

# Industry Update

A summary of newsworthy client/agency relationship developments and relevant marketing or agency management trends.

January – February 2026 | Volume 86



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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: January – February recap

Welcome to an exciting 2026. If the past few years taught us anything, it's this: In our industry, change isn't a season—it's the climate. And right now the temperature is rising. The agency business is undergoing a profound reinvention. Not a refresh. Not a rebrand. A structural shift in how work is produced, value is measured, talent is deployed, and partnerships are priced. AI is compressing timelines, reshaping roles, and turning once-linear workflows into always-on systems. Budgets are tighter, expectations are higher, and the definition of "great" is moving faster than ever. What makes this moment different is that it's happening quietly, inside operating models—not just in headlines. That's why, months or years from now, we may look back and realize we're no longer talking about the same agency industry at all.

This is not a year to simply keep up. This is a year to course-correct, adjust and embrace change as it happens. Google, Meta, and Amazon have built tremendous advertising tech offerings that are the envy of any large advertising holding company. They partnered with holding companies. They built alliances. They are also building capabilities to transform their labor-intensive, time-based commercial models into more profitable, more sustainable businesses that protect their turf while they continue to act as strategic advisors and service providers to large brand advertisers. AI is transforming agencies from creative partners into tech-fueled vendors, such as WPP with its WPP Open Pro self-serve offering, Publicis Groupe's CoreAI, Havas's Converged.AI, or Stagwell's The Machine, to appeal to underserved or low-budget brands. From generative AI to

AI agents that can autonomously launch campaigns, the rise of artificial intelligence in agency offerings is undeniable.

The race is on, and agencies are investing fast to stay relevant.



**Bruno Galpois**  
Co-Founder and Principal,  
Agency Mania Solutions

## A note from the AMS team:

So much is happening in the agency world that even reading our Industry Update's concise curation of the most relevant news and trends may seem daunting. So we are introducing a new content classification to help you focus on what matters most. Each piece of news and information is now labeled as being in one of three categories:

### » GAME CHANGING

Transforms the landscape. Signals a structural shift, creates new rules, or materially alters strategy, economics, or behavior. Immediate attention warranted.

### » HIGH IMPACT

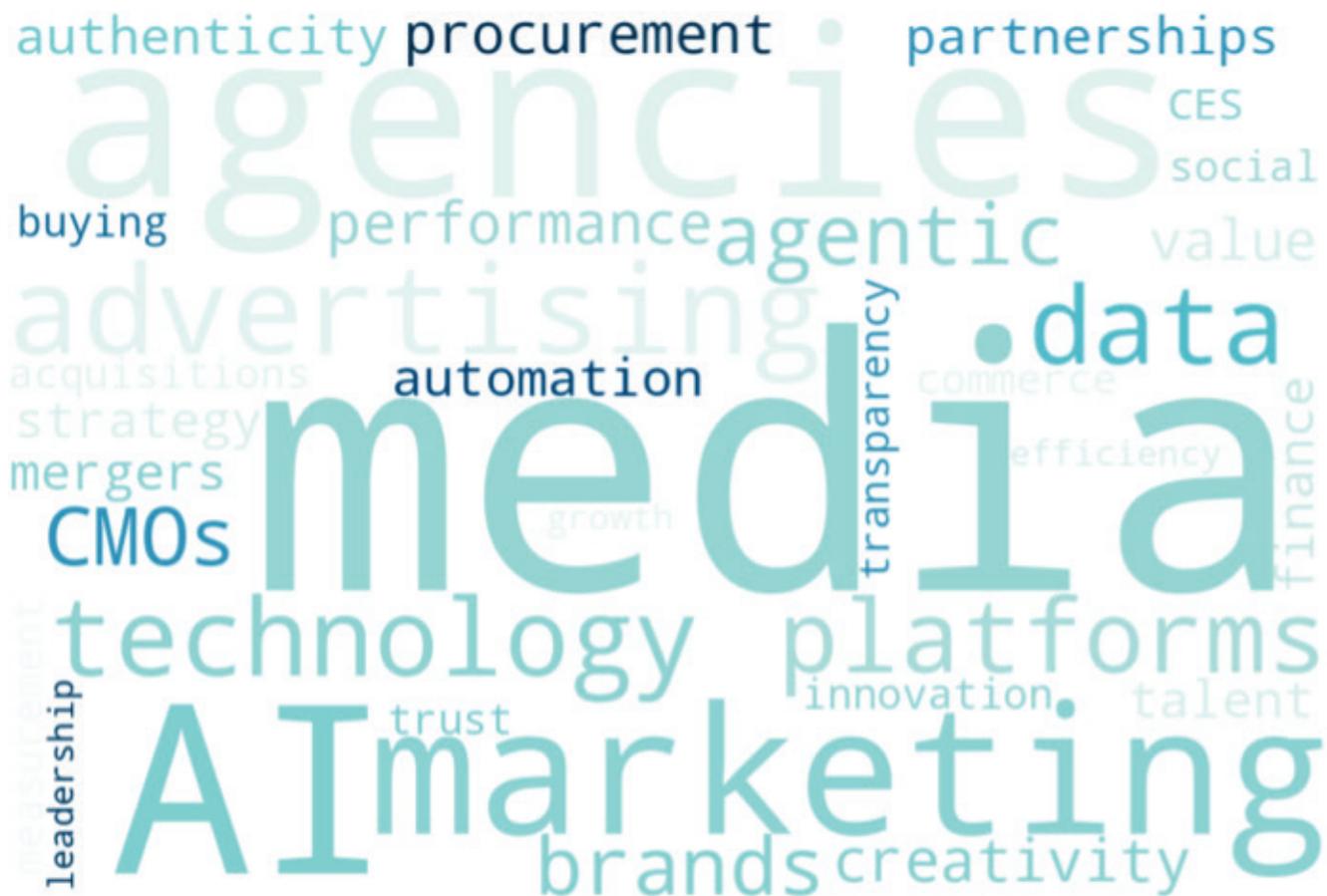
Directly affects decisions, priorities, or performance. Meaningful implications for leaders and teams, even if not revolutionary. Act, adapt, or prepare.

### » NOTABLE

Informative and relevant but limited in scope or duration. Worth knowing, monitoring, or referencing. Context, not urgency.

## What's top of mind in our industry?

The word cloud reflects keywords in this Industry Update.



**TALENT: Securing the right talent and resources**



Between the sensor-embedded LEGO SMART Play Sets, the usual robots and self-driving cars, LG's Affectionate Intelligence and CLOiD (a humanoid robot that can fold and cook), and much more, CES 2026 didn't disappoint. Meanwhile, holding companies announced new AI offerings and capabilities that aim to reduce the complexity that slows decisions while bringing strategy, creativity, and execution closer together. Such tools also provide teams more time to think, explore, and make meaningful work under what is commonly referred to as the next evolution of the agency partner model. The marketing and advertising landscape is entering a decisive reset: CMOs believe in partnership, but churn remains high, cost pressure is intensifying, budgets are tightening, and AI is rapidly reshaping how work gets done, by whom, and how value is priced. Pressure is on agencies to reinvent themselves.

