



# THE NEW NORMAL

A series of thought pieces from industry leaders

## Why the advertising industry must maintain and accelerate change to help society change

**Article by Christopher Kenna, CEO & Co-founder of Brand Advance \***

I write this during a changed and difficult time in our collective history. COVID-19 has seen the whole world come to a standstill. The great economic power housed across the globe has been reduced and only essential 'Key Workers' are being permitted to leave their homes to keep the minimal economic and medical cogs turning. This new reality has led the UK to experience a grinding halt across consumer spending in many sectors, with brands having to rethink their whole media and marketing plans.

Alongside this, many agencies have put portions of their workforces on furlough or worse, they have let large swathes of their team go! An unintentional but very real consequence of this is that many brands and their agencies may have lost some, or in extreme cases, all their diversity gains over the last few years.

Our industry must maintain and accelerate change to help society change. Evidence is emerging that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people are being disproportionately affected by COVID-19. It is more likely to kill within these groups but perversely the impact on 18-25's also threatens lives and futures. We have made progress over recent years to make agencies more diverse workplaces, however, it is quite likely that this group will be hit hardest in the slew of layoffs that are beginning to happen. Consider what happens to diversity when the very group with the greatest social awareness and desire to change the status quo are lost. Lost to the industry, lost to advertisers, they lose their income and their future. All this against the backdrop of Black Lives Matter protests from New York to London and beyond.

You would be forgiven for thinking it's not a great time to be Black right now - I am, and that's how I feel!

However, it's not all doom and gloom for agencies and brands, as adversity provides new opportunities. Advertisers should aim to build both their brand equity and relevance within today's world, ensuring that each, and every campaign now has purpose. Many marketers are looking for Brand Purpose, and at how to positively and inclusively reach out to all demographics.

For agencies the need to support the 18-25's, to support diversity and support their future should be part of their recovery planning. It works. Since the beginning of COVID-19 our revenue has increased by over 400% and our agency has doubled in size. I am not trying to sell Brand Advance services to you, what I am trying to do is show what is possible for all



# THE NEW NORMAL

A series of thought pieces from industry leaders

agencies and advertisers. Agencies need to deliver great results for clients by reflecting the UK as it is today, something it cannot do when agencies lack representation. For advertisers consider this: three months ago a Black Bus Driver was a low paid, low skilled worker but today they are a 'Key Worker'. This in turn is starting to evoke a completely different mindset from marketers as they now wish to reach these demographics and do it authentically and within a Contextual Environment. There is a social and economic need for agencies to work with new and existing clients both in the UK and Globally to reach their Key Worker demographics: let's ponder the significance of the world of the future as we reflect on today's world.

This future is not just good news for my agency but also the 500+ publishers on our Diversity network. Marketing spend across all demographics once regarded as outsiders, BAME, LGBTQ+, disABILITY, Gender, Age 50+, are now having increased investment from Government and brands alike.

We need these publications. They are the voices for you and the diversity of the communities we all live in, and they are now needed more than ever. Remember as we see cities burn across America, true equality can seem a long way off but this increased spend across Black Publications means their voices will survive COVID-19 and that must be celebrated.

*(\*This article was commissioned and written before the death of George Floyd. Below Christopher has shared his personal perspective.)*

## **Ramifications of the Death of George Floyd – A personal perspective**

4 June 2020

I have had what may be considered as tough times in my life - youth in Care System - War Veteran - Divorce - Coming out Gay - and all the other knocks life throws at you in-between, but this week may have been one the hardest of my life!

Here's why.

# THE NEW NORMAL

A series of thought pieces from industry leaders



I'm proud of myself! I'm proud that I managed to build a successful company that continues to grow at a fantastic rate and we get to do some fantastic work with our clients. I'm proud that my kids, especially my son, does not think there is anything in life he can't do, because his dad is a CEO. I'm proud that I finally had the courage to come out as Gay and now every day bring my authentic self to work, on stage, in interviews - what you see, hear, read is me! I'm proud that I get to work with such a fantastic, diverse team and what we do with our clients may just change advertising and the diversity media landscape forever. I'm proud that every day I'm

surrounded by friends, family and colleagues within the Media and Advertising industry that make me feel equal and that I'm part of the group. I'M PROUD!

Then on Sunday I was reminded what I am. After posting a Facebook Live of me walking in the Black Lives Matter march and whilst walking back to head home, I decided to read some of the comments.

NI&&AR\$ was posted on my Facebook, and I can't stop feeling destroyed - that no matter how proud I am, no matter how many awards, how many articles, how much success or money or the size of my company - that actually, ladies still move their purses in lifts, security guards still ask where I'm going after I have swiped in, people still follow me in expensive shops.

That's how I feel right now! And how the hell do I tell my son this!!