

Out of line

By [Mike Silver](#)

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I'm part of an agency that gets categorised as a 'below the line agency'. In fact, we sometimes go even 'further down' when we get referred to as 'an experiential' agency. We finally hit the basement when we get called 'an activations business'. All of this, of course, assumes a reliance on linear media consumption by modern consumers and we know how they love being told what to do. In 2019, when certain people are building walls, it's high time the ad industry let's go of similar security they place around drawing lines.



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Back in 2009, I came back from London-town. It was the age of the specialist, living politely in our cabins in the hull of the industry. The glamour boys dined at the captain's table, retiring at the end of the night for a cigar on their proverbial balconies. We all knew our place. When a little something called digital started to become more prominent, digital agencies were invited to have a seat on the upper decks.

Understanding the hyper-personalised, multi-layered, always-on existence

The industry quickly paid attention to this upward mobility. Traditional ATL agencies panicked and almost over-night became digital specialists, experts in leading their clients in how best to tell their 'fans' to have the best weekend on Facebook. Historically ATL was often a euphuism for "most important". No longer. The consumer would quickly integrate digital into more and more aspects of their lives. Digital agencies rightfully spotted this and began to lead creative campaigns, much to the annoyance of the old upper guard.

Where are we today? Well, it's no longer a race for one medium or another. It's a race rather for value; the ability to understand, entice and convert the modern consumer. It sounds same old, doesn't it? Well, it is, except it's not that linear assumption mentioned above. It's about understanding the (overused phrases alert!) hyper-personalised, multi-layered, always-on existence. You know that tangled mess of plugs and wires next to your bed that powers all your different devices? Well, that's a metaphor for how we each experience media in our own way.

Hard lines are vanishing

So now that hard lines are vanishing, it's really about coming up with the right GPS coordinates and then the best idea to navigate this entanglement to get to the source; the wallet! Who gives a continental what media they are made up of? "But

what about the equity driving from ATL they cried”? Well, no one said anything about that falling away. What’s most important is: does this media form a critical step of their experience journey?

Lastly, I was told a humorous story recently about one of our junior team members being confronted by an ECD of an old school traditional agency saying “brand experience isn’t real advertising. You should come and join a real agency”. In response, I’d advise caution when flying up above, too close to the sun. Like Icarus, you might quickly realise your wings are about as reliable as the lines you still swear by.

ABOUT MIKE SILVER

Mike Silver is the founder of Elevator, a brand experience agency now part of the Smollan Group. Mike has been working in the below-the-line and brand experience arena since 2000. Current clients include Lipton Ice Tea, Old Mutual and Pernod Ricard.

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