

# A journey of digital disruption starts with...

by Robin Charney, Business Director, Digital and Innovation, AAR

**...a few steps forward and often a few steps sideways. A few roadblocks and a few speed traps. In recent months, I've been pondering and sharing with clients some of the trends I'm seeing shaping marketing. Digital transformation is the topic du jour. It is, however, a bit like teenage sex... everyone's talking about it, few are doing it and even fewer think they're doing it well. Figuring out a digital strategy is a little trickier than it seems, and setting up the right agencies and partners to help with that transformation is not always so straightforward.**



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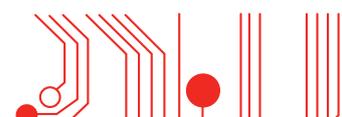
Who is the best UX agency? How do I balance the turf war between my above the line agency and my digital agency? Who is the best at social strategy? Who can figure out how to personalise my direct marketing? These are all questions we've helped answer over the last year. What it really comes down to, though, is one question - how do you buy the "new" and the "innovative"? Where do you even start, if you've never bought it before? Or worse, if you have bought it before, does it look anything like it did three years ago?

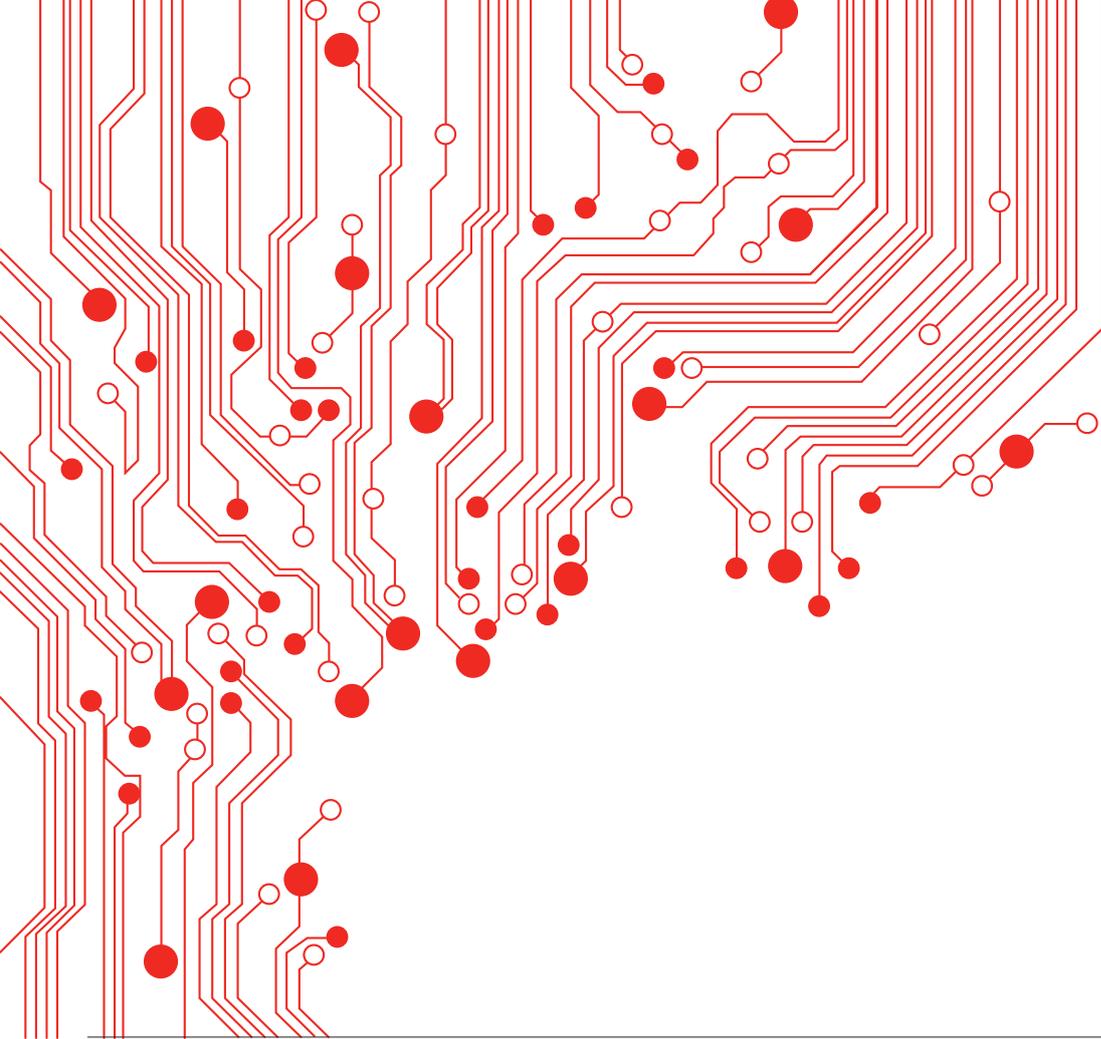
## FIRST STEPS

What I can safely proclaim is that first, what digital means is linked to where clients are on their digital transformation journey. Secondly, all clients are on a digital transformation journey. For some, looking at eCRM is a big step. For others, rebuilding their entire platform is where they're

at. It's relative. But you already knew that, right? Some clients are way ahead of the curve, some aren't. Interestingly, no one believes they're ahead, which just shows how disruptive this all is. The road twists and turns, a new social platform crops up, a new analytics package is flavour of the month or someone proclaims Facebook is dead, again. It's endless and the pace is ferocious. It's not going to slow down.

Regardless of where you start from, you're excited but probably also a little nervous. How do you keep up with the offerings from the agencies in this space? Do you even need an "agency"? Maybe a consultancy is what you need? After all, you don't know what you don't know. Digital opens up all kinds of exciting areas of exploration. Unfortunately, the new





is never easy to buy. Understandably, it's new and unproven for many of you. For others, your experience of what agencies have sold you as digital may have been less than stellar, not through any fault of the agency but, perhaps, due to the overwhelming pace of change associated with the digital transformation journey. Changing one thing often leads to the need to change something else. It's like painting only one room in the house. All of a sudden everything else looks a little scruffy by comparison. Having a brand new website might make your campaigns look a little outdated or having an amazing new social strategy might make your website look out of date. Again, it's relative.