**» GAME CHANGING**

- Per a Spencer Stuart survey released in December 2025, 36% of CMOS expect to **reduce head count** during the next 12 to 24 months "by utilizing AI or eliminating redundancies." 37% of marketers at \$20 billion-plus companies said their CEOs and CFOs expect them to cut costs by at least 20% within two years.

**» HIGH IMPACT**

- Per the **European Association of Communications Agencies**, 94% of CMOs believe agencies can be true partners, but 65% of pitches result in an agency change, highlighting a gap.
- Agency media tech players **Mediaocean** and **Basis Technologies** partnered to integrate their systems to automate the media campaign process from start to finish, enabling two-way interconnectivity between their shared customers.
- Publicis Groupe** formed a "strategic partnership" with LiveRamp to help advertisers and media companies match their customer data with ad platforms and publishers so they can target ads and measure results without sharing raw personal data. The deal provides Publicis access to data clean room provider Habu, a platform for mixing and matching data.
- The 4As published its **"Look Ahead"** report for 2026, highlighting key trends and strategies for agencies to consider for years to come. The white paper introduces the concept of two futures for agencies:
  - 1) Marketing Purveyor: Agencies evolving into enterprise platforms, owning technology, products and data, and delivering outcomes through proprietary systems and automation, as well as agencies being resellers of marketing solutions
  - 2) Strategic Partner: Creative business solutions, where AI and in-housing take on executional work, and agencies create value through ideas, insight, and the human perspective that technology can't replicate

- Stagwell** launched an incubator fund, Quarter Creek Ventures, to help develop adtech and AI-driven marketing products and services. The agency network will take a minority stake in selected projects in return for seed funding for product development, market entry, and operational support in areas like strategy, design, technology, and go-to-market execution.

**» NOTABLE**

- As the world's biggest technology stage, **CES 2026** drew 148,000+ attendees from around the world to Las Vegas. 4,100+ exhibiting companies showcased innovation across every sector of technology, including 1,200 startups bringing fresh ideas and breakthrough prototypes. Over 6,900 global media professionals reported on the popular event, generating more than 37,000 news stories and content pieces. Per Forrester, CMOs rank CES as the most important industry event for marketers, ahead of the National Retail Federation Big Show or the ANA Masters of Marketing. About 7% of CES attendees are part of the entertainment and ad community every year. Omnicom, WPP, Havas, and Stagwell were very active at the event.
- Per AdAge, a partial list of 95 of the **most opinionated agencies in 2026** and worth paying attention to (in alphabetical order):

**Holding company and network agencies include:**

- |                             |   |                              |
|-----------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| - BBH USA (Publicis Groupe) | - Goodby Silverstein & Partners (San Francisco) | - McCann (Interpublic Group) |
| - Dentsu Creative (Dentsu)  | - Havas Chicago (Havas)                         | - Ogilvy (WPP)               |
| - Energy BBDO (Omnicom)     | - Iris (The Brandtech Group)                    | - VML (WPP)                  |
| - Fallon (Publicis Groupe)  |   | - VaynerMedia (VaynerX)      |

**Independent agencies include:**

- |                   |                          |                               |
|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| - Alto            | - Day One Agency         | - Lafayette American          |
| - American Haiku  | - Deutsch                | - Laughlin Constable          |
| - Anomaly         | - Doner                  | - Lerma/                      |
| - Applied Design  | - Fig                    | - McKinney                    |
| - Argonaut        | - Glow                   | - Mādin                       |
| - Arnold          | - Gravity Global         | - Mischief @ No Fixed Address |
| - Bakery          | - Grit Studio            | - Modern Arts                 |
| - Barbarian       | - Grow Marketing         | - Movers+ Shakers             |
| - BarkleyOKRP     | - Hatter                 | - Murder Hornet               |
| - Battery         | - Heart & Soul Marketing | - Obsessed Media              |
| - Cartwright      | - Instrument             | - Open Influence              |
| - Code and Theory | - Jack Morton            | - Orchard Creative            |
| - Colle McVoy     | - Joan Creative          | - Panay Films                 |
| - Cramer-Krasselt | - Johannes Leonardo      | - Pereira O'Dell              |
| - Curiosity       | - Kettle                 | - Pinch                       |
| - CyIndr Studios  | - Known                  |                               |
| - Dang            |                          |                               |
| - David São Paulo |                          |                               |

**Independent agencies** continued:

- Portal A
- Preacher
- Quality Meats
- R/GA
- R&R Partners
- Redscout
- Rethink
- Rival
- Salt XC
- Six+One
- Sounds Fun
- SPCSHP
- StrawberryFrog
- SuperBloom House
- Supergood
- SuperHeroes
- Sylvain
- The Mayor
- The Shipyard
- Thinkingbox
- Tombras
- Trade School
- TUX Creative House
- Uncommon Creative Studio
- Virtue Worldwide
- Walrus
- Workln Progress
- Yard NYC
- Zambezi
- Zulu Alpha Kilo

- **Stagwell** aligned its media and commerce companies, including Assembly, Business Traveler, Crispin, GALE, Goodstuff, Ink, Kenna, Locaria, and Multiview, under a single group composed of 3,500 employees. The agency aims to connect data, media, and commerce seamlessly across the entire customer journey for its clients.
- **Stagwell** announced that SPORT BEACH will become its own business unit dedicated to serving as the premier place to connect athletes, culture, business, technology, brands, and creatives through lived experiences and events, facilitation and editorial efforts. Its success at industry events like CES and Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity prompted the move. Other venues include Super Bowl, NBA All-Star Weekend, World Cup Finals, US Open, and F1 Las Vegas.

**New agencies or capabilities, restructurings, and reorganizations:**

## » GAME CHANGING

- **WPP** consolidated its global production talent and operations under a new entity called WPP Production, retiring Hogarth Worldwide as a brand name and combining production teams embedded across WPP agencies, including Ogilvy and VML. This new global powerhouse now consists of 10,000 employees with footprints in over 40 cities worldwide. WPP Production operates on a single global platform via the WPP Open system, focusing heavily on generative AI and virtual production.

## » HIGH IMPACT

- After acquiring IPG, **Omnicom** is streamlining its commerce media offering by folding shopper marketing agency TPN (The Promotion Network) into Flywheel and combining Flywheel's retail media data with TPN's shopper marketing capabilities in one ecosystem.

