

The reformed art of client service in digital

By [Ashley Watts](#), issued by [Dentsu](#)

5 Jul 2017

The reality is that we used to live in a world where clients just wanted digital, they were not sure what it was, but everyone had it, so they wanted it too. Today, we sit in a very different space, where our clients know the landscape of digital advertising and the benefits thereof, so we, as digital agencies, need to be able to constantly adapt the way in which we work.



This in turn affects the way we approach our clients, or maintain long standing relationships. No longer are we in the days of upskilling clients as to what digital is, and our client service teams are moving away from being the digital suppliers to becoming partners and collaborating with our clients in the digital space.

From a South African perspective, this is something that is great to see, as it is evident that skill-set and opportunities available in digital advertising are indeed growing, it does however come with its own set of challenges.

1. Shifting the client service mind-set

No longer are your client service teams seen as just the middle men, or project managers or the 'number' people. Whilst this is extremely positive, traditional agencies are going to need to shift the mind-set of client service to not just sell, but to entrench themselves further into understanding digital. The Creative Director, Technical Director and Strategist cannot always save them, it is down to the client service team to become client strategists themselves, which requires them to know everything about their agencies capabilities and deliverables.

2. Everyone is a digital marketer

As more and more people create and manage their own Facebook pages, they think that this makes them specialists in the industry. This is definitely not the case, but it does make it exceptionally hard for digital agencies to compete against what



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we call “small fries” thanks to their extremely low rates. Inevitably we end up securing the business when the client realises their lack of experience and poor quality delivery. This is why client service teams need to be able to capture agency experience and core capabilities, not by what is on a piece of paper, but by actually having that specific skill-set themselves, in order to sell the agency against competitors.

3. Training is expensive

Digital agencies need to invest money and training into their client service teams. There is no point in them sitting in a new business meeting stating “I will get back to you on that” – they need to have confidence when walking into a meeting, knowing they already have all the answers. The only way to instil this confidence is by giving them the adequate training.

Robert Solomon once said, “In new business pitches, clients often claim to seek a relationship with the agency, yet select the winner based on which shop presented the work they liked best. Conversely, with existing accounts, clients often say that it is the work that matters, yet fire the agency because of a breakdown in relationship.” It is evident that the core of service delivery is work and relationships, but how can you create a relationship if your client service team do not understand the work?

There will never be an exact science or formula to client servicing, as every client has different needs and different temperaments, the one thing that will never change is that a client will not let go of an agency they trust! Who is at the forefront of your client relationship? Client service.

Something we like to take credit for at Isobar South Africa is giving our client service teams just that, and we follow a very simple process:

1. Teach
2. Train
3. Upskill
4. Give responsibility
5. Lend a hand
6. Push passion
7. Instil culture
8. Collaborate

No longer should you hear the words, “Why is client service in this brainstorm?” Actually, no longer should you hear the words, “Why is this person in our meeting?” Your studio should be able to client service and your client service team should be able to ideate, and that is just how the cookie crumbles.

I will end this off with another quote from Robert Solomon, “We are smarter together than we are alone.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ashley Watts heads up the business at Isobar South Africa as Operations Director. On a daily basis, he deals with interactions on all business levels for campaign management, project management, billings, team and client support, production, client service team management as well as helping to find new business. It's not a job for the faint of heart, and Ashley knows just how to pull it off without seemingly breaking a sweat. His favourite saying, "You are only as good as the team below you", rings true in Isobar - the positive attitudes and the work of his team is reflected in his own dedication. Connect with Ashley: LinkedIn: [\[\[https://www.linkedin.com/in/ashleyalanwatts/\]\]](https://www.linkedin.com/in/ashleyalanwatts/) Twitter: [\[\[https://twitter.com/SoNC_INKS\]\]](https://twitter.com/SoNC_INKS) Facebook: [\[\[https://www.facebook.com/AshleyW.SoNC\]\]](https://www.facebook.com/AshleyW.SoNC)

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