

Relationships: who cares?



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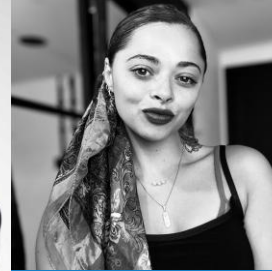
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Our brief

- To understand the health of relationships across the industry
- Identify opportunities to strengthen relationships that will drive business success

Coming up

- Marketing Directors' relationships with their internal stakeholders
- AWC Relationship Strength Index
- Looking to the future

9 + 21+198 +3 = 1 Conclusion

Relationship Recession

The background features a large, semi-transparent blue illustration. It depicts a hand from the top right, dropping a 3D block. The block has a white line graph on its side, showing a sharp downward trend, and a small white icon of a person falling from the graph. In the background, there are faint, stylized icons of people and a document.

A dirt road with a wooden fence separating green and golden fields.

*“People on all sides of the fence
are more scared than ever”*



How do we strengthen
relationships to drive
mutual business success?

The views from the front line...



1. Marketing Directors: Relationships with internal stakeholders

Marketing Directors Internal Relationships

CFO -the toughest stakeholder - building trust through numbers is essential

“The CFO has absolutely no appreciation for what we do as a team... ..they've got no interest in the long term. Their only focus is short-term”

Sales is frequently dominant

Marketing gains traction when campaigns /KPIs are aligned with sales outcomes

“In most companies, the sales team feel that they are the kings”

Measurement

Advertising is often discounted, particularly if it lacks exact metrics

“The abundance of data has put us in a place that is making life a little bit harder... there's a part of it that I don't think can be fully measurable.” organisation.”

Marketing Directors Internal Relationships

Data AI – Legacy systems and fragmented data sources

AI is seen as a real productivity enabler

“We use millions of systems, but we don’t have a single source of truth.”

Leadership alignment makes a difference

“Where CEOs or CFOs understand marketing, it earns airtime, resources and credibility; in less aligned organisations, marketing is left defending its value alone”

Marketing is stretched

Teams are spread too thinly, with not enough training or depth in specialist roles.

“There’s no money for training, but marketing’s expected to cover 50 channels”

Marketing Directors internal relationships

Constant justification

“Negotiation, compliance battles, and constant justification are taking their toll”

The human cost of undervaluation

Marketers report feeling overwhelmed, undervalued and reduced to metric drivers

“Marketers that I know ... are feeling less valued... we're being seen as someone who just drives a metric.”

Agencies – partners or suppliers?

Agencies polarise opinion

“The best are integrated, trusted partners ...the worst are seen as expensive suppliers with limited internal influence”



Raise the game

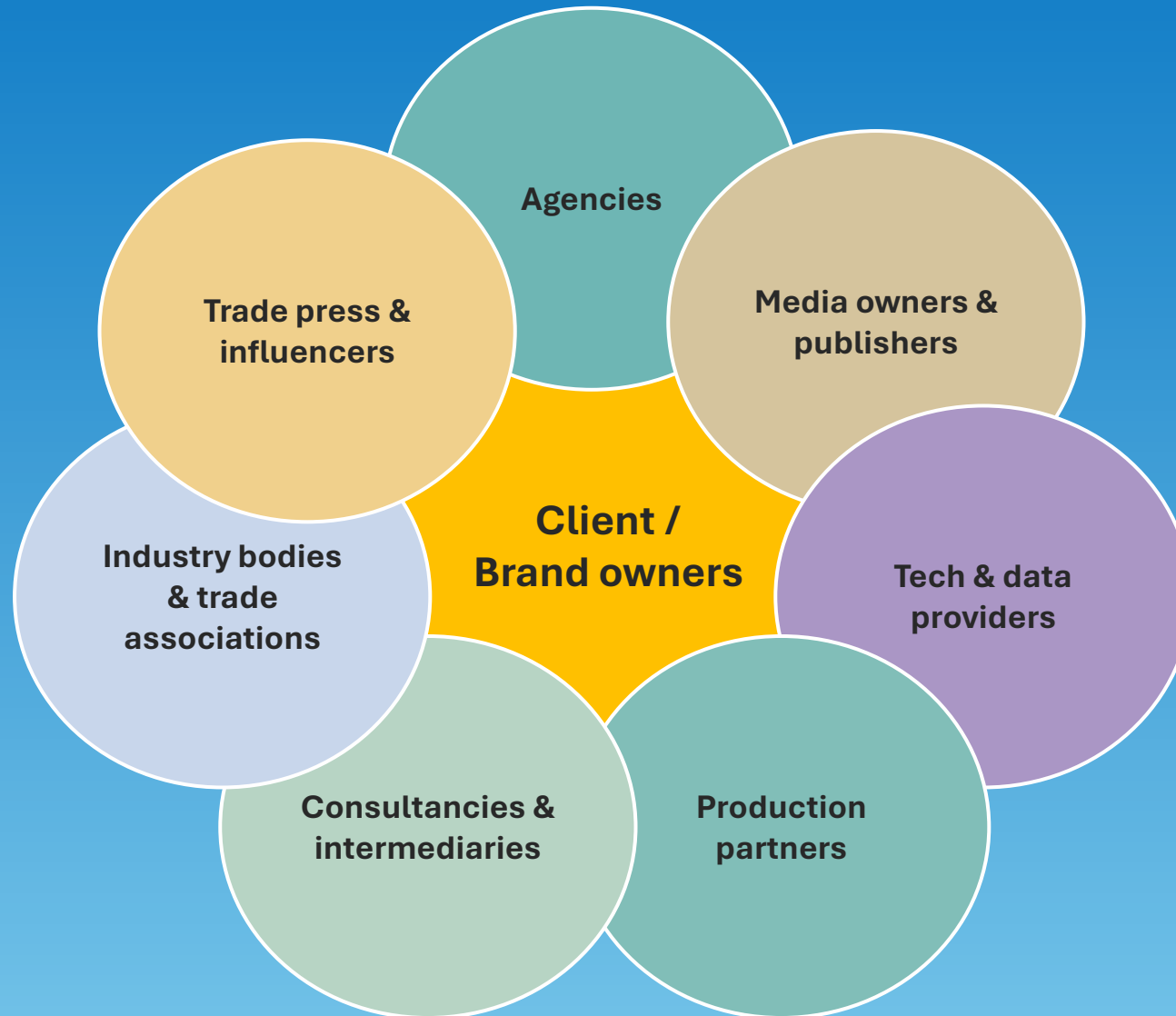
- Marketing in a position of weakness
.... has a ripple effect on the internal ecosystem
- We as a collective need step up to
help marketers to build better relationships.