## » NOTABLE

- Minneapolis-based ad agency **Betty**, part of Sussex, Wisconsin-based marketing group Quad, which offers creative, design and other services, expanded its footprint by launching new offices in Austin, Texas, and Mexico City. The agency is also opening an Austin location that has a content production team within its 8,400-square-foot studio space.
- **Stagwell's** The Harris Poll has launched a real-time reputation intelligence platform called Harris QuestRQ, described as an "always-on corporate pulsing system [that] connects live firm reputation metrics to over three decades of trended proprietary corporate ranking data from The Harris Poll's Reputation Quotient (RQ) framework and its live HarrisQuest brand tracking platform within The Marketing Cloud." It will operate across more than 300 major companies in 22 countries.



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## 4 Questions That Changed the Rules of Marketing Procurement

*What marketing procurement leaders asked in recent years—and why the powerful answers changed everything.*

Check out our new article "**4 Questions That Changed the Rules of Marketing Procurement**": What marketing procurement leaders asked in recent years—and why the powerful answers changed everything.

## AI (artificial intelligence):

### » GAME CHANGING

- OpenAI, the owner of **ChatGPT**, launched an ad-sponsored offering, providing access to messaging, image creation, file uploads, and memory for \$8 a month and starting testing ads in the US for the free and Go tiers (excluded are Pro, Business, and Enterprise subscriptions). OpenAI asserts that data and conversations are protected and never sold to advertisers and will not impact prompt results: “Ads do not influence the answers ChatGPT gives you. Answers are optimized based on what’s most helpful to you. Ads are always separate and clearly labeled.”
- **Omnicom** launched the next generation of Omni, a marketing intelligence platform that powers Omnicom and integrates Omnicom’s Connected Capabilities and leading-edge AI into a single operating system—giving clients a unified foundation to connect strategy, execution, and performance across their marketing ecosystem. The new platform leverages IPG’s acquired assets, including Acxiom, Flywheel Commerce Cloud, Interact, and Omni’s expanded agentic AI framework. Omni includes 2.6B verified IDs, trillions of signals, \$73.5B in annual buying power, end-to-end creative and content production infrastructure, and autonomous agent systems that orchestrate intelligence across creativity, media, commerce, and measurement.

### » HIGH IMPACT

- Per consultant Shelly Palmer, CEO of The Palmer Group, nonprofit content giant **Wikipedia** signed licensing deals with Amazon, Meta, Microsoft, Perplexity, and Mistral AI in addition to its existing agreement with Google to feed into their AI tools.
- **Stagwell** launched The Machine, marketing’s first agentic operating system. It’s built by Stagwell’s technology and creative network Code and Theory (based on work done for clients such as Qualcomm, TIME, Stanley Black & Decker, and T. Rowe Price). Per Stagwell, The Machine enhances the data systems and tools marketers already use, including Figma, Slack, Teams, Adobe, and performance dashboards. The Machine turns disconnected workflows into a unified system powered by AI agents and amplified by Stagwell agencies, products and data. The holding company recently released its newvoices.AI and announced strategic partnerships with Palantir and Gradial to build its AI capability.
- **WPP** launched Agent Hub on its AI platform for marketing, WPP Open, providing clients with access to advanced agentic AI marketing expertise for its 100,000 global workforce. The internal app store acts as a central library, combining proprietary data, strategic capabilities, and institutional best practice into advanced AI agents. The initial agents include the Brand Analytics Agent (on-demand access to WPP’s proprietary Brand Asset Valuator data), Behavioural Science Agent (to understand human behavior and motivation), Analogies Agent (to find inspiration and parallel situations from different industries, fostering cross-sectoral thinking), and Creative Brain (an ideation sparring partner).
- **Havas** launched an AI-powered system called AVA, a global LLM portal built to provide secure, centralized access to the world’s most advanced AI models in a move to make the holding company more proficient in building tools with AI (without code) and transform how employee work is valued and paid for by clients. The unified, human-led AI ecosystem connects employees and clients for better creativity, strategy, and collaboration through models like GPT-5, Claude Opus 4.5, and Gemini 3.
- **Disney** acquired a \$1 billion stake in OpenAI and licensed its characters for Sora, OpenAI’s short-form video platform, as part of a three-year deal. Generative videos made on Sora will also be shown on Disney Plus.



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# 10 Hard Truths Every CMO Must Confront to Lead Fearlessly

*The rules of engagement are being rewritten, and transforming what partnership truly means.*

Check out our new article “**10 Hard Truths Every CMO Must Confront to Lead Fearlessly**”, a candid look at the choices, challenges, and convictions that define modern marketing leadership in a new partnership era.

- The World Federation of Advertisers (WFA) released its **WFA AI Acceleration Playbook**, an actionable checklist to help marketers adopt AI faster while also delivering business value and accelerating innovation without compromising brand reputation or integrity. Key issues addressed include evaluation paralysis; integration and compliance; legal certainty; adoption; and capability building. It provides a six-part process designed to smooth the passage of AI tools from pilot to productivity to profit.

#### » NOTABLE

- Per Ad Age, **five AI marketing predictions for 2026**:
  - 1) Media planning goes full-on agentic
  - 2) More brands will strike direct partnerships with AI companies
  - 3) Voice AI will be marketers' new shiny toy
  - 4) AI search will force a new compensation model for publishers
  - 5) Marketers will place new emphasis on the data underlying AI
- **TikTok** launched updates to its AI powered-solution set including TikTok Market Scope (a first-party analytics platform that turns audience behavior, content performance, and market trends into actionable insights), TikTok One Content Suite (a hub that centralizes organic content that mentions a brand across TikTok, and Symphony Creative Studio (a suite of generative AI tools designed to unlock creative potential at scale).

- Marketing VC fund **Spacecadet Ventures** launched Spacecadet Studio, billed as an AI-native, "science-fiction-driven" creative company that's designed to build brands.
- AI-powered ad tech company **PubMatic** launched PubMatic AgenticOS, an operating system designed to orchestrate autonomous, agent-to-agent advertising execution across premium digital environments. AgenticOS provides a system-level layer that allows agents to plan, transact, and optimize programmatic advertising with speed, consistency, and control based on objectives, guardrails, brand-safety requirements, and creative parameters.
- **Omnicom** partnered with Google to create an AI-type agent, called Consumer Prompt Insights Agent, that improves intent signals to increase performance. Consumer Prompt Insights Agent relies on a variety of search signals that gives brands a clearer and more in-depth understanding of consumers, using Acxiom Real ID and Flywheel.
- **Reddit** launched its own AI-powered media-buying tool, Max Campaign, which automates targeting, bidding, and creative optimization for advertisers on Reddit Ads Manager, and competes with Google and Meta.
- Ad verification and measurement firm **Integral Ad Science** launched an AI agent to its platform to help advertisers optimize campaigns and ensure their messages run in appropriate environments and are viewed by people rather than bots. The AI agent leverages a multimodal model that can analyze trillions of data signals in real time.

