

Agency Scope Insights: The road best travelled, how marketers choose service providers



By [Johanna McDowell](#)

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There's never been a question that real value has always been on a marketer's radar when choosing service providers, writes Johanna McDowell, CEO of the Independent Agency Search & Selection Company (IAS) and Scopen partner. But with Covid-19 adding a potential global recession to the mix, there's also never been a more important time to offer value...

Since its inception, the IAS has placed tangible value at the core of its audits, moderating and matching of marketers with agencies. Depending on the marketer's needs, each service offering carries a business value that must be taken into account as a monetary cost.

Now, more than ever, turning communications into solid value will be top of mind for marketers, and service providers who can't satisfy this requirement will likely fly beneath the new radar set by the sudden shift of market conditions brought about by the global pandemic.

Marketers' requirements highlighted by Agency Scope South Africa 2019/2020 as the most influential attributes used to choose creative and media agencies notes that credentials and quality of work is still top of the global list at 73.6%, with friends or colleague's recommendations following at 67.8%. While articles in the press rose from 9% in 2017 to 20.9% now, last on the South African list of attributes of choice is agency rankings at just 16.6%.

Credibility as a key choice

Even as the market has been divided into full-service and specialist agencies for some time now and the list of criteria used by marketers to choose agencies has grown, a vital factor highlighted in the Scopen face-to-face interviews with marketing executives is credibility.

One marketing decision maker noted:

“ Lots of leaders have learned hard lessons from being burned by previous experience and this can dramatically affect who they want to work with. What they don't want are big promises about big fixes and grand plans with big technology instead of more focus on coaching and learning, and agile, adaptive partnerships. ”

When approached to undertake mediation between agencies and marketers, the IAS has often found credibility – and therefore loss of trust – to be a wheel that isn't turning efficiently. Why would a long-term relationship between parties suddenly turn sour? Given that our stats show a growth in relationship longevity from 4.5 years to 4.7 years, the turn isn't so sudden.

Somewhere in that time, changes have occurred, including rapidly-growing digital marketing and many parties have grown together into martech. However, the speed of martech and the ability of both client and agency to adapt daily (and sometimes hourly) to consumer demands often gives rise to questions about credibility.

Marketers may feel their agencies are not being pro-active and agencies may counter that marketers are taking too long to



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make decisions to be effective. Both may be right.

The bottom line is that marketers want today what they have always wanted – the best business value they can get from suppliers who understand the clients' market, the sector as it changes and the importance of credibility on a path that is going to test even the best in every sector.

Their choices will be made from service providers ready to take off from a brand new runway whenever required and still deliver real business value.

Agency Scope is a study of the creative and media agency landscape in South Africa. It is a biennial study conducted by Scopen Africa which is part of the Scopen Global group that is active in 12 countries. Our universe of analysis in 2019/2020 in South Africa consisted of 239 face-to-face interviews with the highest-level decision makers in marketing.

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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