2. Relationship Strength Index

- Health check on the state of marketing and advertising relationships
- Invested in an online survey
- **19** quantitative questions (Scale of 1 to 10)
- **3** qualitative questions



We wanted to cover the marketing ecosystem



Too ambitious?

- 198 participants
- Focus on **78 agency** and **27 client** responses
- Indicative findings



Key findings ^{1/3}

Global economic climate = nervousness and indecision

“Relationships are under real pressure, budgets, time, everything”

The current state of relationships varies

- Client KPIs average **6.6** vs. Agency average KPIs **7.5**
- Women scored relationships higher than men

Technology is reshaping interactions

- Digital tools have changed the texture of relationships
- *“Tech is making some things easier, but relationships colder”*

Key findings ^{2/3}

Agencies view commercial model transparency as a strength; clients don't
(Agency: 8.2 / Client: 6.3)

Neither sees the current model as fully delivering mutual value
(Agency: 6.9 / Client: 6.1)

KPI setting and timelines (Agency: 6.8 / Client: 6.3)

- Recognition of the need for more precise success metrics

More action required on sustainability/DEI (Agency: 6.8 / Client: 5.7)

Both value human interaction.... but more so by agencies (Agency: 8.7 / Client: 7.5)

Time invested in the relationship (Agency: 7.1 / Client: 5.9)

- Clients don't have enough time.

Key findings ^{3/3}

People remain the heart of good relationships...

- ... but this human element isn't always prioritised in how organisations operate
- Strong belief that technology and processes can't replace human trust and chemistry

Value is not always recognised

- Many feel their contribution is underappreciated
- *"Sometimes it feels like we're taken for granted."*

For many agencies, the sense of partnership is weakening

- *"Everything feels like a transaction now"*

Talent churn is damaging continuity

- High turnover makes it harder to build trust over time
- Experienced people are being lost
- *"People move too fast – relationships never bed in."*

Qualitative:
What would improve relationships?

“We’re at a crossroads... relationships need re-thinking”



What would improve relationships? ^{1/2}

Making more time to build relationships

- The most repeated theme is the lack of time spent nurturing the relationship

Meeting more face-to-face

- Still seen as the fastest way to build trust.
 - *“More face-to-face time. That’s where trust is built”*

Improve mutual understanding

- Better understanding of each other’s businesses, pressures and ways of working

What would improve relationships? ^{2/2}

Transparency

- Especially financial models

Real collaboration

- Earlier involvement

Clear and consistent communication

- Communication problems often underlie other issues like misalignment
- Many frustrations come from unclear or irregular communication.

Findings confirm much of what many of us
already know...

...the question is, what do we do?

