

PR and ad agencies don't understand their clients

 By [Chris Mberdyk](#)

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One of the greatest disconnects in the world of marketing is the lack of understanding by PR and advertising agencies of their clients.

The first mistake is to assume that the contact person on client side is the final arbiter of what PR and advertising decisions are made. Of course, there are some very lucky PR and ad agencies that have clients who leave everything to them. Let them do what they think is best. However, these are few and far between.

My experience from serving on boards or advising CEO's on marketing, is that the people who are actually in charge of advertising are pretty much way down the pecking order. It's slightly different in PR because mostly one deals with the CEO.

In the old days CEO's and boards of directors didn't really care too much about things like advertising and PR. Well, CEO's did care about PR but the biggest problem generally was that CEO's were a little shy about coming out with the truth which was; "make me look good - let me see my name in lights..." And boards of directors just wanted to see their company names or brands in lights. And they certainly did not understand that smiling faces holding new products or sales charts did not amount to news.

The biggest problem in PR today is the total disconnect between what companies want from the media and what the media want from companies. With the result that the majority of PR people try very hard to do what the clients want and when there is no result in terms of media coverage, the client either fires them or just loses interest and cuts budgets.

In the advertising industry, many of the really big brands place their advertising in the hands of staff who can be five or six management levels below the executive.

I remember sitting in a board meeting of one of our biggest banks and being told that the CEO and chairman really did not have time to concern themselves with advertising or PR (unless there was a disaster and then they became interested very quickly and usually far too late.)

Nowadays, when boards meet, they want to know what sort of return on investment they are getting from all the money they are approving for advertising. They want to see results. They no longer buy in to the notion that you can't really measure advertising.

Which is why a lot of financial services brands, particularly those in the insurance industry, have moved away completely

from traditional advertising and into digital which they find accurately measurable.

When I do audits on marketing spend (mostly advertising, PR and sponsorship) I find that between 25% and 50% of budgets are completely wasted.

The problem is that right from the start ad agencies don't get together with clients to try and really understand each other at the highest level, and the same with PR.

My experience of advertising and PR from sitting on various boards is that neither are top of the agenda but way down. But, when the board gets to talk about advertising and PR then discussion immediately moves to "what are we getting for our money."

Some years ago, I developed a checklist for scoring brand effectiveness and have introduced this successfully in a number of companies. The beauty of it is that it gives both boards and marketing staff a clear idea in percentage terms of not only how efficient their advertising or PR is, but also shows the percentage risk in campaigns right at the planning stage.

Talk to me.

ABOUT CHRIS MOERDYK

Apart from being a corporate marketing analyst, advisor and media commentator, Chris Moerdyk is a former chairman of Bizcommunity. He was head of strategic planning and public affairs for BMW South Africa and spent 16 years in the creative and client service departments of ad agencies, ending up as resident director of Lindsay Smithers-FCB in KwaZulu-Natal. Email Chris on moerdykc@gmail.com and follow him on Twitter at [@chrismoerdyk](https://twitter.com/chrismoerdyk).

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