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OPINION >

## What type of trust have we lost in media, marketing and advertising?

By **Darren Woolley** - 15 October 2019 09:00am



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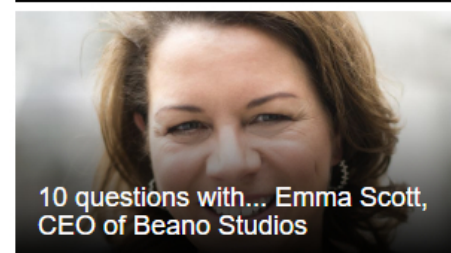
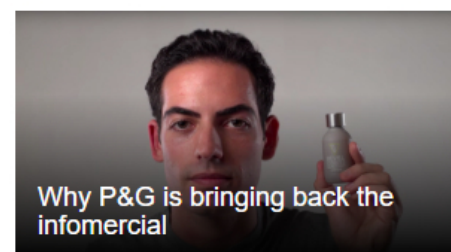


When it comes to professions, the truth is that advertising has hovered near the bottom of the pile along with salespeople.

Just look at the headlines of the trade media and ask yourself "Do we have as an industry have a trust problem?"

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But I am confused as to what type of trust it is that agencies and the industry have lost. The reason is that in the face of this cataclysmic loss of trust it appears that clients all around the world continue to spend the bulk of their media money with these agencies that they no longer trust.

Sure a few advertisers are taking some part of their media in-house, others are changing media agencies but still choosing a media agency they supposedly do not trust. But the vast majority continue to do business with their media agency. Why?

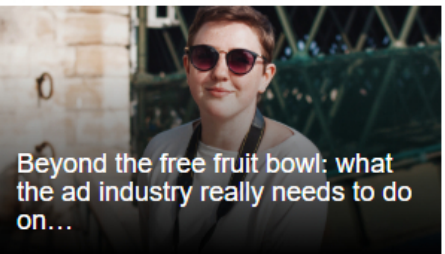
The trust in institutions has taken a hammering in recent times. Government, politicians, religion, corporations and more have all seen a fall in trust. Yet these institutions continue to operate enjoying significantly less trust than they did in the past. So why would not advertising and media enjoy the same fall in institutional trust? In the headlines about advertisers' loss of trust in their agencies, there are also headlines proclaiming consumers have the same loss of trust in marketing and advertising.

Besides, when it comes to professions, the truth is that advertising has hovered near the bottom of the pile along with salespeople. (I remember my parents were disappointed when I changed careers from medical research to advertising) It is not as if it is a profession or an institution that has garnered huge amounts of public trust over the years, so why are we shocked when marketers and advertisers talk about falling trust in the category?

But it is interesting how the industry has responded to this crisis in trust. The industry experts have suggested all manner of ways for agencies to rebuild trust between advertisers and their agencies. But I prefer the knowledge of an academic expert like professor **Frances Frei at Harvard Business School** who says: "The component parts of trust are super well understood.

There are three things about trust. If you sense that I am being authentic, you are much more likely to trust me. If you sense that I have real rigor in my logic, you are far more likely to trust me. And if you believe that my empathy is directed towards you, you are far more likely to trust me. When all three of these things are working, we have great trust. But if any one of these three gets shaky, if anyone of these three wobbles, trust is threatened"

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It is interesting because authenticity, the rigor of thought and empathy are very human traits. These are the type of traits that are experienced not between an organization and their agency vendors, but between the marketing team and their agency team. It is a relationship between individuals and not between institutions. In the same way that we may have lost trust in the many traditional institutions, we still form and give our trust to the individuals.

This goes some of the ways to explain the reactions and responses from many marketers when confronted with the media agency's rebate revelations back in 2015. Many marketers found it was unlikely that their media agency would be participating in this behavior. Of course, they accepted that it was occurring at a corporate or holding company level, but somehow that is very different from the relationship they have with their local media agency and the people they work with and rely on day-to-day.

When you think about the daily relationship that develops between the marketing team and the agency, there are ample opportunities to demonstrate the very traits and behaviors that professor Frei says builds and rebuilds trust - they have the opportunity to demonstrate their authentic self both professionally and in any relationship that develops outside of the work environment. Discussing and recommending media programs involves sharing and developing strategies and plans together in a highly complex and detailed category or media.

