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**NETWORK
CREATIVITY**
**A NEW MODEL FOR
GLOBAL CREATIVITY
WITHIN GLOBAL
AGENCY NETWORKS**

**WILLIAM CHARNOCK
JWT STRATEGIC PLANNING NYC**

WHAT IS WRONG WITH GLOBAL CREATIVITY?

As the world gets smaller, agencies get bigger

The unfortunate truth is that as clients rush to consolidate and agencies restructure to serve them, creativity seems to get lost in the reshuffle. In these negotiations much effort is focused on the financials of the deal. Our industry needs to put as much focus on creativity as we put into the spreadsheet calculations.

The importance of a distribution network

Global agency networks know a network is valuable in securing these global relationships. "There are just some things you can't do globally without a well-functioning global network." A network is essential for distributing creative ideas to every corner of the world. It functions to manage local clients and to translate and adapt the creative work to be as relevant and meaningful as possible in each individual market.

Lowered creative expectations

Given the complexities of global creativity and the number of people involved in the creative process, it is not surprising that most agencies shift their creative expectations on global accounts (by global accounts we mean accounts for which there is a single global agency relationship). There is no doubt that every agency wants to do the best work possible. However, the expectations of what is possible are often significantly lower than for smaller local clients.

It is time to change these expectations. Our biggest global clients should be doing our best and most creative work.

An agency's creative reputation depends on this. There is no agency in the world with a strong creative reputation that is not delivering great creative to its biggest clients.

GLOBAL CREATIVITY IS...

For most of us, a process

Speaking from a planning perspective, the typical approach is for the “global planning team” to set up global research. We execute planning in exactly the same way we handle local clients, except on a global scale.

The global team sets out to understand every market and every aspect of the problem in a very limited time...market audits, focus groups, market segmentation, customer segmentation, consumer tracking, brand tracking, competitive reports, competitor segmentation. The planners sit endlessly in darkened research facilities listening to translated consumer commentary of what works and does not work from a consumer perspective. Planners paw over PowerPoint presentations trying to understand the competition so they can identify what works and what does not work from a competitive perspective. The goal: to identify what can and cannot work globally.

We create a culture of can't

The output of our process is invariably a list of reasons why creative ideas cannot work (a list of global considerations only the global team is aware of and can solve for).

The victims of this process are the central creative teams who are fed a list of impossible demands. *“No humor, it will not be understood in Germany”; “No use of language”; “It will not translate”; “No use of sports”; “No reference to numbers, as they have religious meaning”; “Colors too have secret meanings”; “Hand signals are out, as are animals”; “No sex, it will never be allowed on the US networks.”*



Anything people feel passionate about is deemed out of bounds for global creativity.

AN IMAGINATION NETWORK

So many minds, so little creativity

The global output of our industry reinforces the perception that the clients who spend the most on advertising (and invest the most in our industry) end up with the worst of our output. In contrast, the smallest accounts with the smallest budgets seem to get our best work. This makes no sense. With so many different minds focused on the problems of a large global brand within such a large global network, we should be achieving higher levels of creativity, not lower.

I do not believe it is the quality of the minds on the problems or a crisis of creativity within the big networks or a problem of bad clients. The problem is a broken process that allows us to get wrapped up in our own politics and lose sight of the ultimate goal: **the best work possible for our best and biggest clients.**

In 2005 we saw more global brands winning awards at Cannes than we have seen in recent years, but not one of them was for a campaign created globally. Global agency networks win as many, if not more, awards than small local boutique agencies. The creativity is there.

As a discipline, planning has to ask itself some hard questions: Are we inspiring and facilitating innovation and risk-taking? Or are we obsessed with briefs and a strategic process that is pushing global brands to safe, lowest-common-denominator advertising?

“CENTER OF EXCELLENCE” OR “NETWORK EXCELLENCE”

The end of “Think global, act local”

For over a decade this has been the mantra of global advertising. It may have been the right idea for its time, when globalization was about exportation and distribution. However, as we enter an era where instant global communications are the norm, it seems to be the biggest waste of everyone’s time.

“Thinking globally” justifies central teams responsible for the “big picture.” These teams identify a set of communication goals that only centrally created creative could address. These goals are often totally detached from the specific needs of individual markets and the sharp edges that fuel creativity.

“Acting locally” on the other hand, justifies agencies using their local counterparts as unthinking executors of global ideas. “Acting locally” means not questioning the global guidelines, not thinking creatively and not thinking about the specifics of your particular market.

Local creativity is global creativity

The Internet and global communications have eroded the boundaries between local and global to the point where everything we create exists on a global stage. Whether we like it or not, advertising agencies are no longer in charge of what gets distributed to where—the consumer is. Good ideas get distributed. Bad ideas get left behind. Global ideas are no longer the ones designated global by a global team; they are the ideas that have broad appeal and touch a nerve with consumers in many parts of the world. Global ideas are simply the best ideas in the world that rise to the top and get circulated and distributed by the people who consume them. Global ideas are local ideas with world class potential.

What a wonderful way to think about creativity on global accounts.

