

Frank talk: Rethinking value in agency-client relationships

By [Lynn Madeley](#), issued by [Havas Johannesburg](#)

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Frankly, the current way of working between marketing agencies and clients is in a state of flux and we are not sure what's coming next. We have seen this before, but this time it's different. We know that for marketing agencies, adding value is no longer a price nor capability consideration - those are basics that should always be right. It's now about genuinely understanding the way people are consuming information and adopting a structure that enables this understanding. Agencies who are in that state of mind are the perfect partners, poised to help clients get 'fluent in tomorrow' and win for the future.



Clients' need for more value to cushion their businesses through the current economic uncertainty is the reason behind the changing way of working. From the lead agency model to the full service agency and the latest way of working, the best of breed; we are all looking into agency-client relationships with fine-tooth combs. We know that we need a bit of tension to push ourselves to deliver great work. We also know that we don't have much time for egos anymore – managing them is time-consuming and draining. So where does that leave us? What is the future?

Rather than creating silos or finding a jack of all trades, at Havas we believe the future lies in creating a brains trust. The brains trust brings together different areas of expertise into one core team, with supporting teams that project manage the execution of ideas. It is a creative collective of specialists. From brand and communication strategists, digitally savvy people, content developers, PR specialists to TV smart people. Everyone works together to come up with media-agnostic ideas that help grow brands across the gambit of client needs to meet set business objectives.

The problem with the brains trust is that it can be expensive. You have highly paid resources doubling up, and the question is, are clients prepared to pay for this, particularly at a time when budgets are being cut and economic uncertainty looms? In all honesty, some of them are and some are not. But that can be managed. What we do know is that, clients are more willing to pay a premium for good thinking than they are for the people who facilitate processes. It's the thinking that provides value and uplifts their business. That is not to undermine the people that action the thinking, they are critical too, but that is not the point of this discussion.

Having great thinking in one room, regularly working on client business may increase pressure to perform, particularly if people come from different businesses. We end up with a mini-pitch in every single brief; and maybe that's not so bad. Perhaps that's the edge needed to push ourselves and our clients to the next level. However, is this sustainable for teams, energy-wise? It's an interesting development for leaders of agencies. The approach to talent management has changed to manage this. We make sure that we don't have the same people working at the same pressure at the same time. Otherwise exhaustion sets in. We essentially periodise people the same way athletes rest and work, to ensure quality of work. Playing only one A-Team will work if you are buying them pizzas every night for a week, but after week three that wears a bit thin.

The current uncertainty in the global socio-economic landscape presents us with the opportunity to rethink our way of working. Consumers are at the most dynamic we have ever experienced, budgets are much smaller, yet business KPIs are more demanding and more specific. Our way of working needs to change to one that guarantees a shared value for both the client and the agency business. The brains trust approach will get us closer to that sweet spot.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lynn Madeley is the CEO of Havas Southern Africa and leads a team of 80 marketing and communications specialists working on a wide range of brands in Southern Africa and beyond. She's worked for the likes of Saatchi & Saatchi in London and Hong Kong, Ogilvy in Botswana, and in South Africa was with Lowe before she joined Havas, previously known as Euro RSCG South Africa, to run their Southern African operation in 2007. She believes in fulfilling potential, everyone's, from people who work at Havas, to the brands, companies and products they work with. She is a member of the Advertising and Communications Association, Remuneration Committee and also sits on the appeals panel of the Advertising Standards Authority.

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