

It's digital or die!

By [Claire Herman](#)

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For many years we have been hearing this - if you don't keep up with digital advancements, you will be left behind and the fall will be rapid and brutal! If it hasn't happened already, how much longer can brands hold on before this becomes a reality?



Source: www.unsplash.com

I suspect not much longer – Covid-19 has sped up the world and if you have been ignoring this warning up until now, you and your brand will soon be left in the dust – irrelevant, forgettable and replaceable.

Develop “phygital” expertise in a digital world

From a client and brand perspective, you can't ignore the audience shifts and the levels of engagement that we are seeing in the digital space. In a recent McKinsey survey of global consumer sentiment (April 2021), the Covid-19 pandemic has shown to drive rapid adoption of digital channels across countries and industries. Even as the pandemic eases up and we “return to normal”, digital consumption post-Covid is far higher than pre-Covid by an average of 20%, especially amongst developing countries.

In addition, given digital's borderless nature, once exposed to best-in-class experiences and offerings, consumers won't settle for less – improved user experience, better offerings and increased security and privacy need to be a key focus for brands. Developing “phygital” expertise, using technology to bridge the digital world with the physical world to provide a unique interactive experience for consumers is key to success.



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Our media owner partners have an important role to play here – how do they develop and integrate their offline and online platforms seamlessly and evolve their offerings to accommodate this significant shift in the way people experience brands? They need to be flexible and continually re-evaluate their offerings to remain relevant and at the forefront of technological

change.

We have all seen what has happened in the print space, with very few publishers surviving the past year – let this be a stark reminder to the television, radio and out of home media owners that offerings such as live streaming, podcasts, social media and influencer integration will help keep them relevant in a constantly evolving space.

Digital integration is an imperative.

From a media agency perspective, digital integration is critical. The way that people consume media (and experience brands) is much more blurred, with seamless consumer journeys online and offline - often at the same time. The need to develop hybrid strategists and planners who fully understand the role of digital in the consumer journey and how it needs to work with traditional channels is an imperative. Here we need to ensure that a couple of things happen:

- Up-skilling our teams is critical, not only ensuring that “traditional” strategists and planners understand all things digital, but also that the digital teams understand the interplay between online platforms and offline platforms very well.
- Facilitate continual learning through mentorship programmes – the more informal training ground that will give practical on-the-job experience, with on-going and current real-life scenarios to “sink your teeth into”, should not be under-estimated.
- Actively work on breaking down the silos – I fully appreciate that we still need specialists in the digital space, especially due to the incredibly intense nature of these campaigns and the amount of attention needed to switch on, track and optimise, but the more we separate the disciplines, the more disjointed our campaigns will be, and consumers will notice it.



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This last point speaks to a general challenge in our industry as a whole – having separate agencies for different channels. I am always quite shocked to see pitches and tenders that still separate traditional and digital services. That isn't to say that it can't be done – we have many accounts that are split between agencies – it just requires a lot more time and energy to pull things together. At the end of the day, the speed to market will be compromised. Unless of course, deadlines can't be shifted, which just ends up putting a huge amount of pressure on the agency and client teams to deliver.

I would argue that streamlining service providers is a whole lot more efficient and effective, so in this world of “digital or die”, why is this still happening? I am generalising here, but in large part it is because there is a skills shortage, plus our systems and structures just haven't adapted. If we don't adapt and speed up our evolution, we will also end up being

irrelevant, forgettable and replaceable.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Claire Herman is the media operations manager at MediaShop

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