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# The undeniable value of integration

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7–9 minutes

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*Kamran Asghar, Co-founder and CEO of Crossmedia, explains the benefits to the bottom line of integrating all elements of campaign conception, management and measurement.*

The value of integration in marketing is undeniable and multifaceted. Yet, to the detriment of client and agency effectiveness across the globe, it is not currently the industry norm. Distilling this value takes constant rigor and steadfast commitment, but the payoff is worth it.

Integration can mean different things to different stakeholders and skillsets in the industry. From an integrated brief to holistic measurement, there are many opportunities in the complex marketing ecosystem to enhance business outcomes for our clients. In this article, I highlight the areas that should be viewed as table stakes in a modern and optimal client/agency relationship. And when they all happen in concert, the benefits are gainfully synergistic.

To fully realize these benefits, it takes unequivocal buy-in from all involved and a willingness to meaningfully share, learn and action rooted in a shared process and spirit. It's not enough to simply sing from the same hymn sheet, participants must write and perform the music together.

## **Integrating brand and performance**

The very basis of our philosophy “All media is performance media” is integration, because at the heart of this statement, every media channel, touchpoint, and tactic is integrated to deliver optimal results. It is not uncommon to see tactics, campaigns, or even channels managed in silos, and as a result, brands and clients find themselves perplexed, looking at engagement metrics separately from brand awareness metrics to conversion metrics. Managing brand and performance separately prevents you from extracting the full potential of your budget, and in addition, causes confusion with stakeholders looking at completely different metrics that are often poorly reconciled.

To maintain balance between brand and performance, all tactics in-market must be looked at holistically. The marginal contribution of each tactic must be computed towards its primary outcome (brand awareness, engagement, or conversion) followed by its “lift” on the secondary outcome (usually revenue or conversion). This gives clients a basis to understand the incremental return of every dollar applied towards brand awareness or performance. Using these marginal return numbers, different initiatives are stacked into a holistic plan, all collectively driving outcomes.

An example of such an integration can be seen in our work for a very large bank, where we combined upper-funnel and lower-funnel campaigns into a holistic mix and optimized the “yield”, generating improvements such as 100%+ conversion lift from certain campaigns to -20% lower cost per acquisition metrics in other campaigns.

### **Single sources of truth: Data and measurement**

One of the biggest challenges with understanding marketing effectiveness is disintegrated platform-focused measurement that risks duplication of credit, false positives, and a total blind spot for upper funnel impact. Integrating accountability to business value

through the marketing funnel is a CMO's north star.

For business outcome-oriented clients in both the B2C and B2B spaces, we mandate the implementation of either multi-touch attribution (MTA) or agile impact modeling (AIM) measurement systems that unite the marketing funnel towards a single (or single set) of KPIs.

For example, this could be the sales funnel stages for a B2B client who is looking to understand how *all* media drives not only marketing qualified lead (MQL) volume but quality leads that convert.

One of the biggest fallacies uncovered time and again is that only lower-funnel media drives impact. Brand media drives significant business impact, and often as efficiently as lower funnel. For an unabated view and understanding of performance, the output of holistic models should be integrated into incumbent dashboard environments. Data should be accessible with a recency and granularity that our traders can implement for optimizations within the media platforms and engines. With this process in place, outputs and learnings become less academic and more part of a fine-tuned, day-to-day operationalization.

For a large car rental firm, we set up an enterprise-grade accountability platform integrating all parts of the marketing funnel linked to global customer transactions. With this foundation in place, our client became confident in making a significant eight-figure investment in brand media, no small feat for a brand traditionally “hooked” on bottom funnel-only media and metrics for almost a decade. This took time and education across the marketing organisation but was well worth it. As a result, we were able to optimize a full-funnel mix to a single business outcome KPI (new customer ROI) leading to a record 10-straight quarters of business growth, with double-digit growth in DTC acquisitions and

45% growth in media-attributed revenue from “new to brand” customers.

## **Inter-agency integration**

Clients ultimately decide their agency roster. Some crave a one-stop, “integrated” agency that has media and creative services under one roof. Others prefer picking two, separately owned entities that are experts in their respective fields. When implied compensation efficiencies are prioritized, clients may seek a single holding company selection that brings together two or more agencies that share an office building and stock ticker.

None of these options guarantee seamless integration, a process and way of working that must be mandated by the client and adopted in earnest by all agencies (and individuals) involved. True inter-agency integration lives and thrives in action and accountability, not in a brochure.

In worst-case scenarios (which are common in the industry) media and creative agencies tend to work independently until they absolutely need to engage. Sometimes it’s the media agency handing off a media plan with a list of creative assets for the creative agency to develop. Sometimes the media folks don’t see the strategy or creative until the media plan has been approved. This behavior all but guarantees suboptimal results.

When creative and media are truly integrated, it’s hard to tell where one ends and the other begins. Regardless of remit, all involved must work together in concert towards the same business outcomes, same brief, same target(s), same data, same performance metrics, same outcomes, etc.

Inter-agency integration brings value in many ways. Through the sharing of learnings and insights before, during and after a campaign. Over time, the realization of shared tools and resources

can create cost efficiencies for the client.

For a retail client with multiple agencies on the roster (media, creative, PR, multicultural, experiential), we proposed, implemented, and led a cohesive inter-agency team (IAT) to ensure integration across the board. With all entities working lockstep, performance metrics across core KPIs improved across the board, due largely to three actionable, data-fueled insights that were established early in the process and carried through to activation and optimization.

## **Closing**

True commitment to marketing integration increases effectiveness, creates efficiencies, and ultimately presents purposeful and higher-quality consumer experiences. Reaping the benefits requires the proper process, buy-in and rigor to be in place from day one and championed by the client. With all entities rallying around common goals and visions, the results will speak for themselves.