



Beyond Innovation: Transforming Partnerships for Lasting Value

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Innovation is the lifeblood of the modern knowledge economy, fueling growth and shaping industries. The World Economic Forum highlights that innovation-driven productivity accounts for a staggering 50% of long-term GDP growth in both developed and emerging markets. Nowhere is this impact more pronounced than in the advertising industry, where the ability to stand out, captivate consumers, and embrace technological disruption is a necessity

and a competitive advantage. In a landscape defined by rapid change, innovation has become the number-one capability sought by brand advertisers. Yet, as the saying goes, you can't improve what you don't measure. And you certainly can't secure what you haven't clearly defined. So, we must ask: What does innovation truly mean in today's economic landscape? And how can it be brought to life most powerfully in client-agency partnerships?

Doing the Same Things but Better

(aka Process Innovation)

A key aspect of innovation is deeply grounded in doing things better. Innovation isn't just about creating something new. It's about doing things better. It thrives on improving existing activities, often targeting operational workflows to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. This includes optimizing repetitive tasks or processes shared by agencies and their clients. Take process innovation, for example: reengineering the creative workflow to ensure smoother collaboration. This might involve engaging all relevant client stakeholders for input while designating a single decision-maker to consolidate and deliver clear, actionable feedback to the agency. By refining how work gets done, innovation transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary, driving results that truly make a difference.

Doing the Same Things but for Less

(aka Efficiency Innovation)

Efficiency lies at the heart of innovation. We can achieve more with less and

maximize the impact of our resources and investments. One powerful example is zero-based budgeting (ZBB), a transformative approach that discards outdated assumptions. Instead of using the previous year’s budget as a starting point, ZBB requires agencies to justify every recommendation and expense from the ground up. This collaborative process, often involving clients who must secure buy-in from upper management, demands rigor but delivers significant rewards by reducing costs and eliminating waste. Beyond ZBB, efficiency-driven innovation also consists of tools like cost benchmarking. That means leveraging internal or external benchmarks to ensure every dollar is strategically spent. Together, these approaches reshape how resources are allocated. The result? Leaner, smarter operations.

Doing the Same Things but Faster (aka Speed Innovation)

In today’s world, speed is everything for brand advertisers. The question is: How quickly can you adapt to shifting market conditions or evolving consumer interests? Can your agency move at the speed of culture to seize opportunities and claim first-mover advantage? Agility and speed are no longer optional—they’re critical for success. Speed innovation focuses on eliminating barriers that hinder a brand’s ability to tap into emerging trends. A prime example is X’s AI-powered tool, Trend Genius. It enables advertisers to align campaigns with real-time trending topics to maximize relevance and engagement. By analyzing live conversations, it identifies peak moments of interest and automatically deploys preprogrammed ads designed to capture attention at just the right time. It’s speed and precision, redefined.

Doing the Same Things but with Stronger Talent (aka Organizational Innovation)

Innovation isn’t just about technology—it’s powered by people. Talent is one of the most critical, but often overlooked, drivers of innovation. Organizational innovation focuses on reimagining how teams collaborate. It breaks down silos to create structures that amplify creativity and efficiency. People naturally gravitate toward familiar routines, but transformative results come from challenging those norms. For instance, is your agency treating creative and media as fully integrated disciplines or as merely complementary ones working in parallel? Imagine embedding a media strategist directly within the creative team from the start to foster collaboration that drives more cohesive and impactful campaigns. Leading holding companies recognize the power of talent-driven innovation as they create bespoke teams for global brands to deliver diverse, integrated solutions. Publicis Groupe calls this the “Power of One.” In an industry where talent is everything, the potential for innovation through people is limitless.

Trying New Things Before Committing (aka Incremental Innovation)

Innovation doesn’t always require bold leaps. It can thrive in small, deliberate steps that build momentum over time. Incremental innovation is about piloting new ideas and making continuous improvements. It involves refining concepts until they prove their value before scaling up. For example, an agency might collaborate with a client to enhance the briefing process by introducing new sections that capture more meaningful insights, ultimately leading to better creative



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work. Similarly, a brand advertiser could innovate by institutionalizing KPI reporting—tracking both quantitative and qualitative performance metrics, sharing this data with stakeholders to foster accountability, and even tying agency performance to financial incentives. Testing new KPIs, refining them, and assessing their impact over time can unlock powerful results. By embracing this steady, iterative approach, organizations can drive meaningful innovation without overextending their resources.

Doing New Things with Existing Technology (aka Tech Innovation)

When most people think *innovation*, they often mean *technology*. Our society’s reliance on technology as the

ultimate enabler of progress has shaped how we define innovation. Technology doesn't just support our goals—it unlocks entirely new possibilities by transforming workflows and redefining

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how we work. The rise of cloud-based platforms has enabled scalable, efficient collaboration like never before. But the most transformative force in tech innovation today is artificial intelligence (AI). Agencies are leveraging generative AI to revolutionize every aspect of their operations—from conducting smarter research and crafting breakthrough concepts to generating copy, producing assets at scale, and implementing advanced reporting. Likewise, brand advertisers are embracing AI to reimagine their marketing processes, streamline collaboration, and elevate team productivity. Tech innovation isn't just about new tools; it's about reinventing the way work gets done and driving unparalleled results.

Doing New Things with Emerging Technology (aka Disruptive Innovation)

Disruptive innovation reshapes industries by challenging norms and harnessing emerging technologies with transformative potential. As technology accelerates, it expands the realm of what's possible, unlocking opportunities once beyond our reach. AI-powered agents are one example. Agentic AI is a new wave of autonomous systems capable of reasoning, making decisions, and interacting with their environment to achieve specific goals. In the coming

years, media operations will increasingly fall into this category, with campaign planning and optimization requiring little to no human intervention. This level of disruption is difficult to grasp fully, yet agencies and brands must act now to educate themselves, adapt their strategies, and prepare for a future where their ability to evolve will define their success and profitability.

A New Blueprint for Innovation: Partnerships That Matter

In today's fast-evolving landscape of technological breakthroughs and shifting market dynamics, innovation is no longer optional—it's essential for survival and growth. To truly drive continuous improvement and unlock greater value, innovation must be approached as a multidimensional, collaborative effort. Start by defining what innovation means for your business and share that vision with your agency partners. Consider hosting an innovation summit or workshops to exchange ideas, align strategies, and spark new possibilities together. In a knowledge-based economy, innovation is the ultimate currency—a critical driver of growth for brand advertisers and their agency partners. Its full potential is realized only when it becomes a shared, collective practice. ■



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Bruno Galpois 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” a resource that played a key role in shaping Agency Management as a corporate discipline. He is a faculty member at the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) School of Marketing, where he continues to shape the future of client-agency collaboration.

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