

The Bridging Agency

CG Artworx thought leaders delve into the aspect of knowledge transfer specialization

A bridging agency would free brand managers from highly technical processes for which they are ill suited and poorly trained, thus allowing them to work more intensively on research, marketing, and sales, which is where their strengths lie.

PACKAGING PRINT RELATED PROCESSES:

STAGES OF PACKAGING CREATION THAT TAKE PLACE BETWEEN THE COMPLETION OF DESIGN AND ACTUAL PRINTING, TYPICALLY COMPRISED OF (BUT NOT LIMITED TO) ARTWORK, REPROGRAPHY, AND COLOR PROOFING. ALSO KNOWN AS ARTWORK AND REPRO, PRE-MEDIA, AND/OR PRE-PRESS.

A recent Cocoon Group sponsored survey of FMCG brand managers revealed a surprising statistic. The average amount of time spent by these brand management teams on packaging print related processes was about 15%, with some respondents claiming that this single aspect of their job took a whopping 25% of their time when one took into consideration travel time for print supervisions.

These tasks are highly specialized and technical and are not necessarily suited to brand managers with marketing backgrounds. Even then, as processes and supplier networks grow,

someone must hold all of the knowledge about brand requirements, print processes, and data formats to ensure that the project moves quickly and seamlessly from stage to stage, and from supplier to supplier.

The question is whether the best candidate for this position is really the brand manager to whom the role has fallen by default.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER SPECIALIST

It is from this starting point that Cocoon Group recently held a round table discussion attended by internal experts and business drivers to talk about whether or not there is room in the print supply chain for an agency to take on the role of a 'knowledge transfer specialist' or 'bridging agency'

A technically savvy, workflow-optimization house whose sole responsibility would be to ensure quick turnaround and high efficiencies as branded product moved from one stage of the development

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process to the next. It was thought that this agency would then free the brand manager enough so that he/she could focus on moving the brand forward according to the marketing or strategic vision rather than continually hand-holding design teams and print suppliers.

As envisioned by our round table participants, the bridging agency would liaise with all members of the network to ensure that data was properly prepared for each new supplier as quickly as possible. Their value would lie in bringing costs down, uncovering areas ripe for innovation, and ultimately bringing products to market faster and more cheaply for clients.

IN THEIR DISCUSSION, OUR PARTICIPANTS CAME UP WITH 5 ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS THAT WOULD BE REQUIRED FOR THE AGENCY TO BE SUCCESSFUL AND MARKETABLE TO CLIENTS PRODUCING BRANDED PACKAGED GOODS:

1 THE BRIDGING AGENCY SHOULD IMPROVE THE COST EFFECTIVENESS OF THE WHOLE PROCESS, FROM PLANNING TO PRINT

At the end of the day, greater efficiency should translate into lower costs and/or higher profits. The bridging agency should be able to demonstrate cost savings in terms of quicker turnaround or fewer errors. Getting products to the market in 6 months rather than 18 months is one demonstrable way that a bridging agency could benefit the bottom line. Another benefit is accurate KPI reporting which shows that there is less redundancy, overlap, and errors.

As Andre de Koning, CEO of Mountain Design pointed out, "There are numerous overlapping or unclear responsibilities in the chain that cause inefficiency and money-drain. The bridging agency should be able to clear that up right away."

2 MUST ALLOW FREEDOM TO MOVE/CHANGE SUPPLIERS

There was some discussion between the participants as to whether the bridging agency would actually shield the client from suppliers and be able to switch printers at will; for instance, if greater efficiencies or cost savings are found.

Others suggested that the bridging agent's role would only apply during the actual 'knowledge transfer stages' and be relegated to ensuring smooth communication between suppliers, collecting and storing knowledge, and converting data to correct formats.

It was agreed by all, however, that the bridging agency would create 'supplier independence' for clients. By holding onto the data, lessons, and detailed knowledge of needed processes, it would be ensured that suppliers could be switched easily, quickly, and with no quality or time loss for clients.

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3 **KEEPER OF ALL KNOWLEDGE**

Probably the most essential role of the bridging agency would be as keeper of the knowledge, data, and processes. Douglas Kaufman, Head of Brand Strategies, pointed out that the ideal thing would be for the bridging agency to hold knowledge for all brand creation and delivery stages – strategy and design included.

