



# Back to a Future... Where Relationships Matter

What did we learn from the recent ANA Agency Financial Management conference?

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“We are back!” This is the sentiment shared by all attendees of the Association of National Advertisers’ (ANA) Advertising Financial Management conference held in Phoenix, AZ. But as everyone celebrated the ability to meet in person for the first time in a while, the question overshadowing the event was: “We are back, but...what are we coming back to? Has the world of agencies, marketing procurement, financial management and client/agency relations fundamentally changed? How can we best prepare ourselves for what is to come next?” The annual ANA AFM conference would give us a glimpse as to what is to come with words of inspiration and wisdom from industry leaders, movers and shakers.

Allow me to share my take-aways:

## Desperately Human

It was the ANA’s second in-person event this year, so attendees were in good hands. The ANA thoughtfully added safety precautions, setting up seating and media socially distanced

during the entire conference and allowing attendees to indicate on their badge how comfortable they were to be approached (green for totally comfortable, yellow for moderately comfortable and red for not comfortable). They even gathered input from attendees prior to the event. The findings? 83% wanted to see the mask policy optional, and 70% did not feel the need to “social distance” from fellow attendees at the conference. Although, it is important to state that 100% of respondents were fully vaccinated. About 120 people (roughly 25% of full attendance) were brave enough to travel to join in person, therefore it was predominantly virtual for most attendees.

Most speakers spoke on stage, but a few joined via conference call, reminding us that we are still in transition mode. Many advertisers and industry colleagues I spoke to prior to the event indicated that business travel was not yet allowed (or travel budgets were still non-existent). So a few large roadblocks were preventing the usual crowd from gathering at this superb and traditionally well-attended annual conference. It did not take long, however, to realize how much we all missed human connections and the importance of relationships – business partnerships and friendships being formed or nurtured during industry events. Coffee breaks, cocktail receptions, dinners and late-hour drinks with colleagues and friends were the opportunity to celebrate each other...and the return to some type of normality.

## Effective Financial Management is Key to Growth

A look at the agenda quickly set the stage for what’s top of mind in the industry: sustained growth can only be achieved through strengthened partnerships, the efficient use of talent and resources, and thoughtful financial management. Bob Liodice, the ANA’s CEO, started his opening remarks with words of encouragement, stating that the world will never be the same again...but better. He cited many of the ANA’s initiatives in hot topic areas like brand value and safety, diversity and inclusion, measurement (even cross-media), programmatic media and connected TV, martech, privacy and addressability.

The event allowed both clients and agencies to share their opinion of what drives growth, ranging from creativity, trade partnerships, agency value-creation, ROI tracking and measurement, media optimization and diversity. The recent Global CMO at General Mills, Ivan Pollard, showed how to truly tap into the value agencies create for their clients. The CMO of Banner Health, Alexandra Morehouse, walked us through the way to build the right ROI model and get c-suite buy-in and support. Agency insider, Rick Brook, showed the audience how to strategically approach pricing negotiations to reach a win-win outcome. Bill Afonso, Johannes Leonardo’s CFO, challenged the audience to rethink the true value of

creativity and consider what a new creative economy would look like. Industry experts Mary Ann Brennan, J. Francisco Escobar and BBDO’s Amani Brown debated how to make the 4Ps (People, Process, Productivity, Profitability) work harder in client/agency relationships. Sherry Ulsh, who oversees Indirect Sourcing at The Hershey Company, shared the evolving role of procurement to enhance value contribution. Simona Rabsatt Butler, Sr. Director Global Sourcing at Visa, spoke with ANA’s Bill Duggan about the importance of supplier diversity in advertising and how procurement should step up to play a bigger role in driving this agenda.

## New Complexities Require New Skills

Advertising reached a new level of complexity in recent years, fueled by digital innovation and new technology such as Machine Learning, Artificial Intelligence (AI) or advanced analytics, but also by the depths of expertise and skills required, even in traditional areas like media, production or spend management. To operationalize advertising and marketing into growth drivers, advertisers will need new skillsets.

A couple of sessions are worth highlighting. Jay Pattisall, Principal Analyst at Forrester Research, invited us to think outside the box about a new economic model resulting from the impact of AI and Automation. The focus was on how agencies operate or handle an “intelligent creativity process,” and how we must account for technology services, IP and people in future compensation models. Julie Cary, Chief Brand & Innovation Officer at Scottsdale-HQ Massage Envy, discussed how advanced analytics can dynamically drive marketing ROI. PwC and Method Media Intelligence gave us valuable advice on how to deal with proper measurement in a cookie-less world. KPMG’s Mitchell Caplan highlighted the importance of using

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data and analytics for more robust spend management. Jillian Gibbs, global production tsar and APR's CEO, articulated how content production models should work post-COVID and what successful companies must do to efficiently tackle production.

## Relationship Building to Drive ROI



Sebastien Slek, Executive Director Global Sourcing Marketing for WarnerMedia – the powerful portfolio of iconic entertainment, news, and sports brands which includes CNN, HBO and more – presented a successful marketing agency program and tool the brand launched companywide to strengthen its partnership with a curated list of their key creative, social, and publicity agencies. The presentation, titled

“The One Where Partnerships Are Strengthened,” which played off the American sitcom *Friends*, stressed how an enterprise-wide roster tool, even in a highly decentralized organization, can turn into a win-win program for preferred agencies and internal marketing teams. Sebastien concluded his presentation with a compelling call to action: “Investing in your agency partnership is the most effective way to drive long-term ROI.”

Relationship building was indeed a key theme throughout the event, as agencies, clients and suppliers came together in Phoenix to make a statement: a healthy industry is not only one that is willing to work together during difficult times but one where in-person relationships are valued and flourish as well.

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*“Investing in your agency partnership is the most effective way to drive long-term ROI.”*

SEBASTIEN SLEK

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Bruno Gralpois is the co-founder of Agency Mania Solutions, a premier service and technology firm specialized in helping companies realize the transformational value of managed partnerships. Bruno is the author of best-seller “Agency Mania” and the former chair of the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) Client/Agency Committee and a faculty member of the ANA School of Marketing.

Our clients’ continued accomplishments result from cutting-edge practices in the area of agency management. See how stronger relationships contribute to better marketing.

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