

The Future of Strategy Report 2018 is released by Warc

Warc has released the results of its recent worldwide survey of senior strategists, highlighting their challenges and the impact the strategic function is having on the ever-changing marketing landscape.



Paula Bloodworth, brand strategy director, Wieden + Kennedy, London. Image supplied.

Based on a survey of more than 500 senior planners and strategists from around the world, Warc's second The Future of Strategy report provides both quantitative and qualitative data on the current state and future expectations of the industry. Key findings are:

Strategy teams set to expand as influence grows

More than half of strategists and planners expect their teams to grow over the next year, in an era when most feel that the influence of planning is growing both within their agency and among clients. Despite this optimism, there is a feeling that planners' skills are not always being applied most effectively, commonly attributed to the pace of change in the industry, and a client focus on tech rather than sustainable strategy.

Shekhar Deshpande, global planning director and strategy consulting director, J Walter Thompson, comments: "Senior clients want more strategy, perhaps to help them navigate the current marketing labyrinth, and become better marketers."

Budget cuts are threatening the 'craft skills' of strategy

Budget pressures are a clear obstacle for planners and strategists globally. The majority of respondents in all regions say client-side budget cuts are having an impact on strategy teams. This is leading to more short-term thinking by clients. Within agencies, it means lower budgets and planners who no longer feel able to spend time away from their desks.

Rob Campbell, chief strategy officer, Deutsch, observes: "Fewer and fewer planners spend much time in the real world, preferring to observe it from the comfort of a research report and Google search."

Competition for strategic services is growing

Marketing strategy is no longer just an agency specialism; increasingly strategy is being offered by consultancies, by tech and media firms, or by in-house client teams. That means greater competition for agency planning teams, but it may also

mean more varied career opportunities for individual planners.

Dan Burdett, chief marketing innovation, officer, EMEA, eBay, raises the question: "In a world where everybody is in some way competing with the guys in Seattle, how do we form coalitions that are going to benefit all of our businesses and help drive the industry forward?"

Upstream vs downstream remains a crucial divide

There is a tension between where planners want to be playing - on upstream business problems - and the reality of their day-to-day roles, with, in many cases, limited access to client data and heightened focus on tactical campaign elements. Reflecting the different visions of strategy in the industry and the potential need for reinvention in marketing services, several respondents argue that a link between strategy and execution remains vital.

Paula Bloodworth, brand strategy director, Wieden + Kennedy, London, comments: "With consumers moving and changing so quickly, we should be more executional in the way we plan and be nimble and flexible and adaptive."

Summing, David Tiltman, head of content, Warc, says: "Warc's 2018 Future of Strategy report reveals a discipline in flux. There is generally a feeling of optimism – of greater influence and growing teams. But that is undermined by the impact of client budget cuts and, more broadly, a sense that the planners and strategists are not thriving as they might in current agency structures, at a time when competition for strategic services is growing."

A preview of the Future of Strategy report was unveiled during Warc Day at this year's Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity in June, with insights shared by senior global strategists.

A sample of the report is available to download [here](#) and a free-to-join webinar discussing the findings of The Future of Strategy report will take place mid-August. The full report, including additional data, analysis and exclusive commentaries from senior survey participants, is available to Warc subscribers [here](#).

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