

The agency-marketer relationship

 By [Johanna McDowell](#)

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As with most industries, current trends are either driven by the pandemic, or in response to it. As intermediaries, the IAS has noted some interesting shifts in the way marketers and agencies have surfed the various waves as they rolled in, and how they're looking to stay on the crest in 2022 and beyond.



Image supplied: Johanna McDowell

Chief among current trends is reviewing the number of agencies a marketer works with. The average in South Africa is around the global average of 13, including digital, public relations, communications and more.

Importantly, the IAS is working with marketers looking to review their providers and decide the best way forward. Where there is an overlapping of services, there's a view to keeping agencies in their own lanes – namely, the core competencies for which they were hired.

This brings with it a trend that sees agencies assessing their offerings and ensuring they have the resources required to meet marketers' needs now and for the foreseeable future.



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As more office doors open after the vaccine rollout, marketers and agencies are mostly back in their creative, vibrant, people-centric environments where they feed off each other's positive energy. However, marketers and agencies are facing more complex issues today that were not as pronounced prior to the pandemic.

Among these is an increase in specialisation among agencies, based on the rise in digital platforms and their opportunities for brands. Where bigger agencies may not have the agility smaller ones have to meet brand needs, there's much that can be done and a willingness to take the necessary steps.

The IAS is working with marketers on right-housing, the process that requires them to review their internal and external capabilities, as well as those of the agencies they work with. There's a definite shift away from the 'purely creative' agency of the past, towards partnerships with those who are adept at strategic planning, are able to offer technology to support the strategy, and will work with marketers to produce the best approach.



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Finally, a noteworthy 2022 and beyond trend is the move away from project-based relationships to retainers. While this can be in part attributed to the deepening of relationships between marketers and agencies we saw during the pandemic, it makes sense to retain the services of an organisation as a partner rather than run the risk of the agency being able to work for the competition on a project basis too.

For the IAS, the past 24 months have been busy ones and we foresee no slowing down, as we navigate the new and exciting specialist skill sets and collaborative spirits.

ABOUT JOHANNA MCDOWELL

MD of the Independent Agency Search and Selection Company (IAS), and partner in Scopen Africa, with a background that includes being on both the agency and the client side of the fence, Johanna McDowell is well-placed to offer commentary on marketing and advertising in the South African and international contexts. She built her career in marketing and advertising since 1974, holding directorship in both SA and British advertising agencies. She was MD of Grey Phillips Advertising in 1988.

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