

International media agencies call for dialogue with advertisers and auditors to rebuild trust

14 June 2017, Brussels – **Media agencies believe that trust between agencies, advertisers and auditors could be significantly improved by collectively addressing specific areas of potential concern with media auditing practices, such as data confidentiality, professional standards and potential conflicts of interests. The findings have been compiled by the European Association of Communications Agencies (EACA) within a new Report published today 'Auditing: Contract Compliance & Media Benchmarking - 'Rebuilding Trust'.**

In today's increasingly complex media environment, agencies and advertisers recognise the need to build more trusting partnerships. The media auditing community has an important and influential role to play. Whilst each stakeholder group has a different perspective and faces a different set of challenges – there appears to be alignment on the need for and desire to make the appropriate changes.

The EACA Report outlines these challenges and constructively suggests an action roadmap with the intention of helping to strengthen trust within the tripartite relationship.

Undertaken by EACA over the past 6 months, the Report is the result of dozens of interviews with agencies, advertisers, auditors and benchmarkers. It provides an overview of the media agency auditing landscape, before exploring the differing perspectives of agencies, advertisers, auditors and benchmarkers. It concludes by outlining future practical steps towards building a clearer environment from which to rebuild trust between the three parties.

"Media agencies view media auditing and benchmarking as a potentially positive way to demonstrate contractual compliance and prove delivery of strong media value to their clients. Nevertheless, for this process to work effectively, agencies need to be fully assured that the companies involved are able to operate as truly neutral arbiters, whilst upholding the highest professional standards," says Dominic Lyle, EACA's Director General.

Lyle continues: *"Today's data and digital centric media marketplace, however, has inevitably led to greater caution as agencies now provide auditors with significant volumes of highly sensitive and confidential data. In addition, they are concerned about the potential conflicts of interest between specific divisions within some of the auditing companies. The bottom line is that agencies rightly expect these assessments to be conducted with full confidentiality, impartiality and professionalism."*

Agencies cited the following as key requirements to help significantly improve the existing tripartite dynamics:

- 1. Bulletproof confidentiality guarantees:** *more rigorous processes and procedures need to be put in place to safeguard the sensitive and valuable data provided by agencies to the diverse range of media auditors.*
- 2. Consistent professional and evidenced standards:** *more robust internal measures and controls need to be upheld, and evidence provided, by all media auditing businesses (e.g. accreditations, qualifications, independent verifications etc.).*
- 3. Zero conflicts of interest:** *certain standards need to be incorporated into the decision-making process when appointing independent media auditors, benchmarkers or advisers.*

These issues inevitably exert influence on the degree of transparency and trust between the three stakeholder groups involved and are potentially damaging to the credibility of the media auditing process, but also inevitably exert influence on the degree of transparency and trust between the three stakeholder groups involved.

Advertisers naturally agreed that independent assessment of media agency performance and compliance are critical components of ensuring underlying transparency, confidence and trust in their agency partners. In turn, they believe that agencies could and should do more to demonstrate that they are operating with full transparency.

Auditors and benchmarkers agreed the media auditing landscape is changing fast and that it now covers a much wider range of services – from pitch management to strategic advice to evaluation of agency technology and analytics tools. They noted that agencies could be more cooperative and transparently provide all the required information and data. All interviewed auditors claim to uphold high professional standards.

During the interview process, advertisers, contract compliance auditors, benchmarkers and media advisers all broadly agreed that creating a forum for debate, dialogue and action would be helpful and welcomed this Report as a positive step in that direction.

Jon Chase, Chair of EACA's Media Agencies Council (MAC) added: "EACA is seeking to pull together a collaborative, cross-industry working group to identify and address the key areas of collective concern. We invite advertisers, the media auditing community and our member agencies to start an open and constructive dialogue. Ultimately, we would like to help ensure the media auditing marketplace is fully fit for purpose in the 21st century – a rigorous, consistent, confidential and professional environment, free from any potential conflicts of interest."

The Report identifies three key steps to help create the right environment to start rebuilding trust:

1. The creation of two separate working groups including agencies, auditors and advertisers - one for contract compliance auditing and the other for media benchmarking.
2. The creation of best practice guidelines collectively agreed across the three stakeholder groups. The guidelines could include a summary of best practice processes and behaviours in relation to contract compliance audit and media benchmarking, covering the whole process from start to finish including confidentiality, conflict of interest and professional standards.
3. A more binding, mutually agreed, code of conduct outlining clear rules on professional standards and obligations of all parties. The code of conduct would cover all three parties and the requirements for their professional behaviour throughout the auditing/benchmarking process.

Download the Report [here](#).

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METHODOLOGY

The Report is the result of a six-month process during which the EACA Secretariat conducted telephone and face-to-face interviews with a broad range of agencies, advertisers, auditors and media benchmarkers. These interviews were conducted confidentially and all views have been condensed into a collective summary. There is no attribution to any individual person, company or organisation.

ABOUT EACA

The European Association of Communications Agencies (EACA) represents more than 2,500 communications agencies and agency associations from 30 European countries that directly employ more than 120,000 people. EACA members include advertising, media, digital, branding and PR agencies.

EACA promotes honest, effective advertising, high professional standards and awareness of the contribution of advertising in a free market economy and encourages close co-operation between agencies, advertisers and media in European advertising bodies. EACA works closely with EU institutions to ensure freedom to advertise responsibly and creatively.

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