It's time for a **Relationship Renaissance**



Two parts



1. The Relationship Accord



**An initiative to establish a set of “ground rules”
for relationships across industry stakeholders**

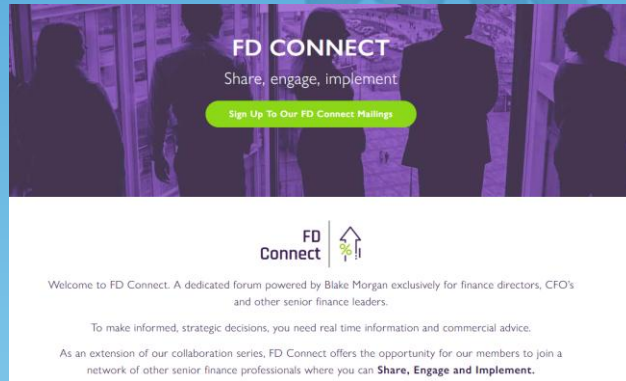
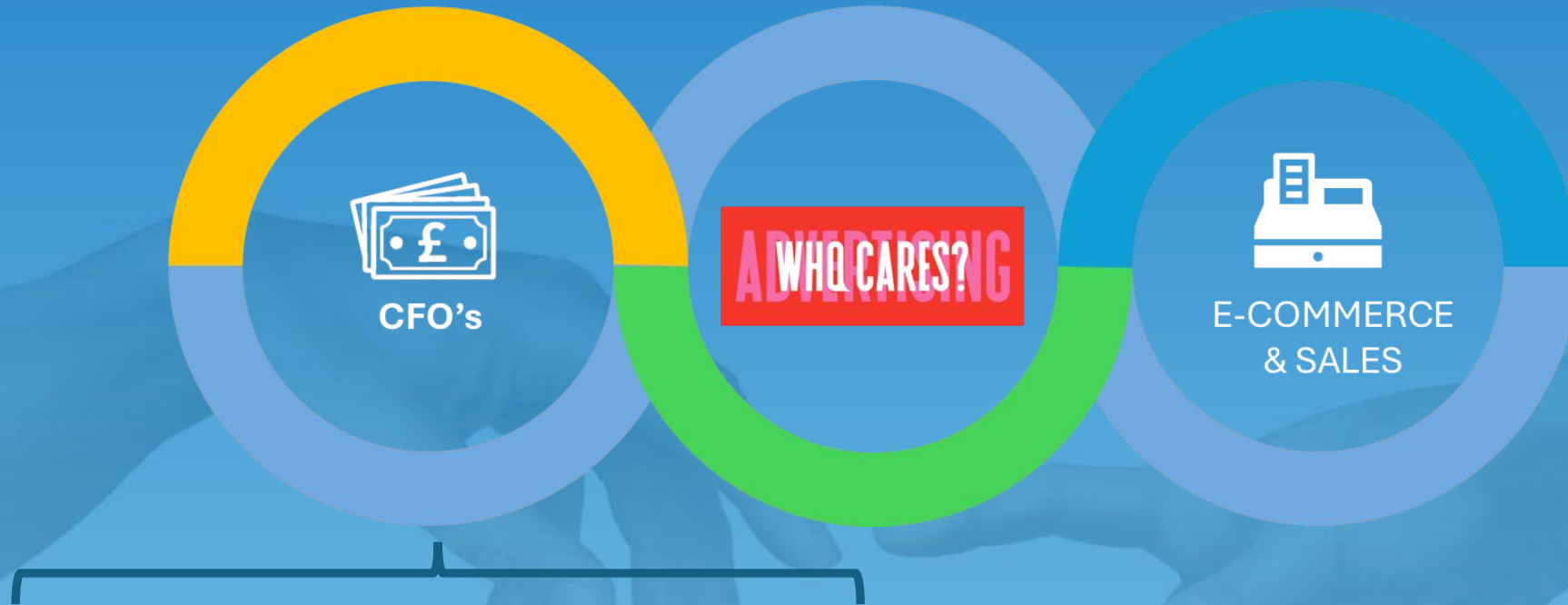
1. The Relationship Accord

- ✓ Agree on industry-wide relationship standards
- ✓ Set joint scorecards and shared KPIs
- ✓ Build relationship time into contracts
 - ✓ *Treat relationship reviews as seriously as financials*
- ✓ Empower senior relationship champions
- ✓ Reward long-term partnership
- ✓ Make leaders visible champions by showing up at key moments
- ✓ Protect trust with proper handovers and continuity plans.

2. The Relationship Accord - Outreach

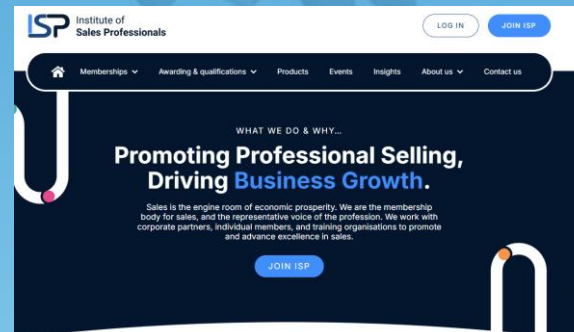


2. The Relationship Accord - Outreach



WHO CARES?
ADVERTISING

2. The Relationship Accord - Outreach



WHO CARES?

Let's shape an industry where relationships
aren't just part of the business ...

...they *are* the business

Relationships: we care