

Profile of a modern agency strategist

 By [Devin Ross](#)

22 Feb 2019

There are many roles flying around these days called "strategist". From comms planners to brand planners, to "digital" strategists. My view is these roles are beginning to collapse into one, which really is the new-age or modern agency strategist. Clients are sick of 80 slide strategy presentations and are losing faith in the value of paying for intangible strategy hours.



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So how do we fight back as strategists? Here are some of my views as to how the strategist role can reinvent itself going forward, to add real value to clients and to be a cog in the process of creating great and effective creative work.

Marketing strategy is business strategy

Too often we ignore the simple fact, that marketing strategy IS business strategy. Marketing strategy, at its core, needs to directly assist in achieving business objectives, that are tangible, measurable and financial. I am not against running campaigns for reach, perception change and other objectives, but ultimately, we need to be able to ascertain the impact we had on a business's overall goals and key initiatives.

Focus on real value

Always seek to build meaningful reports that unleash real business insight (even if the reports reflect poorly on agency performance). Be transparent in value added, and always seek to add real value to the client's business.

Understand tech

Understand technology, and the direction the industry is going – build a toolbox that can help you achieve client goals, at scale. Make sure the tech talks to each other. Build a technology ecosystem.

Question briefs

Don't blindly follow client briefs. Ask questions. Sometimes, you'll find that what the client is saying they want, is actually quite different from what they actually want. Understand their businesses well enough to question business decisions.

You're a strategist, not an order taker.

See the client more often

Become the clients right-hand man (or woman). Be the person the client turns to solve bigger problems outside of briefs.

Strive for inter-agency alignment

The bigger the brands, the more agencies involved. Make agency alignment a priority. Never present in silos. Have one consolidated deck that makes sense. Leave ego behind. Focus on working together as a team to solve client problems.

Don't be afraid to "tack"

If things aren't going well, speak up. There is no harm in changing your course, as long as your destination remains the same.

Think long- and short-term

Realise, good advertising is a combination of long-term plays (brand building) and short-term wins (media/campaigns), etc. Don't pin one against the other – we're both right.

Read

Read stuff a lot – and observe people/ immerse yourself in culture. How can you answer a brief properly as a middle age white male if the target audience is black centennials? Ask for help.

Research and trust your guy

Use research – don't only assume, but also trust your gut. We're professionals with experience. We know what works. Sometimes research is useful to validate our ideas. Sometimes we don't understand the research.

Sell ideas

Present proactive ideas (without a brief) that provide value for the client and help grow your agencies revenue.

Overall, these are a few ideas to incorporate into your work life that can help us break the stigma against strategist, and 80 slide decks!

ABOUT DEVIN ROSS

Devin Ross is a Senior Strategist at Arc (Publicis Groupe Africa), Publicis Groupe's international shopper marketing agency. He has over 6 years of experience in strategy and is passionate about how technology and data intertwine with creative and marketing.

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