

# Advertisers must think differently as non-agencies and AI disrupt the industry

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Advertising is an industry that lives on the cusp of changes in the world. These changes are driven by new technologies and players. If agencies do not adapt, the industry they work in will move on without them.



*media update's* Adam Wakefield spoke to Cem Topcuoglu, president of TBWA\ Middle East and Africa, about how artificial intelligence (AI) and data are changing advertising, and how agency domination in the advertising space is being disrupted.

## AI and data will inspire advertising creativity

AI is one of the technologies disrupting not only advertising but industries overall. Agencies are starting to integrate this technology into their businesses and, according to Topcuoglu, data analysis and reference are where AI will be most relevant.

"From a creative point of view, in the beginning, it was unsettling," says Topcuoglu. "But, once we changed our perspective, and approached it from a data angle, it became clear that AI powered by data can be a powerful tool."

While most are trying to 'crack' [Big Data](#), TBWA\ is looking at it differently. It collects data and puts 'clues' together so its creatives can work with the best insights and use it as the starting point for their work.

"Data should be inspiring. We want data to be used purely for creativity. AI is helping us focus less on the past, and more on current culture. [By] using robots and technology, we can review and summarise events in any category from anywhere, and use that to understand the present landscape," Topcuoglu says.

"We need help processing the vast amount of information available nowadays. For example, you come up with an idea and can combine data and AI to check if it already exists – that's a positive of AI. We can even push it further and use the technology to see what worked best, in what medium, and how."

Topcuoglu believes the changes in advertising caused by data and AI will only accelerate, especially with virtual reality (VR) also on the verge of becoming mainstream.

"I believe VR is going to be even more disruptive because of the possibilities of placing our brands and stories in VR," he says. "The potential for next-generation computers is incredible because of how fast everything is changing. We could be touching it, smelling it, or whatever it may be."

## Advertising is no longer just done by advertising agencies

Looking ahead, Topcuoglu says the greatest competition is not from other agencies but from organisations that traditionally did not operate in advertising.

"The advertising landscape has changed dramatically in the last couple of years and the pace of change means the industry is now facing fierce competition from everywhere," he says.

"Our real competition is culture. This has allowed for consultancies, technology, and media companies, as well as new types of advertising agencies, defined or not, to come into the industry."

Topcuoglu highlights the movements of Facebook and Google within the advertising space as they wear both the hats of a media and a technology company.

“More than anybody else that we can think of, they have the right talent, the right data, and they know everything about us – from what we eat, to what we do, and when we sleep. But they don’t worry about the magical, creative part of advertising,” he says.

Within this context, the job of advertising professionals will not be easy, but Topcuoglu says TBWA\ is ready for these challenges. He believes TBWA\ are already “way ahead” of other agencies, and aim to keep it that way. They also aim to stay ahead of new rivals, which is going to be a challenge.

### **Advertising agencies need to hire differently**

To stay ahead, Topcuoglu says TBWA\ and other agencies need to change the way they work and think, especially when hiring new talent. Topcuoglu believes the industry needs to employ people outside of the advertising norm who come from different industries and who think differently.

The industry also needs to embrace the spirit of collaboration and working with other companies.

“We call ourselves a radically open, creative collective. This is the definition of a new age company and how it works. Traditional companies are struggling against Silicon Valley and other brands because of how they define themselves,” Topcuoglu says.

“We consider ourselves a brand for the 21st century, so we work differently, we collaborate, and involve our partners. We aim to be a more fluid organisation that adapts to the needs of our brand and brief – be big whenever it is needed, and small whenever that is needed.”

Production needs to also be faster, cheaper, and smarter. Content must be created “in the smartest way”, Topcuoglu explains. This means sampling what is available in consumer-generated content, and working with that talent if necessary, to maintain a constant dialogue.

“These are the things that make us different in the marketplace. We also have this incredible operating system we call ‘Disruption Live’,” Topcuoglu says.

He explains, “We have a team of cultural spotters, hundreds of people from all over the world, and every single day they source and articulate live cultural information to contribute to the system – like a social media monitor without keywords.”

Topcuoglu says TBWA\ pulls trigger briefs out of the cultural information they receive, which is a living update of what is happening at a global, regional, and local level. The trigger briefs allow TBWA\ to create proactive briefs and not wait for the next day.

“We are always online. Our system makes us more flexible. We are now working on taking it to the next level. That edge makes us unique, and I don’t think there is anybody out there working that fast – at the speed of culture.”

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