

Ad agencies see market uplift

Tania Banotti, the new chief executive of the Institute of Advertising Practitioners in Ireland, is planning for change



Slobhán Brett

Some 60 per cent of Irish ad agencies forecast growth this year, according to an industry census published last week by the Institute of Advertising Practitioners in Ireland – the first in five years.

"It was a regrettable thing," said Iapi chief executive Tania Banotti of the hiatus. Banotti, who was appointed last year, put it down to "resources, other things." As a result, she prioritised the 2013 census, an important foundation for other change she plans to bring about.

"I want to turn Iapi into a representative body for the whole communications industry," she said, acknowledging that Iapi's make-up has already begun to change. No longer the preserve of the "traditional ad agencies," Banotti is actively recruiting digital and integrated agency members.

"There's nobody just for them," Banotti said of the digital agency community. "IAB [the Internet Advertising Bureau] does some work, but of a different nature, hinging on spend. At the end of the day, we're all shopping in the same pool. Agencies have become incredibly fragmented, all of them have more and more in common, more overlap. Whether or not it is their intention, they morph into integrated agencies. We want the composition of Iapi to mirror that breadth and variety."

Already, Iapi has brought in six new members this year, the last of which, H&A in Cork, joined just last week. "I'm out there, pitching to others," Banotti said.

In a short space of time, she has fully acquainted herself with the geography of "adland". Prior to her appointment to the institute, she was chief executive of representative association Theatre Forum, and held senior roles at National Campaign for the Arts and Screen Producers Ireland.

"It's completely different, commercial creativity," Banotti said. "People who work in the arts do it because they absolutely love it. They don't earn a cent. It's completely different, but I want to bring those two worlds together."

She has proven a decisive, pragmatic chief executive thus far, coming at the industry from a different standpoint than most – expressly bemused by the amount of backslapping and the large number of "gongs" handed out each year, quick to point out that hardship in the ad industry has nothing on hardship in the arts.

Banotti remains concerned, however, about increasing pressure on agencies, regularly resulting from the involvement of larger multina-

By the numbers: Iapi industry census

- 66 per cent of ad agency workers are educated to degree-level or higher
- 13 per cent of Irish agency chief executives are women
- €4.6 million is the average turnover of a creative agency
- €43.6 million is the average turnover of a media/digital agency
- 33 per cent of agencies expect staff levels to increase this year (60 per cent anticipate remaining constant, 7 per cent anticipate a reduction in staff)
- 80 per cent of agencies cited "time pressure" as highly influential
- 60 per cent of agencies are expecting growth in the order of 16 per cent this year
- 7 per cent of agencies expect business to decline by 3.5 per cent

tional clients' procurement departments – "who are experts at getting everything and getting it at the price they want".

"You win the account, you get going, and then you're asked to do more for the same price, advice, collateral stuff," she said, referring to this as "scope creep" or "mission creep".

Under her leadership, Iapi has be-

gun providing "push back" training to managing directors under fire, something which has been offered to London agencies for some time.

Training in negotiation is important to temper clients' sometimes exorbitant expectations (of support, of access to senior staff), according to Banotti. "We need to up our game. Your creative director is not available for €10 an hour, whatever the ar-

rangement," she said. "Parameters need to be laid out."

Iapi will host a series of talks in 2014 about different ways and means of being remunerated for work, "different ways of slicing the salami, so to speak," Banotti said.

Irish ad agencies are under a different and new kind of pressure at present when it comes to talent, something else Banotti is keenly aware of. Capable and experienced executives are being targeted – and eventually, poached – by technology giants with large European offices in Dublin. It is becoming harder and harder for agencies to retain valued staff.

"They offer a lot of money," chief executive of Mindshare, Bill Kinlay, said at the publication of the census last week. His counterpart at OMD, Tim Griffiths, also present, pointed out that Google, Facebook and Twitter alone employed more than the Irish ad agencies combined.

"We've all lost people to these companies," Griffiths said later. "Their pockets are rather deep."

This is among the newer thorns in

the sides of agencies, and is among others which were aired last March at an Iapi-organised event, Rant Night.

"I guess the idea came from my background in theatre," Banotti said. "It's a soapbox format: you stand up, say what you have to say, and walk offstage. So we put out a call for arms and had some great, varied contributions."

Among them, Jess Majekodunmi (now of DDFH&B) railed against exploitation inherent in "the eternal internship"; Orlaith Blaney, chief executive of McCannBlue, vented about the prevalence of fraud and double-billing; and Jimmy Murphy, director at Publicis, lamented the dearth of women in parts of the industry. The event was oversubscribed; follow-ups are planned in the coming months.

"I once went to one in Brussels where we were given slippers of different colours to wave in agreement or throw at the stage in dissent," Banotti said. "We might try something like that next time."

FEARGAL WARD