SHOULD WE JUST CALL IT ALL "THE FRONTS"?

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Ever since the NewFronts were started, there has been debate about whether they had any business mimicking the annual TV selling model, or whether they even belong at all.

I agree—it's time to start asking the question: "should the NewFronts and Upfronts just become one singular entity—the Fronts, if you will?"

At a certain point, it will become harder to draw a boundary line between each medium, and forcing it could actually get in the way of growth.

I can explain.

At this point, nearly a dozen years in, it seems clear that the NewFronts have found a purpose and are here to stay—though their role has evolved, as have the players.

> "IS MEDIA GOING TO BE MUCH MORE ABOUT CONGLOMERATES AND PLATFORMS THAN NETWORKS AND WEBSITES?"

The question is whether this slew of digital ad sales showcases deserves to live on its own island, which to some will always appear to be a minor league version of the well-established TV Upfronts. Or whether in the not-so-distant future, advertisers will demand that all video-based media will need to come together and pitch the same budgets.

And more importantly, will the TV giants and digital contenders all be competing with the same Silicon Valley titans and need the strength in numbers that would come from working together?

In other words, is media going to be much more about conglomerates and platforms than networks and websites? **And what is "TV," anyway?**

The arguments for the status quo are solid—and you've probably heard them all.

- TV is a futures market. Digital media, with its seemingly endless supply, isn't.
- TV is sold and measured completely differently using unique tools.
- TV is bought and sold by a completely different group of specialist buyers and sellers.
- Despite linear TV's stagnancy, there are still so many more "ratings points" available on a given day than any one web show.
- TV has always done things this way. And digital media hasn't and probably doesn't need to.

All of these reasons are legitimate. And the market conditions won't change overnight.

But the thing is, a confluence of events is causing TV's traditions to be upended—and is being done so quicker than most have thought.

For starters, ad-supported linear TV is shrinking and getting older. In addition, younger generations are spending far more time on mobile devices and apps than watching traditional TV networks on the screens mounted on our walls.

At the same time, the options for ad-free TV viewing are only increasing (see Disney+). Meanwhile, digital advertising and TV are colliding in OTT.

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As that ad vehicle/mode of consumption only becomes more prevalent, its "on demand" nature may negate the need for gobbling up TV GRPs in given pockets of time. At least that stands to become more difficult.

Plus, OTT brings elements of digital media, like dynamic ad serving and targeting. In fact, that's being driven by "NewFront" players such as YouTube, Hulu and even Twitter. The more that TV is being bought this way, the more that the NewFronts will belong in the same tactical conversations at the Upfronts.

Last week, Joshua Lowcock, Chief Digital Officer, UM Worldwide, referred to the emergence of OTT as a potential "tipping point" for the way video ads are bought and sold.

Scarcity has always driven TV demand. Increasingly, there's premium ad space that is finite in OTT, YouTube, Hulu and other scaled digital players. That will only prove more true over time.

That's the short term—but let's look to the future. In the long term, a new generation of CMOs and digital agency leaders will see beyond these "front" distinctions.

Let's be honest with ourselves. As much as many marketers and media agencies have preached convergence over the past decade, ad buying—and ad budgets—have remained siloed.

This becomes readily apparent when you have a conversation with a "traditional" brand or TV buyer. They clearly know that media consumption is shifting with the fight for consumer attention and that measurement needs to catch up. But they often want to filter that new consumption through "old" lenses. "How can we translate on-demand viewing of a series to a linear number?" or that sort of thing.

When you talk to a digital buyer, or a DTC brand manager, they don't understand these conversations. They don't think about piling up enough GRPs for certain demos and locking up bulk pricing—in fact, some may not even know what a GRP actually represents. They buy ads hoping to land on whatever ROI number they care about and if that works, they buy more. It doesn't matter where it lives, as long as you can buy it fast, track success and make changes.

> "… A NEW GENERATION OF CMOs AND DIGITAL AGENCY LEADERS WILL SEE BEYOND THESE 'FRONT DISTINCTIONS.'"

Tara Walpert Levy, VP of Agency and Media Solutions for Google and YouTube, said that at one point, web video initiatives were a "nice to have" for many marketers. Increasingly, as linear TV ratings' decline accelerates, and more performance marketers gain prominence, "it's become crystal clear, if you want efficacy, and you want to drive business outcomes, the money needs to move where the audiences are."

What happens when these data-religious executives take the lead at the world's biggest brands and media companies? It's already happening.

These leaders are likely to push their various media partners to compete head-to-head on performance, whether they are based in New York or the Valley. Traditional ad buyers will need to get on board and compete for the future.

One Upfront or NewFront at at time.