Everyone’s idea has global potential. Every communication—big or small, local or global—on a global brand has to be “world class.”

BIG IDEAS ARE GLOBAL IDEAS

The best, most creative ideas are global

It's a simple premise but one that the advertising industry seems slow to embrace. Other industries, like the entertainment industry, clearly understand that some ideas, if simple enough and innovative enough, have global potential—regardless of whether they were intended for a global audience.

While shows like *Miss World*, *The Eurovision Song Contest* or the UK game show *It's a Knockout* are global in execution, they are not the blockbuster global successes that the entertainment industry searches for. The big global successes like *Sex and the City*, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, *Survivor* or *Big Brother* are created with a specific local audience in mind. The global appeal is only apparent when and if the idea is exported to other markets. In all of these instances the best global ideas are local ideas that tap into a cultural phenomenon that transcends the local culture it was created for.



I can just imagine what would happen if the advertising industry had created *Sex and the City*. It would never have seen the light of day outside the US market. The British and the French would have said it was too American. The Italians would say the fashions were wrong for their market. The Japanese would say that the stories were too sexual and the show would need to be re-shot with Asian characters (resulting in a soap opera much like all the others in the market already). The global brief would have been about the similarities of modern women on a global scale and the resulting show would have been a contemporary reinvention of *Miss World* or a documentary with an enormous travel budget.

THE CREATIVE EDGE

Creativity happens where risk is the norm

If you look at where all the best ideas in advertising are created, it tends to be in places where taking risks is acceptable. Where budgets are small and under the radar. Where not too many people want to be involved. Where the agency or client has nothing to lose. Where the environment or culture is forced to deal with risk on a daily basis. Creativity goes hand in hand with willingness to take risks. This is not the domain of the global advertising account. With global accounts there is a lot at stake and a lot of people are involved to ensure no mistakes are made (lowering the risk tolerance). To make matters worse, they are usually set up in the global headquarters, a rarified world distanced from market specifics but close to other global managers and, of course, senior management.

Find the best ideas in the world or create better locally

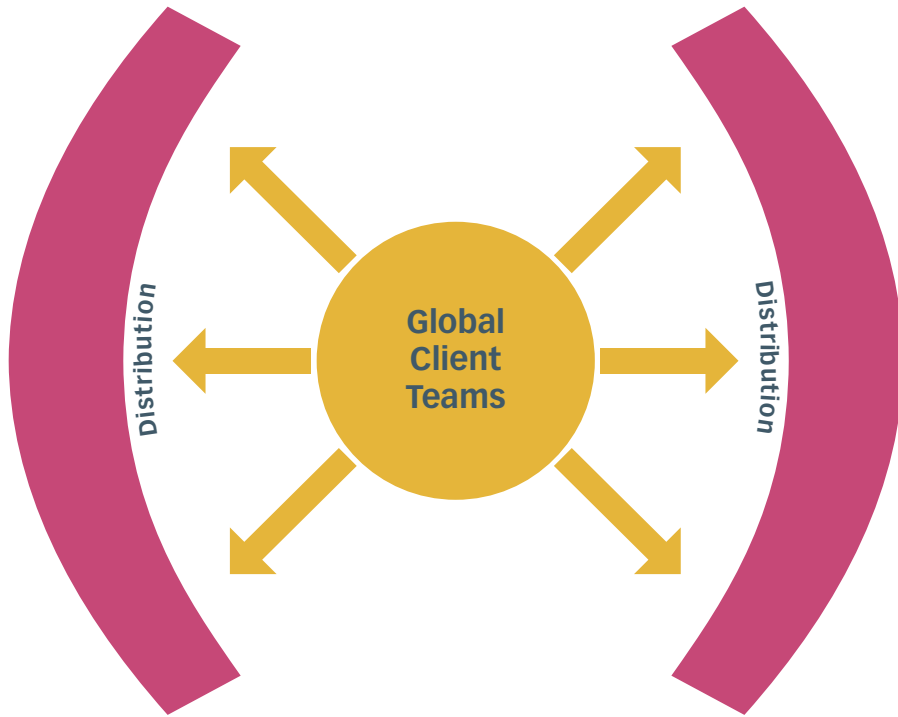
Another fact about new and innovative creative ideas is that they tend to be created with a very specific problem in mind, on a very specific brand and, more often than not, with a very specific cultural reference point. With so much market-specific and cultural knowledge around the edges of an agency network, it seems foolhardy to spend a lot of time and money transferring it to the centers. Surely a better model is to use all the market-specific knowledge in markets to your advantage. Encourage creativity at the edges of the network and make the center responsible for managing that process. What a wonderful call to action to a global organization or global account team!

Every idea, no matter how small, has to be “world class” and has potential to become a global idea. If you do not believe that the global work is the best idea in the world, then it is your responsibility to create better locally.

