



4 Questions That Changed the Rules of Marketing Procurement

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

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The advertising industry crossed a line—and there is no going back. Momentum stacked on momentum. Assumptions cracked. New realities took hold. Tech innovation like artificial intelligence moved decisively from promise to power, reshaping how work is done, partnerships are built, and value is measured. Economic pressure tested leadership at every level, forcing a simultaneous rethink of growth, cost,

and collaboration. Geopolitical tensions reinforced the hard truth that stability is not a given but a variable.

In this environment, curiosity is a competitive advantage. Leaders who asked the right questions moved forward. Those anchored to the status quo fell behind. The era of comfortable certainty is over. The era of intelligent inquiry has begun.

Let's examine four questions that exposed an advertising industry in transition, and the answers that will define the future of marketing procurement for years to come.

QUESTION #1

“What is an agency actually responsible for today and what is no longer defensible?”

Agency restructuring and mergers dominated headlines during the past year as agencies once again reshaped themselves to keep pace with advertisers' evolving demands. Reinvention is nothing new in this industry. What is new is the scale of change on the client side. Advertisers have taken on more than ever as they build in-house capabilities to protect intellectual property, increase speed, and reduce costs where they believe they can compete (with their agencies). Technology has narrowed the historical gap between what agencies do and what brands can do themselves. Except for capacity constraints and scarce access to specialized talent, many of the traditional barriers have fallen. Yet in spite of this shift, advertisers continue to see immense value in independent, third-party perspectives that provide capabilities, creativity, and expertise that remain beyond brands' internal reach.

That reality leads to the defining question: *What should agencies own in the years ahead to create irreplaceable value?* For the answer, turn to what agencies are most aggressively investing in:

- Breakthrough creativity
- Differentiated practices
- Advanced data and insight
- End-to-end execution
- Orchestration across increasingly complex ecosystems

Marketing procurement plays a decisive role. By pressing agencies to articulate what they do uniquely well—and what they intend to truly master—procurement is aligning internal and external talent around complementary strengths. The result is not duplication but convergence, not competition but partnership, and ultimately, not effort but outcomes. As **Jay Pattisall**, VP and principal analyst at Forrester, puts it: *“The age of the agent is ending. Marketing agencies are no longer just service providers—they’re becoming purveyors of solutions, platforms, capabilities, and outcomes.”*

QUESTION #2

“Are we optimizing cost or unintentionally eroding capability?”

Marketing procurement was once celebrated primarily for its ability to drive cost efficiency—bridging marketing and finance priorities to secure the right agency talent at the right price. Procurement became a cornerstone of the commercial relationship through shaping of contracts, pricing models, and operational rigor. In a world where agencies could be neatly compared, costs reliably benchmarked, and budget efficiency reigned supreme, that approach made perfect sense.

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But efficiency came at a price. Under mounting financial pressure, fees were reduced, often at the expense of talent quality and agencies’ ability to invest and innovate. Short-term savings were quietly translated into long-term value erosion. This shift is increasingly recognized across the industry. As **Laura Forcetti**, director of marketing services at the World Federation of Advertisers, warns: *“Savings alone are no longer a sufficient proof of value—not for procurement and not for marketing.”* That era is ending.

Today, marketing procurement has stepped into a far more consequential role—that of transformation “value” architect. No longer focused solely on cost containment, procurement strives to ensure that both brands and agencies are positioned to prosper. Procurement is a strategic partner to marketing leadership in unlocking new pathways to growth. It is a strategic collaborator to agencies to enable stronger capabilities, smarter investments, and more effective ways of working. Procurement is no longer optimizing transactions. It is designing ecosystems. And those ecosystems will determine where value comes from and who wins next.

QUESTION #3

“Are we still buying hours or are we buying outcomes and accountability?”

That question signaled the beginning of a profound mindset shift, as time-based thinking slowly unraveled and

performance-linked partnerships at last emerged. AI did not simply accelerate execution; it broke the assumed link between effort and value. While labor-based, hourly compensation still dominates, it does so largely by inertia after decades of habits built to reward activity rather than outcomes.

But when technology amplifies insight, compresses time, and scales impact, what we are buying changes fundamentally. A sharper way to frame the issue becomes unavoidable: *What does “value for money” mean when output is no longer proportional to effort?* That single question opens the door to commercial models rooted in outcomes, accountability, and shared success. The shift away from labor-based thinking is underway. As **Ramzi Chaabane**, director of marketing indirect procurement at L’Oréal, states: *“Agencies will need to stop selling outputs and start selling outcomes.”*

Then comes the most uncomfortable question of the year: *If AI now delivers 30 to 50% of the work, who captures the value?* Some dismiss this as tactical. It is not. Efficiency without balance erodes trust. Progress without fairness fractures partnerships. The question strikes at the heart of how talent is trained, how tools are built or licensed, and how quality is safeguarded, so that agencies are compensated fairly for investments that ultimately benefit clients. Ignore it, and relationships strain. Confront it honestly, and a stronger partnership model emerges. The future will not reward speed alone. It will reward fairness, clarity, and courage. And those who succeed

will have answered another essential follow-up question: “How do we align incentives so that agencies win when brands win?”

QUESTION #4

“If we were designing the agency model from scratch today, what wouldn’t we rebuild?”

Driven by rapidly evolving client expectations, the agency ecosystem has undergone a fundamental shift. Consequently, the agency model—how roles are defined, teams collaborate, decisions are made, and commercial terms are structured—has been forced to adapt. For years, adaptations were incremental: adjusting rosters, consolidating disciplines under one roof, separating production from creative, and sourcing lower-cost alternatives. It was evolution, not revolution. The system bent but did not break. For a long time, that was enough.

Incrementalism reached its limits. Today’s environment demands a full redesign of the agency model, a redesign co-created by brands and agencies, not patched together over time. The agency model is no longer a slow, year-by-year experiment; it requires a deliberate, strategic assessment of future-ready talent, the

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right balance of internal and external capabilities, and a clear definition of where agencies create irreplaceable value in media, creative, digital, PR, retail, and all other disciplines. The new model must be actively managed, not annually reviewed and forgotten. Continuous performance assessment—whether quarterly, semiannually, or in real time—must translate into immediate action. Waiting a year to correct course is no longer viable when speed defines competitiveness. That rethinking is underway, for instance, among transformation leaders in media. As **Jack Shearring**, head of transformation at mediasense, observes: *“The media organization of the future will look very different from today’s. It will require integration-first thinking, multitasked talent and clear decisions on what to own internally and what to entrust to partners.”*

The modern agency model is lean by design and easier to design from scratch. It rejects bloated teams, rigid structure, and cost-heavy overhead. It is built for agility, clarity, and outcomes. Partnership is flexible, accountability is shared, and value is continuously earned.

The four questions explored here are neither tactical nor theoretical. They were forged in the middle of an industry both shaken by disruption and energized by possibility. The past few years will be remembered as the time when marketing procurement crossed a threshold. It stopped merely policing cost and started architecting value. It moved from enforcing discipline to designing systems where agencies, brands, and talent can all win together. The future agency model did not become leaner by chance; it became leaner by intention.

By asking harder, smarter, and more forward-looking questions, marketing procurement leaders elevated their role from stewards of efficiency to architects of progress. They defined a permanent shift in how value is created, measured, and shared, one that makes a return to old models neither realistic nor relevant. In doing so, they proved a defining truth of this era: those who shape the questions don’t just influence the future, they build it. One question at a time. ■



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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* 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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