**THE MOST CREATIVE  
CAMPAIGNS, BRANDS  
AND AGENCIES BY  
BUSINESS SECTOR.**

AdForum's exclusive  
ranking based on the  
leading award shows.

**BUSINESS  
CREATIVE  
REPORT**  
adforum

#### REPORT

## AdForum's exclusive ranking based on the leading award shows

*Contributed by: AdForum*

AdForum's Business Creative Report 2026 is a unique ranking of the world's most awarded campaigns, organized into product sectors.

The BCR allows advertisers and agencies to measure their creative impact against competitors in the same product category.

The results are gleaned from a deep analysis of campaign performance in over 40 leading awards shows—global, regional, national and specialized—, delivering an essential report on the best-performing campaigns and agencies by individual product sectors: Automotive, Entertainment & Leisure, Finance, Food & Beverage, Health & Beauty, Luxury, Retail, Tech, Transport & Tourism.

Click [here](#) to learn about AdForum's methodology, read our review of standout trends in each product category and download the report.

### Noteworthy quotes:

- » “2026 is set to be a pivotal year for our industry. Agencies will continue to re-architect their models, addressing technology, structure, talent and compensation, all while preparing for what’s next.” —Justin Thomas-Copeland, CEO, **4As**
- » “Great creative talent will go where they’re valued, where their voice matters and where they can make an impact.” —Heather Larimer, Executive Creative Director, **Orchard Creative**
- » “The internet will split between humans and agents, and humans will be wildly outnumbered.” —David Cohen, CEO, **IAB**
- » “CMOs need to empower marketing teams with the permission to experiment with trusted tools, making time for upskilling and information sharing. This strategy leads to impactful results.” —Lara Balazs, CMO and Executive VP Global Marketing, **Adobe**
- » “My priority is building a culture of ‘master prompters’ who know how to get the best out of AI to move faster while differentiating us in ways that are more human.” —Thomas Ranese, CMO, **Intuit**
- » “Earlier in my career, I learned an important lesson that has been pivotal in all the leadership decisions I’ve made in the industry since: be disrupted or be the one who disrupts. This couldn’t be truer in the AI era.” —Lara Balazs, CMO and Executive VP Global Marketing, **Adobe**
- » “AI should be seen as an operating system, not just a tool.” —Vineet Mehra, CMO, **Chime**
- » “We’ve learned that a merger isn’t about blending, it’s about inventing.” —Katy Hornaday, CEO, **BarkleyOKRP**
- » “The era of repurposed ad formats is dead; AI is ushering in a paradigm shift where creative is generated at machine speed.” —Michelle Merklin, VP of Search, **Tinuiti**
- » “AI is for the ‘what,’ humans are for the ‘so what.’” —Thomas Ranese, Global CMO, **Intuit**
- » “OpenAI has roughly 800 million monthly active users and faces an estimated \$1.4 trillion in infrastructure costs over the next decade. The math was never going to work on subscriptions alone.” —Shelly Palmer, CEO, **The Palmer Group**
- » “AI is a firehose. Creative directors decide where the water goes.” —Vini Dalvi, COO, **Publicis Toronto**
- » “AI is no longer just a technology narrative. It is a sovereignty story.” —Lawrence Eta, Digital Expert Advisor, **The Royal Commission for AI/IA**
- » “Agentic commerce is real, and the opportunity is enormous. But the winners won’t be the brands that rush to colonize AI answers with offers. They’ll be the brands that insist on truth before promotion, that make explainability a priority over persuasion, and that are transparent when commercial influence is present.” —Pete Blackshaw, CEO, **BrandRank.AI**

## Looking for a better marketing partnership management solution?

We offer enterprise-grade, automated, Software as a Service (SaaS) based solutions, designed to significantly improve the ability of brand advertisers to effectively manage their valuable marketing agency and supplier relationships.

**Click here** or scan this code to see what our Agency Partnership Management Software can do for you, ad agencies, and suppliers.



**Customized  
SaaS Solutions**

**Partnership  
Management  
Lifecycle**

**AGENCY MANIA™  
SOLUTIONS**



## WORK & PERFORMANCE: Driving better work, stronger performance, and value from the partnership



Did you know that actor Timothée Chalamet became the first person to stand atop the Las Vegas Sphere? During the daring promotional stunt for the celebrated movie *Marty Supreme*, the sphere became a giant ping-pong ball. Such an event reminds us that marketing is entering a new era defined by a productive tension between agentic AI and authenticity, where automation scales execution but human truth drives connection. As mass moments like live sports and cultural events, from the Golden Globes to the Super Bowl to FIFA World Cup, deliver unmatched attention—amplified by social and earned media—brands are shifting from sheer reach to memorability, participation, and emotional ROI.

### » HIGH IMPACT

- Per Ad Age, **top 2026 creative trends** include:
  - 1) AI sheen vs. human imperfection
  - 2) Authenticity will be key
  - 3) Participation in the product
  - 4) Brands as entertainers
  - 5) AI as infrastructure and content engine
  - 6) Creativity being platform native
  - 7) Real-life and “phygital” experiences
  - 8) Industry and talent reshuffle
- Per Ad Age, **top metrics** that will matter most for marketers in 2026 include:
  - 1) Incrementality (a measure of how much additional revenue or profit an ad placement or campaign generates)
  - 2) Attention
  - 3) Creative effectiveness metrics
  - 4) IP address accuracy
  - 5) Working/non-working media ratio
  - 6) Query length
- The WFA released its “**The Data Integrity Challenge**” white paper, which outlines how advertisers can strengthen the upstream data foundations that underpin responsible, high-performing media to unlock effectiveness, reduce waste, and uphold trust.

### » NOTABLE

- Since 2014, the ANA has surveyed members to select the **ANA Marketing Word of the Year**. In 2025, the Word of the Year was “agentic AI,” followed closely by runner-up “authenticity.” Both words are meant to reflect on the state of the marketing industry relative to the continued rise of AI.

