to a phenomenon that costs them far more than it should, due to re-concepting, re-briefing, and simply too many rounds of everything. At a recent Adweek Webinar titled “Are your briefs tight enough?”, I insisted that clients and agencies agree to this universal rule: “No brief, no work.” We collectively deserve better and more clearly defined client input briefs.

We deserve better feedback.

When you move at the speed of light, as most advertisers do, how often can you afford to slow down to look in the mirror or pull over to discuss how things went on the last trip? You know the answer. The tendency is to keep moving, at the expense of repeated mistakes over time and letting relationships deteriorate as bad habits emerge. We deserve to provide each other meaningful, well-thought-out feedback that is actionable and will yield positive change in the work itself, or in the relationship. It’s a commitment we must make to each other, dedicating time and effort on a regular basis to receive and provide that feedback.

We deserve better training.

We think we know. And when we don’t know, we learn to fake it until we make it. Well, without adequate training, we are likely to operate inefficiently. Without adequate onboarding, agencies are left to improvise some basic training – understanding the company, following brand guidelines, complying with the client’s vendor processes, etc. They have to figure out how to work with their clients with nothing more than dusty PowerPoint slides sitting on a shared drive that are quickly outdated and are simply too hard to consume. Similarly, advertisers are expected to know how to be great clients without any handholding or training to guide them. We collectively deserve better training on how to work effectively together.

We deserve better analytics.

No one wants to drive at night when it’s pitch dark. There is a reason for that. We are more likely to crash. The dashboard and headlights become the de facto tools we rely on to know that we are moving in the right direction, at the right speed, and with adequate visibility to avoid hitting something. For years, advertisers have relied on suboptimal views into their business and their agency relationships while being expected to make sound decisions along the way. Well, no matter how good you might be at following your instincts, understanding the



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multi-faceted relationships with your agencies requires better analysis and insights.

We deserve better partnerships. Period.

In the end, we simply deserve better partnerships. We can end the mania by working together. Advertisers deserve better agency partners. Agency partners deserve better clients. This is the one point everyone seems to agree on. When I say we deserve better partnerships, I don’t mean that we should expect them without having to work for them. The ones who do the work establish partnership frameworks and governance models that are foundational to their success. We owe it to ourselves to work very hard on creating renewed partnerships anchored in the concepts of clarity, transparency, and mutual accountability. It takes discipline, rigor, people, tools, commitments, and the right resources.



If you would like to learn how to drive greater value from your client/agency relationships, consider reading best-seller and industry reference

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Bruno Gralpois is the co-founder of Agency Mania Solutions, a premier service and technology firm specialized in helping companies realize the transformational value of managed partnerships. Bruno is the author of best-seller “Agency Mania” and the former chair of the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) Client/Agency Committee and a faculty member of the ANA School of Marketing.

Our clients’ continued accomplishments result from cutting-edge practices in the area of client/agency performance evaluations. See how stronger relationships contribute to better marketing.

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