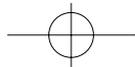


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CAN'T FIND A GOOD GRADUATE WITH A DEGREE AND A CLUE? YOU'RE NOT ALONE. THE INDUSTRY IS IN A STATE OF FLUX, SAVVY TALENT IS HARD TO FIND, AND YET UNIVERSITIES ARE TAKING YEARS JUST TO UPDATE A COURSE. SO WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

WORDS: HANNAH EDENSOR

Katie Dougherty, Australian National University, Canberra, Class of 2017

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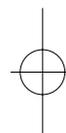
"I BELIEVE IT SHOULD BE ESSENTIAL PREPARATION FOR STUDENTS TO DO INTERNSHIPS AS A PART OF THEIR COURSE. MY AGENCY INTERNSHIP WAS NOT PART OF A COURSE REQUIREMENT, BUT MY OWN INITIATIVE. UNDERTAKING INTERNSHIPS IN ADVERTISING ALLOWS YOU TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE INDUSTRY, THE PARTICULAR AGENCY YOU ARE AT AND THE DIFFERENT ROLES INVOLVED – AND THAT KNOWLEDGE COULD HELP YOU FIGURE OUT WHERE YOUR PASSION LIES WITHIN THE INDUSTRY."

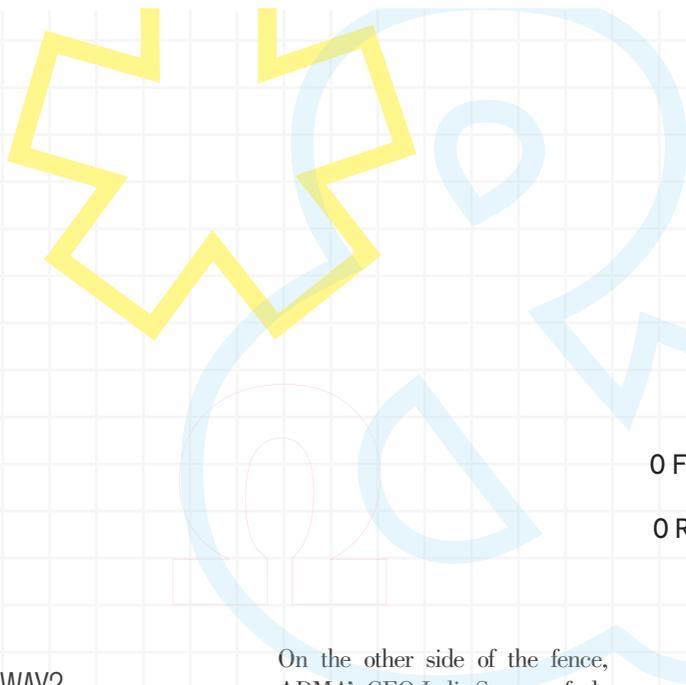
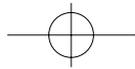
For a good 13 years of your life, you spend five days a week on your arse in a classroom. You learn to read, write, add, subtract, measure, analyse, extract and infer. And while these are essential tools to go forth and prosper, a lot of the more useful skills are learnt outside the classroom; how to tie your shoes, talk to people, queue for coffee, drive a car, cook dinner – you get the picture. And it doesn't stop with high school.

The current tertiary education landscape knows damn well it's struggling to keep up, meaning adland is struggling to find competent employees. And for most, not enough is being done to prepare young grads with the expertise required to make it in the real world. Kevin Mok is a digital marketing strategist at ntegrity, and graduate of RMIT University. He says the industry has "changed more in the past two years than it has in the previous 50", and that what they're teaching at universities "is just no longer applicable".

His employer, Richenda Vermuelen, founder & director of ntegrity, agrees, saying, "By 2025, 70 per cent of the workforce will be Millennials, but universities aren't teaching what we train our staff to do. Seventy per cent of students are being educated for careers that soon won't exist."

The result of this lack of training? For some agencies, it means looking outside Australia for essential talent. Switched On Media managing director Chris Hitchcock says while he loves hiring young people, he's increasingly having to hire from overseas to fill these gaps. "It's hard for some young graduates to compete with global talent who have stronger practical skills in digital, learnt at university." ▶





SO WHO'S FAULT IS IT ANYWAY?

Word on the adland streets is that it's tough to find university graduates ready to hit the ground running in a real-world setting. But that doesn't necessarily mean it's the fault of the education system.

"The feedback we receive from advertising and media industry representatives have indicated that graduates who have come through more traditional universities may very well have exposure to conceptual thinking, but often lack entry level skills which make them useful from day one in a junior level role," says Ian Thomson, head of the Advertising & Media Faculty at Macleay College. "This has led to a certain level of frustration from both employers and graduates, where it has been mentioned that it takes up to six months to train these new employees up on the job."

For Thomson, it's the university structure that's failing. "At Macleay College, we take a much more industry-focused approach to ensure that graduates not only have a strong conceptual and theoretical experience gained through real-world projects and internships, but also multi-disciplinary hard skills in programs such as Excel, PowerPoint, Photoshop, InDesign, PremierePro as well as exposure to social media content and analytics, and increasingly, basic coding."

There's a certain level of industry blame too, and it comes from a mistrust of young employees. "Agencies are underestimating the one asset that can help them adapt because they're not giving them that opportunity," says Vermuelen. "But you have to give them challenging work so they get the skills to know what they're doing." But despite this skills gap, she disagrees that the onus is on education. "We don't need universities to become TAFE and give it that apprenticeship base, I think that's the role of the industry; to give that practical insight, practical training, and on the job expertise."

