

The future DNA of digital agencies

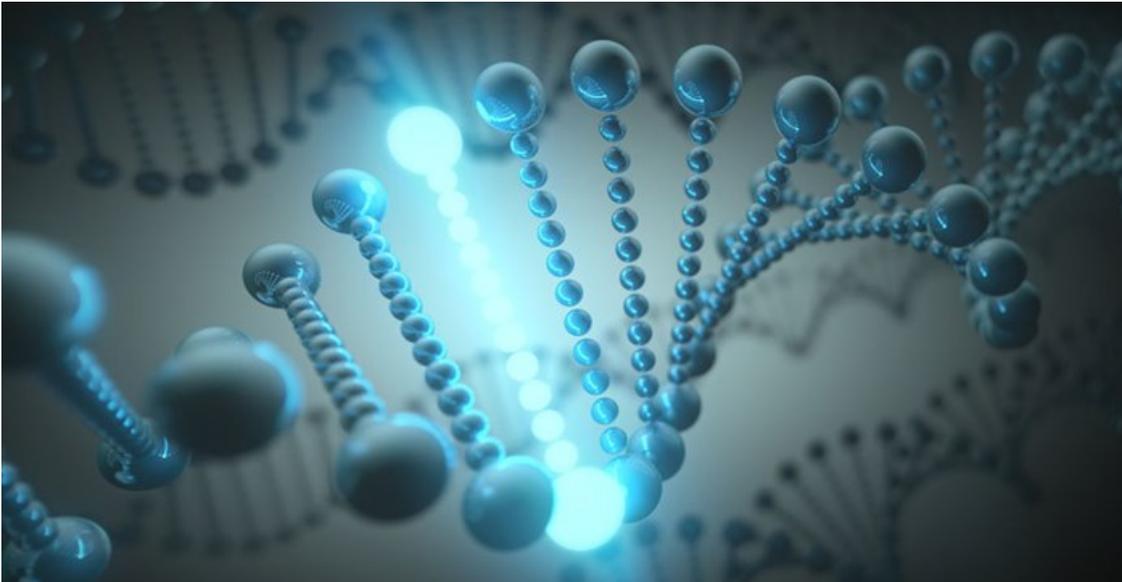
 By Lee Naik

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My Accenture Interactive team was fortunate enough to participate in this year's Loeries Week (Africa and the Middle East's premiere initiative for brand communication industry) in Durban, South Africa where my lead design & innovation [Marcel Rossouw](#) served as a judge in the Service Design category.

Aside from the awards, the Loeries is known for networking and the industry conversations they generate on everything from storytelling to stereotyping. So when Marcel told me about an impromptu discussion he had with agency heavyweights on the future of digital agencies, I was naturally curious.

During their conversation, it became clear that there was a strong awareness amongst industry leaders that agencies need to make some adjustments if they wish to be ahead of their game in serving a rapidly transforming market. In a world where the typical categories and disciplines are increasingly becoming blurred, there is a realisation amongst agencies that relying on their traditional approaches will no longer cut it.



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Today, beyond creative concept and content, emphasis is increasingly placed on finding the right mix of technology, tools and systems to deliver an integrated, individualised experience at scale and more importantly effective outcomes for businesses that want to remain relevant in an increasingly digital world.

This is the emerging reality - businesses are going to be asking a different set of questions when looking for digital agencies that are capable of delivering the transformational outcomes they seek:

Is your agency able to deliver against the business strategy?

There's a conversation happening right now in the agency world around measuring impact – how do you measure marketing ROI and ensure that the money you pour into building your brand is reaping rewards. But I think the focus is moving away from MROI and more onto top-line growth and real business impact (the stuff that the CxO's care about). And this space is not one that agencies naturally play well in.

In the digital economy, top-level strategy needs to drive marketing communications and customer experience efforts. Agencies need to be more proactive when it comes to being a business driver, and substantiate what they do.

Does your agency have the right technical capabilities?

Of course, it's no good having a partner that understands exactly what it needs to do to drive business growth, but no means of executing.

Sure, your agency might call itself a full service digital agency, but what are its competencies like when it comes to wearables, virtual reality and augmented reality? And other emerging technologies? Can it deliver across the range of touchpoints necessary to deliver a holistic experience?

This also extends to the methodologies used to execute. Does your agency use design thinking principles to create and roll out customer experiences? Does it engage in rapid prototyping? Does it have the analytics and data science skills in place to optimise what it does?

Businesses need outcomes and the agency's ability to execute will be key.

How are the teams structured?

Holistic experiences can only be created by holistic organisations, so it pays to look closely at just how integrated the people you work with are. Digital can't be ring-fenced, and traditional agencies with strictly delineated departments and siloed approach to workflows, simply aren't going to deliver integrated experiences.

On the other hand, those agencies with collaborative workplace models and flat hierarchical structures, can engage in the cross-functionality and interdisciplinary thinking needed for the new challenges of digital marketing.

Are they building the right skillsets?

The last question I'd ask of any agency is whether they're investing in the right skillsets, thus ensuring digital and design capabilities are embedded in their DNA. This means hiring generalists and polymaths instead of specialists, and training up existing workforces to have a broad pool of knowledge from which they can draw.

This new breed of employees can't be solely creatives either, but must demonstrate good amounts of business savvy and analytical thinking. The future will belong to those who can deftly straddle the line between consulting and creativity.

What do you think? How does the future of the marketing industry look like? And which companies – agencies, consulting, or a consolidation of both – do you believe are delivering on the above four criteria?

ABOUT LEE NAIK

Lee Naik is the CEO of TransUnion Africa.

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