

# Feedback from the AdForum Global Summit

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The Ad Forum Global Summit - the third virtual one that has been held - took place over six days with morning and afternoon sessions timed so that colleagues in the US, Europe, Africa and Asia could join in with minimal difficulty from a time perspective.



The Summits have been highly effective in keeping us connected as global pitch consultants and also the agencies who have participated. It has been very interesting to see which agencies have really thrived during the pandemic and the steps that they have taken as businesses in order to grow and prosper.

This Summit was more about that business aspect as well as the typical reviews and case studies of client work. So this report looks at those key highlights from global agency leaders. Of the 10 agencies and agency groups we met per the agenda above, here are some key findings:

## **WPP – Mark Read**

Just like 12 months ago, Mark Read was at the start of this Summit – though this time he was live and could report back on what has happened within WPP in the past 12 months. Some key points:

- The value of saying “No” to unreasonable requests so as not to be overwhelmed

- A predicted downturn in profits of 30% for 2020 turned out not to be nearly as bad
- 2021 – has bounced back well
- Mark has been most surprised by how well they have managed
- WPP has grown
- They have saved on costs – travel, rentals, operating costs
- They won more new business in 2020 – up by 40% on the previous year
- And they learned more about each other in the company – the culture of WPP has been strengthened through the pandemic

And my favourite of his comments: “By the time we get back to normal, we will have forgotten what normal is”.

Looking forward:

- Read said that he has seen more of his clients than before as they are more accessible – he wants to continue with this
- Clients are now questioning if they have the right agency partners in place in order to grow
- WPP predicts strong growth for 2021 and 2022
- VMLY&R has been the best performing agency in the group
- Biggest account wins in the past two years have been integrated and using a few of the agencies in the group
- WPP are keen to get their people back into the offices – but not necessarily five days a week
- Would like to see much clearer objectives in pitch processes
- Is committed to achieving the goal of making WPP the most creative company on earth – along with creative partner Rob Reilly

Altogether an excellent session to boost the Summit start.

### **Ogilvy – Andy Main Global CEO and Devika Bulchandani CEO of North America**

Main, as the recently appointed global CEO commented that his first impressions last year were that Ogilvy had “more P/L’s than people” with a structure that was too complex.

They have restructured the agency group into five businesses:

- Growth and innovation
- Public relations
- Advertising – ABC – advertising, brand and content
- Health
- Experience

Agency leaders within the group are now able to focus on these businesses while the finance team in the background focus on the nitty gritty of financial management. New business gains have been significant in the past 12 months and they have also noticed that 59% of their clients in the group work with two or more of the businesses of the five identified above. The “intersection” of these is where the magic is happening.

- Ogilvy spoke of Intersection rather than Integration.
- Intersection brings impact – whereas “integration is the enemy of creativity”
- Intersection frees up other thinking

We were to hear the word “intersection” several times throughout the Summit. In fact, it became the word of the Summit this year.

Several excellent case studies demonstrating the most recent work from the various businesses were shown to us in order to prove the results of this restructuring for the various client brands. We concluded that the session with Ogilvy was probably the best in more than 13 years of attending this Summit.

### **MSQ Group**

This was interesting as it is a new holding company with nine specialist agencies, in digital and tech mainly, and their model is to build a multi-discipline system around a client’s needs. They have 13 global offices, 855 staff and 250 clients with a revenue of 100 million pounds Sterling in 2020. Forty percent of that revenue is derived from B2B marketing, making them quite unusual among the larger groups. Some great work from Tetrapak, Chanel and Lifebuoy illustrated their approach and success. They don’t have representation yet in Africa – but no doubt this will be part of their growth.

### **Accenture Interactive**

Jon Wilkins and his leadership team built on what they shared with us at the NYC summit of 12 months ago. Since then, they shared with us what has accelerated the growth of this ever burgeoning global agency (not a holding company) which celebrates its 12th anniversary this year.

They observe that – for the first time ever - consumers are buying brands based on experience rather than just quality and price. They believe that the formula for growth and relevance is to become a Business of Experience (BX).

They revealed that Jaguar Land Rover and their internal agency Spark 44 are now part of Accenture Interactive globally – in South Africa too – and that personalised customer experience with creativity and technology at the core will be their offering.

Another recent acquisition is Creative Drive – a creative content, long form, short form content, commercials business with 150 sites/studios all over the world. We heard from the founder of Creative Drive that the reason they wanted to be acquired by Accenture Interactive was for their transformational skills. This acquisition which took place in August 2020 has created the perfect combination of makers and doers.

Other than those four highlights, we were updated by some of the world’s leading agencies such as DDB, McCann Worldgroup and Dentsu, and some interesting independents such as The Richards Group and Giant Spoon.

We probably have on hand about 20 superb and recent case studies, and we will be sharing these at our forthcoming summit feedback session to agencies and marketers at the end of June.

### **Key learnings**

- How agency healthcare divisions and skills have expanded enormously in the past 12 months
- How agencies have been productive and focused in the past 12 months
- And there is a degree of greater optimism and growth as the world starts to return so more in-person contact
- That agencies and consultants are “virtual weary” and while the importance of staying connected cannot be over emphasised – with the Summit succeeding in doing that – we sense that both agencies and consultants prefer the intimacy and confidentiality of the in-person Summit format.

Next stop London Summit in November 2021.

## ABOUT JOHANNA MCDOWELL

MD of the Independent Agency Search and Selection Company (IAS), and partner in Scopen Africa, with a background that includes being on both the agency and the client side of the fence, Johanna McDowell is well-placed to offer commentary on marketing and advertising in the South African and international contexts. She built her career in marketing and advertising since 1974, holding directorship in both SA and British advertising agencies. She was MD of Grey Phillips Advertising in 1988.  
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