

BRIDGING  
THE  
TALENT  
DISCONNECT:  
CHARTING  
THE  
PATHWAYS  
TO  
FUTURE  
GROWTH



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## Executive Summary

# BRIDGING THE TALENT DISCONNECT: CHARTING THE PATHWAYS TO FUTURE GROWTH IN THE MARKETING AND ADVERTISING INDUSTRIES

### BACKGROUND:

In 2016, the ANA Educational Foundation (AEF) responded to the growing concern in the marketing and advertising industries about the challenge of attracting and retaining the best entry-level talent. To assess the issue, the AEF contracted GfK Research to execute the first ever study that surveyed all stakeholder perspectives, including from: a) C-suite executives, line managers, and human resource recruiters, b) deans and professors from both public and private institutions, and c) current students and recent new hires to the industry.

Three core objectives drove the survey:

1. Better understand the dimensions and causes of the talent problem
2. Identify potential remedies to both attract and prepare top talent to enter and excel in the marketing and advertising industries
3. Inform, inspire, and instruct talent acquisition and retention

### CORE FINDINGS:

Marketers and the agencies that work with them are facing an unprecedented talent challenge or “talent disconnect” as millennials look to other, seemingly more appealing fields to build careers. This is driven in large measure by a lack of common vision, vocabulary, and perceived relevance among marketers, young professionals, and the schools that are expected to educate them.

Overall, the report concludes students are unclear about career paths in marketing and advertising and question whether it constitutes “meaningful work.” At the same time, universities

are scrambling to develop curricula that anticipates rapidly changing industry realities. They are conflicted by the desire to prepare the job-ready graduates the industry demands and provide an education that develops the broad critical thinking capabilities needed for future leadership in society. All this as marketers and ad agencies struggle to decipher and adapt to the millennial mindset while being frustrated that recent graduates are often unprepared to enter the field.

There are significant reasons for this disconnect:

**1. Digital transformation complicates new marketing and advertising career paths.** New digital channels have changed the way the industry communicates with consumers. Roles within organizations that didn’t previously exist, like social media and digital analytics managers, are mandating new “hard skills” in data management and advanced analytics. These constantly evolving skill requirements and job definitions have made it difficult for marketers and agencies to define and promise clear career paths to students and prospective hires with any consistency.

**2. College and university curricula cannot keep pace with the rapid change going on in the industry.** Course work and textbooks are out of date almost as soon as they’re published, and much that is taught about marketing and communications is outdated and unrelated to management expectations and students’ actual experience in the field.

**3. Marketers and agencies now directly compete with technology companies for highly skilled talent.** As demand for data analytics and digital expertise in marketing increases, marketers and their agencies find themselves competing with consultancies and

tech giants like the Boston Consulting Group, Google, Facebook, and Apple — all of which readily offer more generous compensation packages to new hires, both in terms of salary and perks. Aggressive recruiting tactics in the tech world further help them connect with talent faster and make concrete offers well in advance of marketing and advertising companies.

4. **“Great expectations” are defining today’s crop of young talent.** Differing generational expectations for job responsibilities, quality of life, and career advancement are challenging middle- and senior-level marketing executives on how to effectively manage, motivate, and retain the new generation of workers. Young talent often seeks “purpose” in their work along with “creative” job environments, like those established by the startup and tech culture. Many also feel they’re not getting the level of responsibility and opportunities for rapid advancement they expect, fostering more frequent job turnover.

### FACING THE CHALLENGE

The AEF’s mission is to serve as the bridge connecting the advertising, marketing, and academic communities. Together, we look to inspire the next generation of talent. In convening its key stakeholders to take action, the AEF proposes to address collectively what it perceives as the three most critical issues surfaced by the study:

**Challenge 1:** Marketers and agencies seeking “job-ready” talent from universities

**Challenge 2:** Academia seeking better ways to adapt and prepare students for careers in a digital, data-driven world

**Challenge 3:** Students seeking clarity on professional growth and a career that matters

### A CALL TO ACTION: PATHWAYS 2020

The Association of National Advertisers (ANA) and the AEF are calling on marketers and agencies to partner with educators to inspire and prepare the next generation of marketing and advertising leaders. The movement is called Pathways 2020 and aims to create a wider, more diverse, and better equipped pool of talent to fuel industry growth. At the same time, it will make the case for what a creative, innovative and rewarding career marketing can be. The AEF plans to measure progress on this collective effort against three specific initiatives:

#### 1,000 Industry Campus Visits

- The AEF and the ANA are collaborating to power over 1,000 marketing and advertising executive campus visits by 2020.
- The AEF will create a formalized toolkit for industry representatives to ensure professional consistency of content and engagement.
- The AEF will employ new technologies to enable more efficient and scalable campus participation from leading marketing and advertising executives.

#### 1,000 Professors Inspired

- The AEF will expand the reach of its current “Visiting Professors” program to ensure at least 1,000 professors will have on-site industry experiences by 2020.
- The AEF will welcome professors to ANA member conferences and committee meetings.

#### 1,000 Students Immersed

- The AEF will create formal, “certified” guidelines and best practices for the internship experience that will bring industry consistency in the identification, recruitment, and training of students coming into the marketing and advertising industries.

- The AEF will actively engage its extensive network of professorial and campus relationships to better source promising talent for the two industries.
- The AEF will create a more efficient, codified process to screen and recommend talent for summer internship programs within the marketing and advertising industries.
- The AEF’s goal is to have 1,000 students participate in AEF immersion programs, such as a summer internship or a week-long immersion experience by 2020.

The research further confirmed that the talent disconnect is tied to the issue of diversity in the marketing and advertising industries. Its role is crucial in evaluating the three initiatives, and the AEF will be tracking diversity goals within each initiative and across all programming efforts. However, this talent effort alone is not sufficient to make an impact on diversity. The AEF is therefore partnering with the Alliance for Inclusive and Multicultural Marketing (AIMM) and is looking to join forces with other organizations to drive greater diversity in the marketing and advertising industries.

While these three Pathways initiatives cannot solve all the issues surfaced in the GfK research study, they represent a strong first step toward addressing challenges that have been festering within the marketing and advertising industries for some time. The industry is confronting a growing deficit of talent, and needs to demonstrate a clear commitment to its development. **Visit [www.aef.com/pathways2020](http://www.aef.com/pathways2020) to download the full study and learn how you can pledge your support.**