

**Interview: Tom Beckman, Creative Director, Prime PR.**

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**Prime has a common methodology to its creative approach. Do you feel there are any common and identifiable elements in an example of Prime work?**

We have this saying that I use to evaluate our own ideas and that is: we want to create value instead of creating awareness. So that is the one question I always ask my team to ask themselves: "Am I producing value here?". At the end of the day that is what we as an industry need to be better at providing.

We used to be obsessed with creating awareness – we want to do a stunt here, a stunt there, thinking "everyone is going to notice this!" It becomes like a circus. If you are thinking like that you are going in the wrong direction because you are focusing on the fireworks rather than what you actually need to provide.

**How much traditional PR is Prime being tasked with today?**

The way our industry is changing is both positive and negative. On the positive side I think the communications market is moving more in our direction, so the corporate interface is more important and earned media is now at the heart of the marketing mix within consumer, to give two examples. But on the other hand you have a situation on the client side where it is not very clear who's making the decisions and who's holding the money anymore.

So in terms of service development and finding new ways of cutting the cake, it's inspiring times but financially I think it's challenging for a lot of agencies, especially PR agencies. You're also seeing that a lot of the bread and butter services that PR has traditionally provided, like press release writing, that is more and more being done in-house. There is not really a future in the bread and butter services.

**You think it's going to die out?**

Yes, and in terms of the more dynamic side of client needs there is much uncertainty. So it's inspiring but difficult times.

**Do you feel that the new possibilities will come to fill the gap sufficiently and replace the bulk of the bread and butter work?**

That really varies from market to market, in our Swedish market there are a lot of good agencies shrinking because they don't keep up with service development.

**Keeping up with digital must be a big part of that.**

Yes and that includes advertising agencies, but especially media agencies.

**What are clients not asking you for that you feel they should be asking you for? Are they coming to you asking for an integrated approach for example?**

Competition is not getting less significant for anyone and we are now seeing so many industries and categories where the competition is really pushing the CEOs to have a different set of requirements for their CMOs. I think the average time a CMO keeps his or her job in the USA is around ten months. It's a very harsh environment and obviously that effects client relationships and raises the bar in terms of what you actually present.

One obvious conclusion is that they need to be able to report back within the organisation the value that they provide. It used to be the case that a company might say "we need to fix our image" or "we need to create a buzz around this new product" and it's more advanced today.

There is usually one or two tops within the client's organisation that has the CEO's ear and that person becomes really important. So you have to ask yourself who that person is. It's usually the CMO, and then you have to ask if you have a relationship with that person, the answer is usually no.

Power and money are being centred higher up so if you are in an organisation where your main interface with the client is a comms person, you need to be aware of the changes within the industry because that person is getting less traction internally, less money and also doing a lot of that stuff in-house.

*Ashley Coates*