

THE FUTURE OF AGENCIES

How Agency Employees Want Their Leaders to Support Abortion Care Right Now

In response to the Roe v. Wade decision, staff members are looking for more than empty statements



Agencies are encouraging their staff to engage in civic action and take advantage of mental health resources. Getty

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By Emmy Liederman

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On Friday, June 24, a Dentsu Creative copywriter—like many others across the country—was in no mood to focus on work. While dissenting sentiment toward the decision on Roe v. Wade was commonplace at the beginning of Zoom calls, she noticed these discussions always came to an abrupt end when it was “time to get back to work.”

“We really could have benefited from having the day off,” she said, acknowledging that Dentsu sent out two company-wide emails both expressing solidarity and offering to cover expenses for employees who would need to travel to access abortion. Though she appreciated the effort, she acknowledged that after a while, these gestures across the industry at large can go stale.

“Emails are the advertising equivalent of ‘thoughts and prayers,’” she said.

also promises to reimburse employees for mental health apps like Calm and Headspace. Tech PR agency SourceCode, which has also instituted a wellness stipend, is offering that employees use what the company calls "nope days," which are encouraged when "some days you wake up and just need a break."

Since the news broke that Roe v. Wade was at risk of being overturned, **agencies began to announce that they would do what they could** to make sure all employees have access to safe abortions. All five major holding companies have issued statements in response to the decision, promising to **protect employees' privacy when seeking reimbursements for abortion care**. Additionally, in memos to employees, the leaders of the holding companies pushed their staff to take advantage of mental health resources.

But employees are demanding more, and for companies that have a heavy presence in blue states and few staff members that would be directly impacted, making donations, reevaluating client relations and taking political action feels like a more meaningful stance for many.

Holding clients accountable

Agencies including The Marketing Arm, which is owned by Omnicom and headquartered in Dallas, advised clients to pause social posts on Friday and continue to evaluate the role of their voice in this cultural moment.

"We continue to monitor and help determine what each of their roles should be as this important conversation continues," said president Trina Roffino. "At the moment, our clients are largely focused on the needs of their employees and having employee-focused conversations."

While many agencies publicly disapprove of the Supreme Court decision, employees want to make sure they, as well as their clients, are making monetary contributions. In an Adweek survey sent out to industry employees, a staff member at McCann NY said, "I would like to see [the agency] donate money towards abortion funds and to disclose if they have donated to any lawmakers that are publicly 'pro life.'" An employee from TBWA echoed this sentiment, urging the agency to stop "supporting Republicans and right-wing clients."

Non-profit agency Media Cause set up a **Rally Starter page** asking participants to write letters to their senators urging that they support pro-choice legislation, and Detroit-based agency Lafayette American is collecting signatures for a ballot initiative by Governor Whitmer that would add reproductive rights to the state constitution, according to president Emily Siegel. Freelance employees are also taking it upon themselves to create resources for those who wish to take action, like freelance producer Kristin Loudis, who bought the domain **roevwadeco.com**.

Elizabeth Rosenberg, founder of consultancy The Good Advice Company, urges her clients and all agency leaders to be candid about the fact that figuring out the best steps to take is a process. They know it is not a time to stay silent, she said, but "corporate canned statements miss the mark every time."

"There is no 100% right way to do this and leaders and companies should be honest that they are working on plans so their statements aren't performative," said Rosenberg. "Otherwise, we're just talking to ourselves for the likes, again, and no progress will be made."

While some are asking for more than mass emailed statements, others have yet to see their employer react at all. Agencies in the southeast, including Atlanta-based creative shop 22Squared and many shops across Florida, Tennessee and South Carolina, also have yet to acknowledge the decision.

"Even a statement of some kind would be nice," said Lee Banov, senior brand planner at Cramer-Krasselt.



THE UNAVOIDABLE ROLE FOR BRANDS IN THE BATTLE OVER ABORTION RIGHTS



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