

The Calm Before the (Digital) Storm

By *Vernon Vasu*, CMO, [ReFUEL4](#)



The sea both frightens me and lures me in. I enjoy surfing, hanging out on the beach with my family. But when I am out there on my surfboard, there is always a little twinge of danger being in the open, so far from the shore.

That was my feeling after being at [Cannes Lions](#) last month. Much of it seemed familiar and comfortable – old friends, new friends, great exchanges, loads to learn and deals to make. But in the back of my mind, there was a feeling of flatness, sort of like how just before a storm, the barometer falls, the wind dies and sweat clings to your skin.

There is a storm coming.

Why did I feel that? What could I sense? I see more than a few big shifts happening in [ad land](#). I can't see where they lead, but they will rock the status quo as we know it.

Here are some of my thoughts:

1. **Clients want performance.** They are no longer truly interested in hiring agencies with glittery medals in the lobby. They want to reduce cost and see the ROI of creativity in dollars not gold lions.
2. **Creative agencies have missed the boat.** I could really get the sense at Cannes that mismatch between what clients want and what creative agencies are geared to deliver is growing more apart. The age of the grandiose creative flourish is over. The asteroid has entered the atmosphere! They have to reinvent themselves or very quickly go extinct.
3. **Media Agencies need to start delivering real insights.** They must over the big data hang up and seize the chalice. Move up the value chain and start considering how to deliver creatives to drive programmatic against those insights. Clients need that and will pay for it. Creative agencies are priced out.
4. **Agency networks are trying to play publisher, too late.** There is no way to move up the food chain now. I believe the opportunity is to reorganize their networks in a process of creative destruction. If they don't, the likes of Accenture Interactive and Deloitte Digital will eat their lunch.
5. **There will be the holy trinity of Facebook, Google and Tencent.** That's it. Sorry guys, if you are a smaller player, you will be muscled out. Unless you are Snapchat. Then you are onto something.
6. **Content and creative at scale** is an opportunity to be seized. Agency networks don't seem to have their heads around it.
7. **Gravity is shifting to APAC**, we are going to see many solutions for the issues above coming out of this

region, taking advantage of scalable tech, access to a big talent base.

More clouds are gathering with the global economy taking a beating and adding stress to the infrastructure. It will be interesting to see what Cannes Lions 2017 looks like.

About the Author: Vernon Vasu is an award winning CMO who has manage creative and PR agencies for over 15 years in APAC. He is known for leading effective marketing teams, focusing on business results.