- Forty-five brands committed to advertise during this year’s **Super Bowl**, with a strong presence from tech, CPG, beverages, retail/e-commerce, pharma, and financial services. A 30-second spot cost \$7.5 to \$8 million. About 25% to 30% were first-time advertisers. The expected reach: 115 to 120 million US viewers and more than 200 million globally. Super Bowl ads are 20% to 30% more likely to be remembered than regular prime-time ads (300 million to 500 million earned media impressions). Ads released early generate up to 2× more total impressions across platforms.
- Per Nielsen, the **83rd Golden Globes**, hosted by comedian Nikki Glaser, saw a decline in viewership to 8.66 million, down from 9.3 million in 2025. Yet CBS reported that the event had its most social show ever, with 42 million interactions, confirming a change in viewership habits and preferences.
- Per Adweek, the **five advertising-related themes that dominated CES 2026**:
  - 1) Consensus around agentic media is forming—but how it will work remains an open question
  - 2) Live sports are still coveted content and a hotbed for media investment
  - 3) Creative and creators are converging
  - 4) Agency models are evolving—and consolidation will continue
  - 5) “Commerce media” is just media
- **TikTok** published its annual trend prediction report, “TikTok Next,” for marketers. Key trends and predictions:
  - 1) Reali-TEA (fantasy fading, audiences realigning through the chaos to forge new realities together)
  - 2) Curiosity Detours (curiosity as the new currency as audiences dive deeper into new journeys of discovery)
  - 3) Emotional ROI (less impulse and more intention, shoppers rewarding the brands that justify the why to buy)

### Awards:

- Per **MediaPost**, Media Agency of the Year was MRM’s AI Relationship Management. Independent Agency of the Year: Dallas-based independent media agency PMG. Holding Company of the Year: WPP Media.
- Stagwell agency **Code and Theory** was named Adweek’s 2025 Innovation Agency of the Year. The recognition highlights the agency’s 50/50 model—balancing creatives and engineers—and its success in driving systemic business transformation through AI and technology. The agency was previously awarded B2B Agency of the Year by Ad Age and Innovation Agency of the Year by Digiday.

**Noteworthy quotes:**

- » “No amount of skillful invention can replace the essential element of imagination.”  
—Edward Hopper, **American Realism Painter (1882-1967)**
- » “Today’s chief marketing officer isn’t just a storyteller, campaign crafter, brand builder and profitable growth driver. They continue to play those roles, but they also step into the broader function of chief transformation architect, designing intelligent systems that adapt and scale.” —Lara Balazs, CMO and Executive VP Global Marketing, **Adobe**
- » “Today, culture has shifted into a new gear. It’s layered. It’s quick. It’s shaped by people changing direction fast, and marketers urgently need the tools to stay on top of these trends as they manifest and evolve in real time.”  
—Cassie Taylor, Global Head of Platform and Trends Marketing, **TikTok**

- » “Leaders are looking for clarity, integration, seamlessness and consistency.”  
—Florian Adamski, CEO, **Omnicom Media**
- » “Companies that act fast, hire fast, pivot fast and make decisions without a large leadership committee will thrive. Differentiation will be essential. Those who rise to the top will combine distinctive craft, bold ideas and fluency in AI tools.” —Renata Florio, Global Chief Creative Officer, **Gravity Global**
- » “The next big opportunity is rethinking how our teams work in an AI-first world: redesigning processes, expanding roles, and giving people more ownership across end-to-end workflows.”  
—Stacy Martinet, VP of Integrated Marketing and Communications, **Adobe**
- » “As AI transforms digital advertising and privacy expectations continue to rise, transparent and trustworthy data practices across the media supply chain are becoming critical drivers of campaign performance.” —Stephan Loerke, CEO, **WFA**

# The Agency Reset 2026

## Analysis and the Case for Change



### REPORT

## Analysis and the Case for Change

*Contributed by: Piscari*

The Agency Reset 2026: AI, Procurement, and the Collapse of the Labour-Based Model—the foundations of the agency model developed in the 1950s is structurally crumbling before our eyes. AI, in-housing, Procurement Transformation, and rising client expectations are permanently eroding labour-based revenue, margins, and loyalty.

This report shows which parts of your agency will compound value in 2026, which will quietly destroy it, and the strategic decisions you need to make before the market makes them for you. [Click here](#) to read the entire article.

*"This kind of analysis from Mike Lander becomes a critical filter for both agencies and brands. It helps us as clients identify which agencies are designing for the future of our organization, and which are optimizing for a past we've already left behind. That distinction will define the next decade of partnerships."*

— Bruno Galpois  
Co-Founder & Principal,  
**Agency Mania Solutions**

**FINANCIALS: Driving efficient use of resources**

 Despite economic uncertainty due to geopolitical tension, the marketing economy is adapting, scaling fast at times—and sharpening its contradictions. Brand value is surging on the back of tech-enabled disruptors, social platforms continue to absorb a growing share of spend, and celebrity-driven storytelling remains a billion-dollar bet with a creator economy on the rise, even as marketers face mounting pressure to prove efficiency, transparency, and trust. With procurement stepping into the spotlight, principal media buying rising, M&A accelerating across influencer, commerce, CTV, and experience, and billions still being lost to invalid traffic, the message is clear: Growth is no longer just about spending more—it's about spending smarter.

» HIGH IMPACT

- Per the **ANA US Commercial Production Tax Incentives** report, well-designed state programs now return as much as 40% of qualified in-state production, talent, and post-production costs. Thirty states explicitly include commercial advertising as a qualified production type, and 18 additional states are actively considering new or expanded programs. Advertisers, as IP owners and financiers, are the intended beneficiaries of production tax credits—not agencies or production partners.
- Per Forrester, 81% of marketers say their firms plan to increase their principal **media buying**—acquiring media directly from agencies in 2026 (yet cap it to not exceed 10% to 20% of their total spending budgets). This trend is despite the controversial practice, as most agencies apparently buy the media they resell at discounted rates and do not disclose the markups or profit margins.

- Per Lunio, \$63 billion went to waste on global ads because of **invalid traffic** in 2025. Due to the surge of AI-powered bots, 8.51% of all paid ad traffic is invalid, meaning nearly 1 in 12 clicks does not come from a real user with genuine purchase intent.
- Per Fuel Media & Marketing, **three questions every CMO should ask their media agency:**
  - 1) How are you using inventory media, and what's in it for you?
  - 2) Are there any barter arrangements I should know about?
  - 3) What happens to rebates from specialist suppliers, particularly out of home?
- Per Kantar, the **Global Top 100** reached a record total brand value in 2025 driven by tech-enabled disruptor brands. Apple retains its top position for the fourth year with a brand value of \$1.3 trillion, up 28%, followed by Google, Microsoft, Amazon, and Nvidia. Nvidia, Huawei, VMware, Xiaomi, and Instagram are the top risers, achieving more than 100% brand value growth. ChatGPT is the highest new entry in the Top 100, followed by Stripe and Chipotle.
- Per Integral Ad Science and YouGov, **social media** remains a priority for 84% of US digital media professionals, outpacing influencer marketing (61%) and video livestreaming (56%). Per eMarketer, social media ad spending is expected to grow 15.6% this year and reach \$124.88 billion.