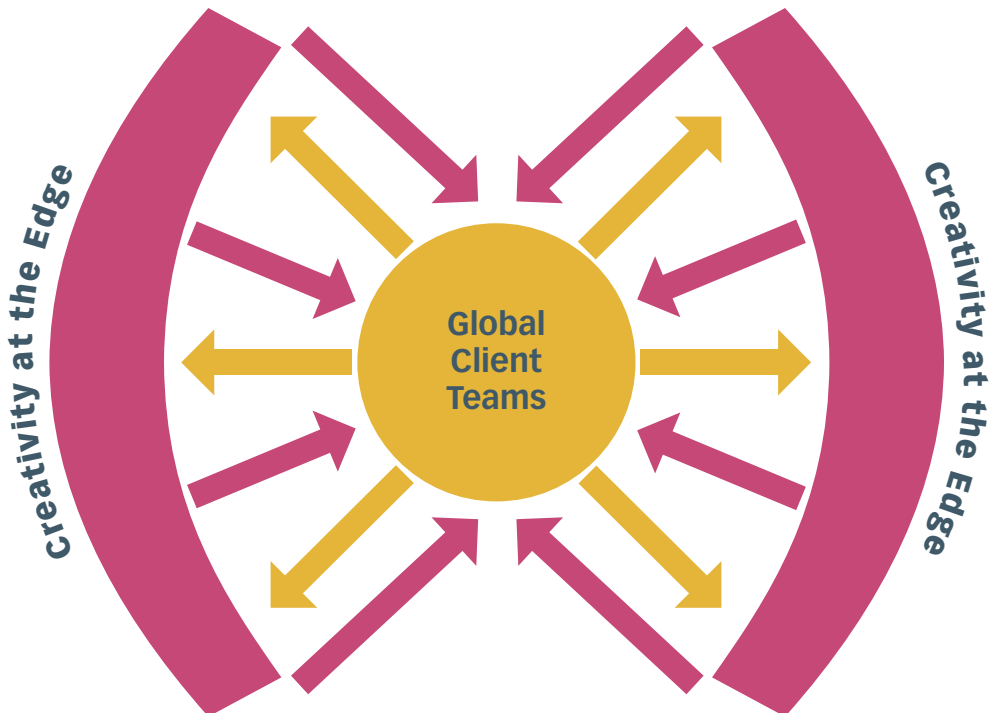
Central distribution, network creation

Such a model changes how global teams work. The global team has less responsibility for original creation. The central team is responsible for identifying, modifying and distributing “the best ideas in the world.”

OLD MODEL
Central Creativity



NEW MODEL
Idea Distribution and Modification



GLOBAL APPRECIATION REPLACES GLOBAL CREATION

Cultural understanding replaces consumer interrogation

As the global planning team, we have the advantage that we do not have to start everything from scratch. We start from reviewing everything that has been created around the world. Take time to see what ideas exist for the brand, especially in the places that have been under the radar. Rather than travel the world to sit in darkened focus group facilities, we have to get out and connect with our network partners in each market to find what they have done, what their competition has done, understand their market and their culture and facilitate them creating more, not less. Redistributing some of the central research and creative budget to the edges can have a profound effect because it gives the local team something to play with and some sense of shared responsibility. You will be amazed how a little goes a long way in these markets and they come back with some interesting stuff when given the chance (and remember, they have to decide what to do with this money—you have to cede control).

Idea modification and success replication

The creativity that lives in the center is a different type of creativity. Firstly, I feel all global planners should have local market responsibilities so that they have somewhere to test out their own original ideas. However, their global role should be one of “idea thief” and “modifier.” As “idea thief,” the planner takes the best, most successful ideas and tries to identify why the idea worked so well locally and what it would take to replicate that successfully in different markets/cultures. As “modifier,” the global planner takes local ideas and adds their own interpretation/execution of it, often merging or combining ideas from different markets that touch on a similar territory.

Consumer research, rather than a starting point, should be limited to much later in the game, when there are real ideas on the table for consideration. After all, consumers never come up with great new ideas, but are sometimes able to tell you when you’ve found one.

WORLD CLASS AND WORLD BEATING

We need people to focus on 9 and 10 on our scale

Our biggest clients need world class and world beating advertising ideas, and our creative reputation depends on it.



In the new global media environment all ideas live on a global stage and the best rise to the top. In this environment, global ideas need to live up to a higher set of standards, and the competition for our consumer's time is much, much stronger. Our organizational structure and planning process have to live with this and work with it, not spend their time trying to stifle it.

We need every creative mind in the network focused on this, not just a small team in the center. To create such a creative network we need to encourage creativity in the places where creativity is most likely to occur and distribute the best of them as widely as possible.

Planning can and should be a catalyst to creating this type of network.

Look for world class and make it world beating

We should do away with the "global" classification for creative work and simply think of everything created on a global brand as having global potential. We should empower and provide resources to every market to create world class communications on all our global accounts, especially in markets where risk and creativity are most prevalent.

The role of the central planning team should not start from scratch but take these "world class" ideas and work out how they can be made "world beating." This is a process that requires a great deal of collaboration and open-mindedness to new ideas. It will also demand strong cultural understanding of different markets and an expertise in modifying ideas to have broad cultural relevance.

Finally the global team needs to help our global clients understand the new demands of a global brand in a world of instantaneous global communications. But that is another presentation...