He pictured a centralized ‘brand database’ where brand books and consumer research were stored side-by-side with print guidelines and contact reports, creating a ‘one-stop-brand-knowledge-shop’ for clients. This would insulate clients not only from suppliers, but also employees who may be absent, go on holidays, or leave the company altogether.

According to Monika Jevocinova, Client Services Director of CG Artworx, “We have seen cases where a brand manager will fall ill and no one in the company knows whether data is at the design agency or the print house.” A centralized supplier would ensure that up to date information, knowledge, and data are available for quick implementation or sharing with network members.

4 **EXPERT IN ALL PRINT TECHNIQUES, TECHNOLOGIES, AND SUBSTRATES**

One area where the process currently fails for most companies is focused expertise applied to innovation and continual improvement. Very few individuals have expertise in all aspects of print technologies, and those who do often have little incentive to innovate in ways that save the client’s money.

As technical experts across a broad range of print-related processes and materials, the bridging agency would be in a unique position to make recommendations based on a client need for increased efficiency.

One area of expertise in particular that was pointed out by Mick Cassell, Business Development Director for Cocoon Group, was direct knowledge of local print suppliers. “You would need to know what is available and who it is available from.”, he stated.

5 **PAY BASED ON EFFICIENCIES AND SPEED OF MOVEMENT BETWEEN STAGES**

In order to be attractive to clients, the bridging agency would need to base its compensation structure almost entirely on efficiency and speed. Benchmarks and KPIs would need to be established from the very outset. The bridging agency would need to implement a barrage of reports to track exactly where the money is going and set up processes for continual improvement. No one in the discussion was prepared to put forward an actual pricing structure, and yet, everyone felt many of the pieces were out there to develop something.

6 **MUST BE COMPLETELY TRANSPARENT**

This led to the final point of the discussion, which was that of transparency. Andre de Koning very rightly pointed out that “The largest budget in the packaging area is pre-press, and yet, this is essentially a black hole for most clients.” Everyone felt that the bridging agency should be able to provide more transparency; otherwise it would be seen as adding clutter to an already complicated process.

Everyone agreed, however, that if the steps of putting into place clear KPIs and stage-by-stage reporting were implemented, it would already go a long way in clarifying real costs in packaging print related processes and, indeed, in all brand delivery.

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At the conclusion of the round table, all participants felt that a bridging agency – if it could deliver on the promises covered above-would definitely bring value to the process of bringing products to the market. It would free brand managers from highly technical processes for which they are ill suited and poorly trained, thus allowing them to work more intensively on research, marketing, and sales, which is where their strengths lie.

While there was some disagreement about the scope (strategy and design included or only packaging print processes) and as to whether a bridging agency could retain credibility if it additionally offered production services (thus becoming another supplier), every participant agreed that this was a discussion that should be carried further and revisited at a future date.

Our participants:

ANDRE DE KONING, CG Board member, NL

PETR BACA, CEO, Cocoon Group

MICK CASSELL, Business Development Director, Cocoon Group

DOUGLAS KAUFMAN, Head of Brand Strategies, Cocoon Group

JIRI LUKACEK, Product Director, CG Artworx

MONIKA JEVOCINOVA, Client Services Director, CG Artworx

Many of these principles of proper knowledge transfer are ingrained in the products, services, and philosophy of CG Artworx. For instance:

- Maximizing efficiency through the centralization of core processes is the basis of our Smartworx document management and workflow management tools.
- Innovation and optimization opportunities for technologies and processes are exploited through CG Artworx's technical and regional experience.
- KPI reporting and benchmarking help CG Artworx manage and optimize the crucial and expensive steps between design and print.

While not a 'bridging agency' as defined within the context of this article, CG Artworx does work by these principles with the predictable result of faster times to market, lower costs, and increased all-around efficiency in print related processes. For more information on how CG Artworx is using the latest trends to find efficiencies for our clients, visit our knowledge center at **WWW.CG-ARTWORX.COM**

Or, contact us directly for a consultation:

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