

# What will the future agency look like? (part I)

 By [Abey Mkgwatsane](#)

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The world is in flux: American politicians have played 'who blinks first' and arrogantly slid the world into economic turmoil; the euro is facing possible collapse; and all indications are that we're heading for another recession before even recovering from the last one. Added to this, technology continues to change the way people interact every day. It is in this context that I ask: "What will the future agency look like?"

In answering this question, one must first look at what's going on in the client environment because agencies exist only to service their clients and ensure the sustainable growth of the brands they oversee.

## The age of parity and technology

Other than economic uncertainty, which has already been extensively written about, there are two other major forces that are throwing the clients world into a spin.

The first is that there is parity everywhere; parity of product, price and distribution. "[W]ithin arm's reach of desire," first spoken in 1923 by the then president of Coca-Cola, Robert Woodruff, is no longer just the preserve of Coca-Cola; globalisation has made that apply to all products.

This is actually good news, as in this new world order, the positioning of a brand in consumers' minds is the predominant differentiator left to brand owners. That's a space where marketing practice can thrive.

The second force is the ever-increasing pace of technological innovation that is rapidly changing the way consumers engage.

### Plethora of new products, apps

There is a plethora of new products and applications that were not around not so long ago (smart TVs, tablets, smartphones, Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Instagram etc). It's difficult to imagine that Facebook wasn't around seven years ago, Twitter six years ago and the iPad, less than two years ago.

Technological change is happening at such a pace that it's almost impossible to plan how to use these channels to effectively engage with consumers. This pace of technological innovation is only going to accelerate.

Back in the day, marketers used to promote their products through TV, radio, outdoor and print - the traditional above-the-

line channels. Today a brand owner can make a song, create an experience, launch an app, sponsor a team and many other activities to engage its target market. There is no longer a template.

How does this change the client environment?

## Disconnect

Marketing as a business input becomes more important than ever. More resources are being invested in marketing as the final frontier of differentiation, which means that marketing as a profession is going to become a more critical business function. [Gillian Rightford](#) elaborates on this topic in her Bizcommunity article "[The great business/marketing/advertising disconnect](#)". Finally, marketing will be taken more seriously

Strategic skill will remain paramount. In this complex, ever-changing world where communication media fragment every day, well-thought-through and -executed brand strategy is going to become absolutely critical. No longer can marketers hide behind an expensive ad with high reach. You simply will not be able to spend your way out of an ineffective strategy or mistake omnipresence for strategy.

Also, just being present on a social network platform such as Facebook, doesn't mean you have a social media strategy - that's the fad today. Check out Intel's "[Museum of Me](#)" Facebook app for a clue on how social media can be leveraged to drive brand proposition.

Also, the client environment is going to require more depth of skill and experience across communication platforms. Along with the traditional skills such as research and strategy, clients will tap into a new breed of resources that bring digital, mobile and cultural anthropological depth to their business.

## Less obvious skills

Digital and mobile skills are obvious, cultural anthropologists less so; these are individuals who are so close to the pulse of their communities that they are able to provide marketers with a more instant source code of consumer behavior. These skills are outsourced at the moment but they will become so important that they will soon be a part of the client's permanent payroll.

Additionally, due to the growing relevance of social media, in the near future you are not only going to have brand or campaign managers, you are going to have network managers: individuals whose job it is to manage the virtual consumer network.

Those are the implications for the client environment. How does this relate to the agency environment? [Part II](#) looks at how the agency will change.

*Part II hyperlink added at 1.28pm on 5 September 2011.*

## ABOUT ABEY MOKGWATSANE

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