*Bruno Galpois from the new article:*

**4 Questions That Changed the Rules of Marketing Procurement**

**"Leaders who asked the right questions moved forward. Those anchored to the status quo fell behind."**



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- **The Marketing Procurement Awards (MPAs)**, the first independent honors dedicated solely to celebrating excellence in marketing procurement, launched to celebrate professionals who had a critical role in driving marketing effectiveness and value. The MPAs ([marketingprocurementawards.org](http://marketingprocurementawards.org)) aim to celebrate excellence and elevate the profession, showcase best practice, and set a benchmark for what great looks like in marketing procurement, including a Best Use of Technology Award. Partner organizations include WFA, ISBA, CIPS, RightSpend, and Marketing Procurement IQ.
- Per XR (Extreme Reach), brand advertisers spent over \$1B on **celebrities** in ads in 2025 including high-profile actors, musicians, athletes, and other talent in ad productions.

### Mergers & acquisitions (M&A) activity:

#### » HIGH IMPACT

- **Pinterest** acquired tvScientific, a connected TV (CTV) performance advertising platform in a move to combine its audience signals with CTV, enabling brands to deliver more personalized ads and measure how TV boosts the outcomes of their performance marketing campaigns. tvScientific's outcome-based CTV platform will be integrated into Pinterest's performance products, including its automation and AI-based advertising suite, Pinterest Performance+.
- Experiential agency **Impact XM** (owned by private equity firm The Riverside Company) acquired Jack Morton from Omnicom Group in a move to diversify and expand Impact XM's capabilities outside of the trade show sector in creative, strategy, content, and digital. Combined clients include Amazon, Dell, General Motors, Google, GSK, Meta, New Balance, Nvidia, and Takeda, served by over 1,000 employees in 20 global offices.

#### » NOTABLE

- Agency group **Mindgruve** acquired Ameo, a commerce agency based in Hamburg, Germany, in a move to broaden Mindgruve's European footprint and strengthen its ability to help US and global brands scale retail media performance across international markets.
- Chicago-based independent brand consultancy **Fifty Thousand Feet** acquired San Francisco-based CX consultancy Tangible, which has expertise in customer understanding, experience design, and execution. The move intends to expand the agency's strategy and enterprise capabilities and bridge the gap between high-level brand strategy and practical execution.

- **PMG** acquired Digital Voices, a leading influencer marketing agency based in London and New York, with clients like General Mills, Adobe, DoorDash, and Unilever. Digital Voices is known for blending data, creativity, and technology. PMG will now have access to Digital Voices's proprietary tools, Chord and Composer, in a move to expand its global influencer marketing practice and provide a deeper layer of intelligence to the PMG Alli operating system.
- **Havas** acquired Digizik, a Belgian entertainment agency, and launched Havas Play, the network's experiential marketing arm, operating as Digizik by Havas Play. Digizik's client portfolio includes Universal Music, BNP Paribas Fortis, Red Bull, Warner Music, Campari Group's Picon, Orange's Hey!, and Casio's G-shock.
- **Tombras** acquired Portland, Oregon-based Opinionated bringing together one of the industry's largest full-service independent agencies and a creative shop of 40 people, which will continue to operate as Opinionated, a Tombras Company. The move contributes to a stronger West Coast presence.

### Holding company financial performance:

- Not available at this time as we await earning results from major publicly traded agencies.

#### Noteworthy quotes:

- » "If you buy impressions from publishers with bad data practices, then no amount of downstream optimization can reverse the impact that will have on targeting and efficiency." —Jamie Barnard, CEO, **Compliant**
- » "Today's changing spend and budget patterns also reflect a wider trend: auctions and algorithms have flattened the advantage that buying scale used to create. Advertisers can no longer outmuscle, so they must work with the system." —Tom Ashby, Global Lead, Media Services, **WFA**
- » "AI and automation don't replace creativity, they protect it. Efficiency gives you the space to do the work that actually moves clients." —Adam Cotumaccio, COO, **4As**

**AGENCY: Agency reviews and roster changes**

Disclaimer: The reviews listed often capture larger review activity reported in the industry trade press, which we understand to be only a subset of total review activity. Specialist reviews (digital, social, PR, etc.) are rarely reported in the trade press. Also, due to the increasing number of project reviews (versus AOR/retainer reviews), many of those do not receive media attention and therefore are not included here.

- Fiber internet service provider **123NET** selected Stagwell's Doner as its creative and strategic AOR. The agency will handle brand strategy, visual identity, creative, and media planning and buying (through Doner Media).
- Automotive services chain **Belle Tire** selected Boulder, Colorado-based independent shop WorkInProgress as its creative AOR without a review, replacing incumbent Cramer-Krasselt. The agency will collaborate with Noble People, the brand's media AOR.
- Food-wellness brand **Bragg** selected TDA Boulder as its new creative AOR, replacing incumbent Boulder-based agency Fortnight Collective. The agency will handle strategy and creative across the US, including digital, social media, and out-of-home advertising.
- Branded apparel and promotional products maker **Custom Ink** selected VaynerMedia as its media AOR. There is no public knowledge of an incumbent on the account. The agency will handle integrated planning, buying, and measurement across the full marketing funnel, with a focus on digital.
- Brewery **D.G. Yuengling & Son, Inc.** selected Santa Monica, California-based RPA as its new creative AOR following a review. The agency will handle integrated marketing campaigns cross-media: TV, digital video, social media, radio, display, and out-of-home for its brand portfolio including pilsners, lagers, ales, and bock beer.
- National specialty retailer **Floor & Decor** selected Dentsu's iProspect as its media AOR, expanding its existing relationship. The agency will handle all media planning and buying in addition to performance media (already handled by the agency).
- **Hershey Co.** selected Publicis's Saatchi & Saatchi as its creative AOR for its Reese's brand following a review, replacing project-based agencies. Publicis built a bespoke team to handle the account (similar to its bespoke media team called MiltonOne) and will partner with other roster agencies such as MSL.
- Tech giant **IBM** kicked off a review of its media business. Incumbent WPP Media is expected to defend. The selected agency will partner with the brand's long-term creative AOR, WPP's Ogilvy.
- Appliance company **Instant Pot** selected Stagwell's Minneapolis-based Colle McVoy as its creative and media AOR following a review, replacing incumbent Cramer-Krasselt. The agency will handle Integrated creative, strategy, media, and PR.
- UK-based automaker **Jaguar Land Rover** selected WPP as its global integrated AOR, following a review, replacing incumbents Accenture Song (creative) and Omnicom (media). The agency will handle all of the automaker's global end-to-end marketing communication activities across all channels for its brand portfolio (Defender, Discovery, Jaguar, and Range Rover).
- The Shell USA-owned company **Jiffy Lube International** selected independent BarkleyOKRP as its creative AOR following a review and replacing incumbent Stagwell's Doner.
- American consumer health company **Kenvue** (formerly the Consumer Healthcare division of Johnson & Johnson) selected Publicis Groupe as its media AOR and WPP as its creative and production AOR following a review, replacing various incumbents, including Interpublic Group of Cos, Interpublic's FCB and Deutsch, Omnicom's BBDO, and Stagwell's Doner. WPP will handle all creative and production, including creative, influencer, healthcare professional communications, shopper, and commerce for all brands (including Tylenol, Zarbee's, Aveeno, and Neosporin) except Neutrogena. Publicis Groupe will handle media, influencer, commerce, healthcare professional support, and technology, in addition to creative and production for Neutrogena.
- **Kidde**, the North Carolina-based maker of smoke alarms and other fire safety products, selected Acadia as its omnichannel retail, media, and analytics AOR. The agency will handle retail media and organic management on Amazon as well as customer data insights and media mix modeling.
- Heineken-owned **Lagunitas Brewing Company** selected Otherway as its first creative AOR following a review. The agency will handle creative and brand design from its offices in London and New York.
- **Magnum Ice Cream Company** selected Publicis Media as its global media AOR following a review, replacing incumbent WPP Media's Mindshare. The agency will handle all media planning and buying duties for the brand portfolio that includes Cornetto and Ben & Jerry's.
- **Major League Soccer** selected WPP's Ogilvy as its creative and strategic AOR following a review, ahead of the start of the FIFA World Cup.
- Skincare and cosmetics brand **Mary Kay** selected WPP's Grey New York as its global creative AOR following a review. There's no public mention yet of an incumbent.
- Boston-based **MassMutual** selected Stagwell's 72andSunny New York as its new creative AOR without a review, replacing five-year incumbent WPP's Grey.
- Snacks and sweets company **Mondelēz International** kicked off a review of its creative account globally for its Oreo and Ritz brands (and potentially more), following leadership changes. Incumbent agencies Omnicom's The Martin Agency and Publicis Groupe's Digitas are expected to defend.

