

'Okay Marcel, make me an ad': AI's role in the future of marketing

 By [Shaune Jordaan](#)

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Publicis, the global advertising conglomerate headquartered in Paris, France, recently announced the launch of its bespoke artificial intelligence (AI) platform, Marcel. The platform was Publicis' major focus for the best part of the year and saw it pull out of all industry awards and events until it was complete.



Screengrab from Marcel: The Vision video on Publicis Groupe [video](#).

Unsurprisingly, Marcel has generated plenty of hype, but how much of it is deserved? And what does the platform's launch tell us about the role AI will play in the future of marketing?



Publicis Groupe unveils Marcel; what is it and will it replace creatives?

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Firstly, it's important to note that Marcel isn't going to automate any part of the advertising process. Instead, it's designed to connect Publicis' 80 000-plus employees and give them access to the knowledge and skills base of the entire network.

The AI will, for instance, be able to recommend that an art director at an agency in South Africa help out with a Dutch agency's pitch to a major exporting company. Employees can also contribute to pitches of their own volition.

Additionally, Marcel will have access to employee calendars and can make recommendations around availability and workload, as well as behavioural patterns, needs, desires and experience.

Publicis also promises that Marcel will cut time spent on tedious tasks such as timesheets and expenses. Finally, it will serve as a repository and archive for all of Publicis' work and assets, making it easy to find inspiration, historical client work, and do research.

No job killer

Far from being the job killer that AI systems are usually portrayed as then, Marcel may actually generate jobs.

By ensuring that the best global resources are working on pitches, agencies are more likely to generate new business, allowing them to increase hires.

By taking time out of some of advertising's most mundane and time-consuming tasks, such as timesheets, Marcel could free up agency employees to the jobs they're paid to.



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Indeed, that's the message Publicis is putting out when it comes to Marcel.

"It's about engagement, versus compliance," Nick Law, chief creative officer of Publicis Groupe said in interview with [Campaign](#).

“You get energy and creativity out of engagement. The app should engage people and make their jobs better so they naturally want to use. If it's not doing that, then we need to get on it.”

It's a clear reminder then that AI doesn't have to be a bogeyman in the advertising space.

Doing data right

One of the reasons Marcel is so promising is because it combines smart AI with relevant data.

This approach does not have to be restricted to the internal organisations making ads. In fact, it could ensure that people get served ads that are relevant to their needs and wants, erasing some of the current issues with AI in advertising.

Let's take programmatic advertising as an example. Outside of the ad industry, most people understand programmatic as those ads that follow you around for three months after you've bought something online.

Thing is, AI is only as good as its algorithms and the data available to it. Implemented effectively, programmatic advertising is about as far from annoying, irrelevant ads as it's possible to get.

Instead, the AI might see that you've been looking at cars and serve you ads for car financing from your bank, perhaps even tailored to the make and model you've been looking at.

Without having to appeal to the widest possible number of people, this approach opens up more creative opportunities.

For the foreseeable future, that's going to require human beings coming up with creative solutions to business problems. Whether inside their own organisations or in the way they market their clients, AI can only help ad people do that.

**Shaune Jordaan was an executive at Publicis while Marcel was conceived and in the early stages of its construction.*

ABOUT SHAUNE JORDAAN

Shaune Jordaan is the co-founder and chief commercial officer at Hoorah Digital. He is passionate about delivering world class results to brands and building a digital culture that drives change. He is the former co-founder/CEO of an award winning performance digital agency with an extensive global client list. He's worked extensively across the globe, growing digital portfolios and leading digital transformation. He is one of Africa's most experienced digital leaders.

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