

# Why Metrics Are Killing Creativity in Advertising

## Viewpoint: When Marketing Decisions Are Based on Numbers, We Lose the Desire to Be Creative

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Advertising Age, by Patrick Sarkissian

Published: March 04, 2010

Every once in a while, it happens. An epiphany -- fully materialized and smacking you between the eyes. Mine came to me on a recent evening while lounging on the couch, recovering from another day of doing the due-diligence dance with my beloved clients. And this one was a paradigm-shifter: Just as video killed the radio star, metrics are killing creativity.

When the economy takes a nosedive, marketers get nervous. And when sales follow suit, clients stop approving creative ideas and start staring at numbers. No client ever will tell you that the creative way you waded through the fantastically distorted worlds of online branding and social media is wrong. But they can be nothing short of sanctimonious when telling you the numbers don't support the creative. As a result, we have become absolute geniuses in the field of metrics.

Most agencies today are helping clients adapt new technology solutions to better connect with consumers, to use and develop powerful tools that deliver a whole new level of metric sophistication. But have we gone too far? Recently, I had a wicked battle with a client determined to let the numbers fully dictate a new creative strategy.

Thing is, you cannot truly quantify creativity. And in ever-increasing fashion, our clients' (and our own) rote dependence on the dusty world of metrics is exactly why creativity is going to hell. When marketing decisions are based on numbers, we lose completely the desire to "waste" time being creative. And heaven forbid we ever again just go with our gut feelings. Of course, I'm in no way advocating the death of metrics, just a different approach with creativity as the vanguard.

We are forgetting that brand preference is built on emotional connections. No measurement tool is going to change that. Period. What works are creative and strategic communications that seamlessly engage and interact with the target audience. Most important, it's big, new ideas -- not crunched numbers -- that remain in a person's mind long after the initial experience. They are what really make a brand stick with the consumer for current and future recall, and numerous case-studies prove it.

Malcolm Gladwell, describing his theory of "stickiness" in advertising, recounts that some four decades ago "Legendary" Les Wunderman, fearing the loss of long-time client Columbia House Records, sparked a death match with mighty McCann Erickson. McCann, pointing at its sophisticated research and resultant numbers, ran a big, expensive prime-time wash that garnered a 19.5% increase in response to Columbia's pitch. Meanwhile, Wunderman came up with a wildly cheesy gold box/treasure hunt/giveaway deal. But he knew his idea both would connect and engage

his target. Well, Wunderman delivered a whopping 80% increase in the markets he pursued -- totally annihilating McCann's numbers.

Undoubtedly it will take a leap of faith to firmly challenge current client methodology. To land safely, we will have to take advantage of uncrowded fields. Social media savvy is not the entire answer. It's time again for big creative ideas; to challenge convention and see what creativity can do for your brand.

Delivering a unique brand positioning is becoming an ever-tougher proposition as marketers continue to rely on metrics. Perhaps the fastest way out of this rut, however, is to always remember that great ideas don't come from numbers -- but they sure as hell can deliver better ones for your clients.

*About the Author*

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