- **Naturally Fresh** selected TDA Boulder as its new integrated AOR. The agency will handle strategy, creative, and media planning and buying, including digital, social media, and out-of-home.
- Japanese manufacturer **Nikon** selected London-based creative agency Born Social as its full-service social media AOR in the US following a review and consolidating all its social media work with a single agency. The agency will handle social strategy, education-led creative, content production, and paid social from its New York office.
- Miami-based **Norwegian Cruise Line** selected WPP Media as its media AOR in the US following a review, replacing incumbent Publicis-owned Digitas. The agency will handle all media planning and buying duties in the US market.
- Ready-to-drink protein milkshake brand **Nurri** selected Cincinnati-based independent creative agency Curiosity as its AOR following a review.
- **Pernod Ricard** selected Publicis as its media AOR by consolidating its North America media business under Publicis Santé, a bespoke unit within Publicis Media. The agency will handle all media duties in the US and Canada while leveraging advanced targeting and data-driven insights to scale innovation by using predictive analytics to connect paid, owned, and earned channels.
- Luxury fashion house **Prada** selected AKQA as its global digital agency following a review. AKQA will handle all global digital experience duties. Operations will be coordinated through Milan, utilizing AKQA's global teams across EMEA and the Americas.
- UK's largest hotel chain, **Premier Inn**, selected creative agency Born Social as its social AOR. The agency will handle creative development, production, design, and community management of the brand's social presence. The agency will partner with its creative and media AORs, Leo Burnett and OMD, respectively.
- CPG manufacturer **Reckitt** selected McCann New York as its creative AOR to handle its Essential Home portfolio (Woolite, Resolve, Rid-X, and Easy-Off) in the US following a review, replacing incumbent Havas. McCann will handle strategy and creative across television, digital, social, and experiential. The agency's offices in New York and Toronto will run the account with support from McCann Content Studios.
- **Reckitt** renewed its ongoing integrated media mandate with WPP Media for the India market, while expanding its scope to include e-commerce. The combined remit brings together mainline media, digital, and commerce capabilities under a single, integrated operating model. The agency manages media planning and buying in 21 European markets globally.
- **SC Johnson** selected WPP Media as its media AOR for North America following a review, replacing incumbent Omnicom Media, which will retain the global account.
- The Gambrinus Company-owned **Shiner Beers** selected McGarrah Jessee as its new creative AOR following a review. The agency previously did work for the brand.
- German tech giant **Siemens** selected Augsburg, Germany-based Dentsu agency iProspect as its global search engine advertising AOR following a review, retaining the business as the 10-year incumbent agency. The agency will handle strategy and execution in more than 150 markets.
- Qualcomm's **Snapdragon** Compute selected Stagwell's 72andSunny as its creative AOR following a review. The agency will handle global creative and branding assessments from its New York and Toronto offices.
- National US cosmetic surgery brand **Sono Bello** selected Dentsu X as its digital media AOR. The agency will handle digital strategy for all of Sono Bello's business lines (breast augmentation, advanced liposuction, and excess-skin removal) at 125 locations.
- Seattle-based coffee giant **Starbucks** selected Stagwell's Anomaly as its creative AOR in the US following a review, replacing the incumbent of only three months, WPP, which had created a global bespoke team composed of VML, Ogilvy, and Landor to serve the account. WPP remains on the agency roster.
- Outdoor power equipment marketer **STIHL** selected Philadelphia-based Harmelin Media as its digital media AOR. The agency will handle all digital media duties, including planning, buying, and analysis. There is no known incumbent.
- Atlanta-based retailer **The Home Depot** ended its relationship with five-year creative AOR Omnicom's BBDO in a move to bring more work in-house. The brand will further leverage its Studio Orange in-house offering and use generative AI to scale content creation internally.
- **The United States Postal Service** kicked off a review of its creative and media account to elevate its challenger brand status. The brand is exploring a range of options, including a single agency relationship, working with multiple shops, or pursuing a holding company model. Incumbents MRM (creative) and UM (media) are expected to defend.
- Pittsburgh-based **Vocelli Pizza** selected Houston-based Love Advertising as its integrated AOR, following a review. The agency will handle creative, media planning and buying, and influencer strategy.

