

# ADWEEK

## MediaVest's Manifesto: Truth and Design

***New planning philosophy cuts clutter, yields insights and helps the shop go '3 for 3'***



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MediaVest's Lisa Donohue embraces new planning philosophy.  
**NEW YORK** At MediaVest's planning practice, "Truth and Design" are in.

Just as many agencies have substituted terms like "investment" or "activation" for "buying," MediaVest executives have concluded that "planning" is no longer adequate to describe the process of unearthing insights to best connect client brands with consumer targets.

In fact, said Lisa Donohue, the shop's former president of the connections planning unit and now president of its newly renamed Truth and Design Group, planning is a counterproductive term.

"Planning is bad," she said. "By its nature, planning has the heritage of a plodding, rigid and linear connotation. What we're implementing is a fundamental shift in mind-set where planning becomes design, which does not have a linear connotation and is more creative with less of a building-block approach."

Another negative concept is "collaboration," at least when that consists of the client gathering hired guns from its various disparate marketing and communications firms in a room to generate big ideas and formulate action plans.

With representatives from creative, media, public relations, digital, branding and event-planning shops thus thrown together, strategy sessions can become "giant cluster f\*\*ks, where most of the people in the room are silent, only a few make any real points and nothing gets decided or accomplished," said MediaVest evp, business development director Marston Allen.

The Publicis Groupe agency's solution is "active inclusion," a new approach to planning in which the client convenes more meetings, but with fewer attendees and more focused agendas.

"Planning by committee doesn't work," said Allen. "People sell their own agendas, not the client's. We need to have fewer people in the room. Fewer of the right people having the right ideas and making decisions."

The new approach is as much about getting the 300-plus MediaVest planners ("truth designers"?) as excited and focused about what they do as they are about winning and retaining clients.

The shop even issued a new "manifesto" to the entire Truth and Design Group staff: "You stand at the center of communications at the alpha hour. You stand with the power to change hearts and minds and grow businesses and to grab whole worlds as witnesses." The missive goes on to encourage the troops to "take a stand against planning and process and checklists and a stand for design, for technique, for melody, rhythm and syncopation."

While the manifesto sounds a bit like a cultish creed, the new technique has helped MediaVest win some big business and defend at least one account.

In April, it won \$220 million in business from pharmaceuticals giant Schering Plough based on a pitch that focused on the revised planning approach, Allen said. A month later, the shop won TD Ameritrade, which spends \$160 million annually on ads, also with the new technique front and center in the pitch. More recently, the approach helped MediaVest hang on to a major client it declined to identify. "So basically, we're three for three" since adopting the new philosophy, Allen said.

When TD Ameritrade awarded its business to MediaVest, Robert Haverback, client vp, brand management and advertising, specifically cited the shop's planning approach as having "played an important role in our decision." He said MediaVest had "the unique ability to drive smart marketplace solutions that are both scalable and innovative."

Bill Tucker, CEO of MediaVest USA, said he is "excited and committed to this new approach because it is our future, it drives value, it makes us accountable to the business challenges, not just the media challenges." He asserted, "Truth and Design humanizes what has historically been a robotic and sequential approach to planning. And that approach has left little room for creativity and ideas."

The Truth and Design concept provides new tools for developing business and media strategies -- including proprietary software -- to interpret data about client products and trends among customers and prospects. Those insights in turn help generate continuous stream of actionable brand-building ideas that clients will buy.

"Because if they're not buying the ideas, you're talking to yourself," said Allen. "Generally speaking, media agencies maybe haven't been as effective at that as creative agencies" at making the case for actions to take in the marketplace.