### **EVOLUTION OF BRIEFS**

Looking back at recent briefs, the work we've been asked to undertake from clients falls into roughly two camps. The first can be categorised as more traditional comms briefs, where clients have been looking for agencies to help them with their digital marketing across multiple touch points – otherwise known as - owned (make my website more engaging, relevant, personal, responsive), earned (help make my

social channels more integrated with my overall brand positioning), and paid (handle my digital advertising needs). Some of the interesting trends here are around the areas of predictive marketing, insourcing (taking the work in house), and personalisation. "Always on" digital marketing is becoming the norm for many brands.

### **RELEVANT AND USEFUL**

The second type of brief I've seen has been driven by the desire for brands to become more relevant and useful. This was often expressed in the form of a User Experience/Service Design brief. This is where it gets interesting. In recent years, many brands neglected their owned platforms as they were seduced by the lure of the new social platforms. This, coupled with the need to address the demands of mobile devices, meant that brands have been under investing in their owned platforms. They believed they had to go to where the eyeballs were and that was most definitely places like Facebook. They were not wrong about the need to go to where their customers are, but this cannot be the be all and end all of their digital marketing efforts. They need to drive them somewhere and,

more importantly, they need the data they can collect about their customers. This, along with the proliferation of screens, is what is driving this type of brief. Brands, especially the dot coms, are now all too aware that the front door to their "shop" is their online platform and it has to be great. It has to work very hard. And it has to be measurable. They are all too aware that the customers' brand experience is very much defined by their online interactions and the platform is the jewel in the crown for this.

The final area of interest I am increasingly discussing with clients is their approach to innovation and how agencies can help to support that. Of course, sometimes it may not even be an agency. It could be an incubator or a start up. At the heart of these types of engagement, though, is the brand's search for the new and the innovative. With the realisation that change has to start with a single journey, sometimes a nimble social strategy agency might be the right first step. Other times it may be a product design consultancy or a retail specialist. The journey to digital transformation has many on ramps. What's yours? ■