Finally, it provides ample opportunities to show empathy for the client's challenges and problems and in fact to offer advice and assistance in developing solutions together. It is hard to understand how a corporation or a holding company could possibly have these opportunities as the interactions and therefore the relationships are not as intense or as frequent.

It is this last trait, empathy where local agency people can feel the most compromised in the relationship with their client. In the past five years I have often been approached by senior media agency personnel, not the market chief executive officer or managing director, but often with a senior role is who is responsible for implementing the holding company or global agency strategy they feel is in conflict with the client's best interests. This is because toeing the agency line can compromise the trust relationship between the agency and the advertiser. Just to remind you of what Professor Frei says "if any one of these three wobbles, trust is threatened".


So yes, it makes a great headline and we can have infinite industry discussions about the loss of trust and the need to rebuild trust, but I believe much of this is a loss of institutional trust in the media and the media agency and we need to balance that with the trust that exists and continues to exist at a personal human level in the relationships between advertisers and their media agencies. This is where the important trust relationship ultimately exists.


relationship ultimately exists.


**Darren Woolley is founder and global chief executive of TrinityP3.**

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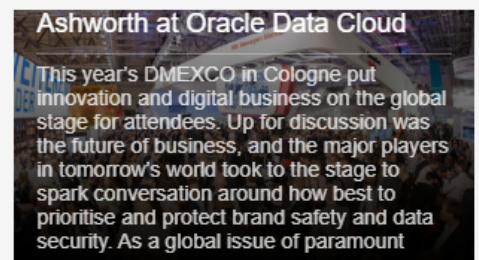
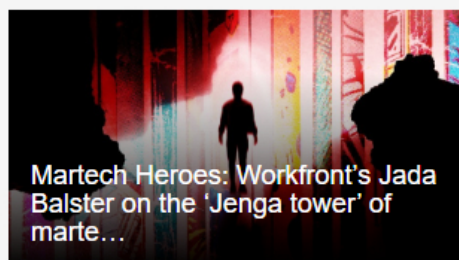
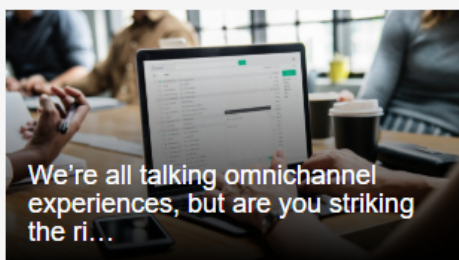
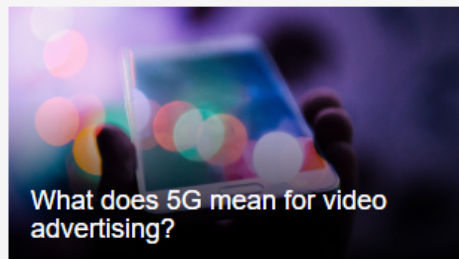
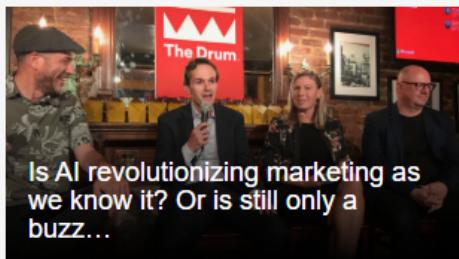
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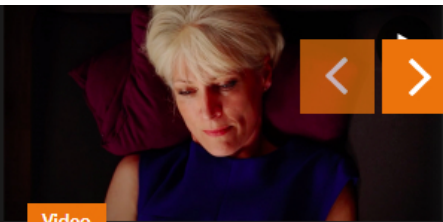
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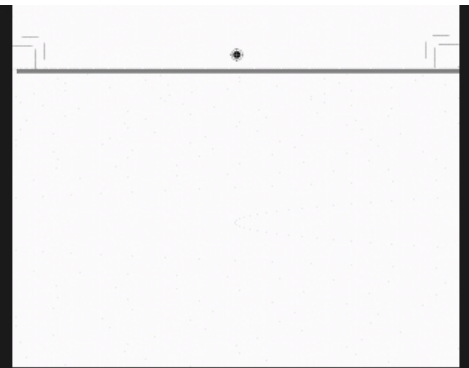
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