



Let's Face It, The New World of Media is
Still An MVP!

Sequent Partners

Great Progress, But
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This December, Sequent Partners will say farewell to the advertising and media industries.

When we started our careers, it was a mass marketing world. National brands, national advertising, national media, national sales. Broadly defined demo-based targets, no niches anywhere in sight.

Now, we leave in a far more promising 1:1 marketing era. Tailored products, targeted media, relevant personalized messages with outcome measurement right alongside.

We've gotten closer and closer to that magnificent vision that's been on every white board since the beginning of time: personalized, just-in-time messaging, true intender targets, real-time trackable outcomes – at scale and affordable.

The industry has made epic improvements and grown exponentially in our lifetime. Massive tech and data investments have connected many/most/some of the pieces of the most complex media ecosystem on the planet. That is a huge accomplishment.

And yet, our media world is still a bit of an agile engineering “MVP” isn't it? A minimum viable product with just enough features to be usable - not a well-oiled machine.

Why is that and how do we go about fixing it?

Re-center on the consumer.

How did we lose sight of the consumer? In a tech-centric world, it's almost understandable that a focus on data obscures the person represented by the data. Multidimensional consumers are not baked into the system.

Consumer attitudes about brands are also missing. Consumers' preferences for a brand matter because they improve the effectiveness of upper and lower funnel messages. The impact of creative is missing too! Resonance, relevance, and reactions are left out of the

average media tech solutions. Brands exist in the minds of the consumer and creative advertising stirs our souls. The consumer isn't whole without these aspects.

We get it. Re-focusing on the consumer will be hard. And expensive. The vision requires a scalable, holistic system that captures consumer brand attitudes/preferences, and distributes messages that are targeted to the right person, (not their device or household). But it will also require privacy-safe solutions that are built on accurate, recent, and complete data - not just the best available data.

Fix media delivery.

To consumers, media delivery is a mess -- ad collision, excessive frequency, inaccurately targeted spots unconnected to content. And advertisers suffer with unknown reach/frequency. Though some providers offer nascent holistic solutions, for the most part, we're operating in an ecosystem with enormous blind spots; AdTech dumps faceless impressions on faceless households.

AI tools and platforms try to control and streamline the process. But AI brings with it another set of issues, from accuracy to transparency. Consumer data that fuels the platforms will be irrevocably altered by privacy laws and business practice; with AI, we may be working with synthetic data and personas that are one step too many removed from real consumers with real hearts and minds.

We need to start to set aside individual interests in favor of industry collaboration, integration, and standardization. An interoperable holistic view is needed to cure ad collisions, excessive frequency and provide accurate reach and frequency and marketplace results.

Optimize outcomes.

The industry has made strong strides in optimizing outcomes, driven by the need to measure a very complex communication plan. Thanks to a plethora of data and machine learning, modeling methods have evolved. Still, they may never achieve the real-time response needed to drive programmatic buying or provide granular insights into consumer segments and journeys. Those were the promises of attribution – now stymied by privacy policies and legislation. Attribution also has a scope problem: walled gardens have strong attribution within the walls, and clean rooms can integrate disparate data, but we are nowhere near a full understanding of the consumer journey and the impact of our 360-degree communication plans.

We face a serious fork in the road ahead. Will we have complete and accurate consumer level data, or will privacy policies and legislation make that impossible? What path should we take?

Should we go all-in on first-party data, anonymized data sets, and privacy-preserving measurement technologies? Or should we abandon the notion of individual data entirely and adopt cohort measurement - of similar behaviors and characteristics most relevant to brands. At this point, an argument could be made for either path.

Over the years, we've been privileged to witness mind-blowing generational changes in the advertising business. The 1:1 vision is finally within sight. We'll get there, we think, barring economic infeasibility, or privacy or territoriality or other structural hurdles that could confound progress. Today's generation of media pros has the creativity, brainpower and the capabilities to do it. We hope they carry this "minimum viable product" all the way and not stop short of creating the ecosystem consumers desperately deserve.

About Sequent Partners

Since 2003, Sequent Partners has been a leading consulting firm specializing in brand and media metrics. It was founded by Jim Spaeth, former President of the Advertising Research Foundation and research innovator with PEAC ViewFacts, ScanAmerica and ASI and Bill Moul. Alice Sylvester partnered with Jim after years of research and planning with major advertising agencies and serving as former Chairman of the Advertising Research Foundation Board.