On the other side of the fence, ADMA's CEO Jodie Sangster feels it is absolutely the role of education to keep up with workforce expectations. "Universities know they have to change. And I do think in the next two to three years we will see the whole idea of the degree change dramatically," says Sangster. "It will go much more to experience and internships, and actually rewarding people for being able to demonstrate their experience rather than rewarding people for turning up to class."

WHAT'S A UNI TO DO?

Professor Kim Watt, associate dean of quality standards and accreditation at Deakin University, says there's a stack of evidence that "supports the inclusion of developing employability skills for our students", stressing that employers look for these skills as much as they do a degree. Course director for commerce and associate professor of marketing, Kerrie Bridson, adds the best way to support students is to "talk to them".

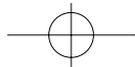
"We look at what interventions and supports we can put in place to keep our students engaged and on track and we take the responsibility seriously as part of our pastoral care approach," she says. But taking this into consideration and actually making drastic changes are two very different things.

According to Sangster, "The whole underpinning of courses needs to be relooked at because the speed at which the industry is changing, not just in ▶

*Melanie Pennington, University
of Sydney, Class of 2013*

"I THINK UNI COURSES SO OFTEN FOCUS ON THE THEORY OR MARKETING PROCESS, AND EVEN IN THE ASSESSMENTS THAT INVOLVE DEVELOPING A CAMPAIGN, IT FEELS SO ARTIFICIAL. AND YOU CAN'T APPRECIATE THE BENEFIT OF THEORIES. IT'S NOT UNTIL YOU'VE SPENT A FEW YEARS DOING MARKETING, THAT YOU CAN LOOK BACK AND APPRECIATE THEIR VALIDITY AND PROPERLY CRITIQUE THEIR APPLICATION. SOME HAD MERIT... OTHERS, WELL I'M STILL TRYING TO WORK OUT WHY I GAVE THEM BRAIN SPACE."





marketing, needs to be reflected in the curriculums, and three years [to update a course] is too long.” Aside from the obvious requirement of internships within degrees, she feels collaboration is where we’ll find gold.

“Universities could partner up with organisations like ADMA so you can have theoretical teaching, which they do very well, coupled up with real practical, on the job courses that industry associations and others run,” Sangster says.

Cooperation is the secret for Macleay College as well, with Thomson explaining, “Education can no longer exist only in a closed environment. The pressure on graduates to move into professional life quickly is intense; what is the value of theory if it cannot be applied?” The very notion of paid internships is, as Thomson calls it, a “win/win”, with graduates getting a jumpstart on their career, and agencies getting first pick of the cream of the crop.

Kevin Mok, RMIT University

Melbourne, Class of 2014

“I’M A NEWBIE IN THE INDUSTRY, AND WHEN I WAS GOING THROUGH UNIVERSITY A LOT OF TEACHERS DIDN’T SEE DIGITAL AS AN IMPORTANT PART OF MARKETING. THEY JUST SAW DIGITAL AS A SUPPORT MEDIUM OR SUPPORT CHANNEL, WHEREAS TV AND RADIO WERE THOUGHT OF AS A SPEARHEAD. IF YOU JUST TAKE WHAT YOU CAN GET FROM THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN TERMS OF DIGITAL MARKETING, YOU’RE NOT GOING TO HAVE A GOOD TIME.”

WE DON’T NEED NO EDUCATION

From an industry perspective, it seems young people are often overlooked as half-baked coffee handlers, and unis blamed for their inexperience. In reality, the industry itself has been given an opportunity to cultivate these open-minded grads and turn them into moneymakers.

“One of the things that really irritates me is that everyone’s pointing the finger at education, demanding it needs to change and be more digital,” says Vermuelen. “I agree with that, however I also think it’s an employer’s responsibility. Unless there are companies willing to take risks on young people, willing to take them under their wing to learn, there’s only so much universities can do for students.

“It was so obvious to me that training young people made sense because they were desperate for this skillset, and were having to teach themselves things they weren’t getting at university.

“Young people are not prepared to work in marketing in general because digital crosses everything now, and if they’re not prepared, then brands aren’t prepared, and if brands aren’t prepared then we can’t stay competitive in Australia and everything is going to be bought online overseas. It’s one vicious cycle and our role as an agency is to be part of changing that, and that’s why it isn’t just about education.”

Sangster adds that for the industry, we need to have induction and training programs for when agencies bring new graduates onboard, in order to get them up to speed faster. “If we invested in them for the first three to six months – actually invested in their training when their brain is really open to information – it will go a long way to getting marketers up to speed with the new marketing skills.”

“We shouldn’t look at them as junior,” she emphasised. “These skills are scarce now. They’re scarce in mid-level and senior markers so for us to be training young grads in these skills is an investment.

“It’s an investment in our own agencies or an investment in our own people and that’s how it should be perceived rather than as a cost.”

One of the world’s fastest moving industries won’t survive if its people get left behind, and while the once sacred tradition of a university education was paramount to a successful career, the baton is being passed to the industry, which needs to take some ownership of this issue. The industry needs to nurture new talent coming through the ranks, because, much like tying your shoelace and necking a beer, some things just can’t be taught through education. ■