Agency roster summary:

IP= Review in progress, Unk= Unknown

COMPANY LOGO	CLIENT	INCUMBENT	CHANGE/SCOPE	FOCUS AREA	NEW AGENCY	REVIEW?
	123NET	Unknown	Creative and Strategic AOR	US	Doner	Unk
	Belle Tire	Cramer-Krasselt	Creative AOR	US	WorkInProgress	N
	Bragg	Fortnight Collective	Creative AOR	US	TDA Boulder	Unk
	Custom Ink	Unknown	Media AOR	North America	VaynerMedia	Unk
	D.G. Yuengling & Son, Inc.	Unknown	Creative AOR	Unknown	RPA	Y
	Floor & Decor	iProspect (expanding duties)	Media AOR	US	iProspect	Unk
	Hershey Co. (Reese's)	Various project-based agencies	Creative AOR	Global	Saatchi & Saatchi	Y
	IBM	WPP Media (will not defend)	Media	Global	Unknown	IP
	Instant Pot	Cramer-Krasselt	Creative and Media AOR	Global	Colle McVoy	Y
	Jaguar Land Rover	Accenture Song (creative) Omnicom (media)	Integrated AOR	Global	WPP	Y
	Jiffy Lube International	Donner	Creative AOR	Unknown	BarkleyOKRP	Y
	Kenvue	Various agencies	Creative and Production AOR	Global	WPP	Y
		Various agencies	Media AOR	Global	Publicis Groupe	Y
	Kidde	Unknown	Omnichannel Retail, Media, and Analytics AOR	US	Acadia	Y
	Lagunitas Brewing Company.	None	Creative AOR	Unknown	Otherway	Y
	Magnum Ice Cream Company	Mindshare	Media AOR	Global	Publicis Media	Y
	Major League Soccer (MLS)	Cornerstone (creative AOR incumbent)	Creative and Strategic AOR	North America	Ogilvy	N
	Mary Kay	Unknown	Creative AOR	Global	Grey New York	Y
	MassMutual	WPP's Grey	Creative AOR	US	72andSunny	N
	Mondelēz International	The Martin Agency, Digitas (expected to defend)	Creative	Global	Unknown	IP

Agency roster summary:

IP= Review in progress, Unk= Unknown

COMPANY LOGO	CLIENT	INCUMBENT	CHANGE/SCOPE	FOCUS AREA	NEW AGENCY	REVIEW?
	Naturally Fresh	Unknown	Integrated AOR	US	TDA Boulder	Unk
	Nikon	Unknown	Social Media AOR	US	Born Social (consolidation)	Y
	Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL)	Digitas	Media AOR	US	WPP Media	Y
	Nurri	Unknown	Creative AOR	US	Curiosity	Y
	Pernod Ricard	Publicis	Media AOR	US, Canada	Publicis Santé (consolidation)	Unk
	Prada	Unknown	Digital	Global	AKQA	Y
	Premier Inn	Unknown	Social AOR	Unknown	Born Social	Y
	Reckitt	WPP Media	Integrated Media	India	WPP Media (retains duties)	Unk
	Reckitt (Essential Home)	Havas	Creative AOR	US	McCann New York	Y
	SC Johnson	Omnicom Media	Media AOR	North America	WPP Media	Y
	Shiner Beers	Unknown	Creative AOR	North America	McGarrah Jessee (McJ)	Y
	Siemens	iProspect	Search Engine Advertising AOR	Global	iProspect (retains duties)	Y
	Snapdragon	Unknown	Creative AOR	Global	72andSunny	Y
	Sono Bello	Unknown	Digital Media AOR	US	dentsu X	
	Starbucks	WPP	Creative AOR	US	Anomaly	Y
	STIHL	Unknown	Digital Media AOR	Global	Harmelin Media	
	The Home Depot	BBDO	Creative AOR	US	In-house	Unk
	The United States Postal Service (USPS)	MRM (expected to defend)	Creative	US	Unknown	IP
		UM (expected to defend)	Media	US	Unknown	IP
	Vocelli Pizza	Unknown	Integrated AOR	US	Love Advertising	Y

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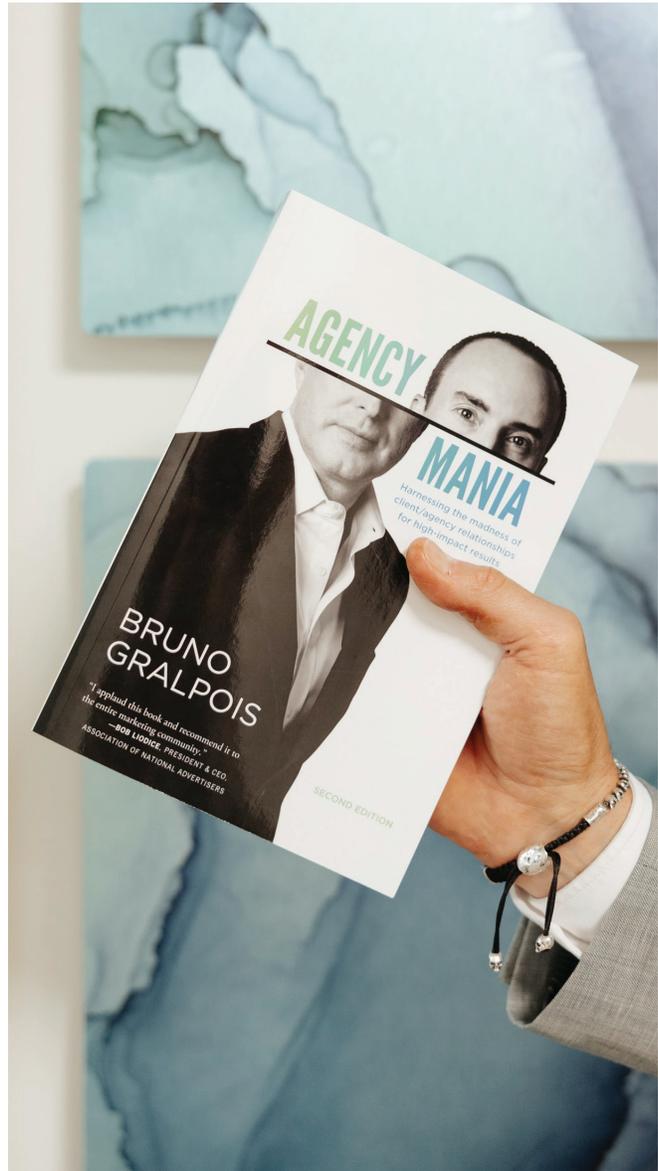


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**A word about the author:** Bruno Gralpois is a globally recognized thought leader in business partnerships, renowned for his pioneering work in establishing agency management as a critical discipline among the world's largest advertisers and Fortune 500 companies.

As the author of the industry-defining book *Agency Mania* and the co-founder of Agency Mania Solutions, a leading cloud-based software company, Bruno has dedicated his career to fostering successful client-agency relationships. His expertise, honed through leadership roles at Microsoft, Visa, and several pre-IPO software companies, has made him an authority on building and nurturing high-impact business partnerships.

In addition to his corporate achievements, Bruno is a key Faculty member at the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) School of Marketing, where he continues to shape the future of client-agency collaboration, driving growth and sustained business performance.

**Bruno Gralpois**, Co-Founder and Principal, Agency Mania Solutions



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