

Open-sourced collaboration

By [Haydn Townsend](#)

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My prediction for the coming year is that we'll start to see the growth of a trend that has already taken root overseas: open-sourced collaboration.



I'm talking about bringing different creative resources together: a model which is slowly starting to gain traction in South Africa. As it gathers momentum, it's going to reshape agencies' role in the industry.

In the past, the type of creative talent employed in agencies was mostly limited to above-the-line thinkers. However, brands now require solutions that go beyond print, TV and radio, and the type of creativity needed to engage with consumers in the current milieu means that we have to go beyond the traditional skills set, looking outside agency walls for that talent. For example, a successful activation may require input from artists, comedians, stage producers and scriptwriters rather than copywriters and art directors.

Shift in agency roles

Businesses around the world have already been bringing together disparate skills in this way for some time, but it's something new for agencies. Even so, it's a trend we'd best embrace swiftly; if not, we run the risk of disintermediation as clients approach creative practitioners directly.

The problem with this is that it poses a threat to brand consistency - without the agency acting as brand custodian, there is no one to ensure that a thread of cohesiveness runs through every brand execution. This means that, if agencies are to service their clients properly - and, more than this, ensure they remain relevant - they will have to find ways to bring other types of creativity into their pool.

But this, in turn, poses another challenge: most agencies won't be able to afford to keep these resources on their books permanently; not when only one in, say, 10 jobs require these specialist skills. So we'll have to find a way to manage freelance input. My prediction is, therefore, that agencies will come to rely less on in-house teams.

There are implications for clients, too: they have to learn to be comfortable dealing with creatives outside of the advertising world, people who are not brand-driven and who may balk at the idea of bending their creativity to suit the brand's agenda. So here, too, is a new role for the agency: we'll have to take the lead in a new relationship between client and creative, helping them understand each other's needs. Almost like an editor of content.

It's going to be a tricky balance, because these content producers don't like being told how to handle their creativity, especially if it's in the pursuit of commercial interests - they may see this as compromising their art.

Thus, for me, the biggest trend influencing the industry in the coming year is the shift in agency roles to becoming facilitators of external creativity.

ABOUT HAYDN TOWNSEND

Haydn Townsend is Chairman and CEO of Pangea Ultima. He's a qualified Chartered Marketer who has worked across the FMCG and advertising industry, including Ogilvy Johannesburg, where he reached Deputy MD and as Chief Strategy Officer at The Jupiter Drawing Room (TJDR). He was also CEO of sponsorship and activation company Sail Sport & Entertainment. From there he joined BLK OPS, an activation agency, which he has been a shareholder in since 2007, as Executive Chairman before taking on his current role.

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