

Features

Wired for Collaboration

At Ogilvy & Mather, adoption of KM tools required an internal ad campaign aimed at the agency's creative knowledge workers.

by Tom Kaneshige, Line56
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On the same floor where Lyndan Sawain lives, a bunch of account managers at Ogilvy & Mather unwind from another frenzied day in the advertising business. Sawain, global Web integrator and co-worker at the giant ad agency, saunters across the way and knocks on their door, hoping to pick their creative brains.

Sawain is in charge of a strategic project to build a giant virtual world. Inside, global clients would converse with account managers who, in turn, would communicate clients' wants and needs with the artistic side of the company. One big happy family, so the thinking goes. Sawain needed to know what it would take to get Ogilvy & Mather account managers on board.

At first, Sawain felt flushed, figuring his job would be a breeze. Why? Because the managers whooped and hollered at the idea, spurred by e-collaboration software's time-saving promises. Global clients would dig it, too, they said. Advertising groups in far-flung countries would finally be able to work together and execute on a central marketing theme. "Account managers told me that this is great, everybody loved it," Sawain recalls. "They gave me feedback, telling me that I should do this and that, all very positive."

But here's the thing. Creative types aren't really known for follow through. So when it came time for them to use the collaboration tools, "They weren't really exploiting it," says a scorned Sawain, adding, "We had to go back to the drawing board." And herein lies the bane of new-fangled technology. The Net set refers to it as the change-management challenge.

Results from a survey on destinationCRM, the website for Line56's CRM Magazine, showed that change management is the biggest barrier to CRM success. Executives across the board complained of shelling out millions of dollars, only to have software sitting idle on workers' desktops. Some companies, such as General Electric, have resorted to draconian measures, instructing employees to adopt certain e-business technology or else lose their jobs.

Unlike manufacturers though, advertising agencies must answer to the eccentric. From top to bottom, advertising agencies are chock full of freethinkers, many of whom clash with their suit-and-tie counterparts. Perhaps David Ogilvy, the late founder of Ogilvy & Mather, sums it up best in his book, *Confessions of an Ad Man* (Ballantine Books, 1971): "The business community wants remarkable advertising but turns a cold shoulder to the kind of people who can produce it... Our business needs massive transfusions of talent. And talent, I believe, is most likely to be found among nonconformists, dissenters, and rebels."

These folks form the lifeblood of any advertising agency, which depends on them to beat the competition to the punch line, literally. To cite a famous advertising maxim, an ad agency's inventory goes down the elevator every night. Of Ogilvy & Mather's 11,000 employees, roughly 7,000 fall into the creative-type category. All of this means that a heavy-handed approach "doesn't work in the advertising world," says Atefeh "Atti" Riazi, senior partner and CIO of Ogilvy & Mather, and overseer of the e-collaboration project.

No stranger to instigating changes in human behavior, Riazi once spearheaded a \$1 billion-budgeted, automated-fare collection program -- the MetroCard -- that affected thousands of buses and hundreds of subway stations in New York City, not to mention an entire community of riders. But e-collaboration at Ogilvy & Mather represented a very different kind of hurdle that required an insider, of sorts, and the man charged with surmounting it was Sawain, a former account manager.

After initial adoption of the technology stalled, Sawain searched desperately for a plan. *How do you sway marketing people?* he thought. And then it hit him. Marketing people fundamentally believe in the power of marketing, so why not market e-collaboration internally to them? Sawain devised a simple marketing campaign, using the image of an ordinary filing cabinet as a metaphor for virtual space. He created colorful brochures and online demos, and sent his own legion of managers to the four corners of the world: New York, London, Singapore and Latin America, to spread the word.

"How could you not use this system? How did we ever manage without it?" Sawain asks rhetorically in an interview with Line56, his voice rising in familiar marketing speak. "It's easy, and we'll show you how to get the hang of it. Life will be more convenient."

On the technology front, Ogilvy & Mather chose e-collaboration software from Intraspect. The technology creates virtual spaces with customizable business rules and finely controlled access rights wrapped around them. Since groups participate from different time zones, it's not essential that collaborative processes be handled in real-time. A key Intraspect selling point is that people send information to the collaborative space and receive notifications about updates through a familiar interface, email. In turn, Intraspect software tags, indexes and records information for future use.

This email approach negates the need to have team members build large distribution lists to ensure that the right people are getting the right information. "Making email the primary use paradigm in its collaboration platform could prove to be a wise one," IDC analysts Mark Levitt and Robert Mahowald wrote in a recent report. "Most Internet and Web users will continue to view email as a central part of the way people work... Email integration will mean that the obstacles to user adoption can be more easily overcome."

The tradeoff is that the interface, in this case email, is more of a bird's eye view than of an actual workflow or business process. Adding workflow management to APIs and email integration could make the Intraspect platform a more attractive proposition, according to IDC.

Ultimately, Ogilvy & Mather wants to cut down on one-to-one conversations. "We do not encourage just two people having a conversation on the system," Sawain says. Users of the system will also need to write more detailed emails, since more people will be seeing it. And some of those people will likely be complete strangers. "Things are no longer hush-hush," Sawain says. "The biggest issue is changing the habit."

This doesn't mean that account managers and clients can poke their nose into the creative process. Currently, there are two main types of virtual spaces: one for creative teams on certain accounts, the other for account managers, production folks and clients. Over the next six to eight months, Sawain plans to integrate the two virtual spaces to make sharing of near-completed art pieces easier. More so than a change management challenge, it'll be a technical feat to make the PC and Mac OS (the preferred platform for graphic designers) work together and trade large files.

For creative types, having a virtual space all to themselves helped them get comfortable with the system. They'd work on a project and then fire off notes in an email at the end of the day, as easy as if they'd stuck them in a filing cabinet. The following morning, Sawain's internal marketing team made sure that the artists saw everything their counterparts around the world had contributed.

"Of course, there were issues concerning originality, unwelcomed second-hand ideas and even cultural hurdles. In Asia, there's an inhibition where, 'I'm not going to put mine up because my colleague is better,'" says Riazzi. "It's about getting the trust level up." It also didn't hurt that Ogilvy & Mather employs mostly twenty-somethings, who were weaned on the Internet, Riazzi says.

Internal marketing efforts have shown signs of success. Already 25 to 30 percent of Ogilvy & Mather's multi-national customers, such as Eli Lilly, Ford, British Petroleum and, critically, their respective account managers and art teams at the ad agency, are using the e-collaboration system. Now Ogilvy & Mather plugs e-collaboration benefits in every pitch for new business. The e-collaborative project was "sold and bought inside," says Riazzi, adding, "And I think within two years this is the way we'll do business with everyone."

[Tom Kaneshige also writes for destinationcrm.com, the Web site for CRM Magazine]

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