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Mat Baxter and Darren Woolley clash over TikTok promo: 'Wholly inappropriate' or 'overly sensitive'?



by Alisha Buaya

Posted on 8 May 2024



"He's just really bored, scared of being irrelevant or forgotten, or he's overly sensitive because of what's happening in the US."

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Mat Baxter and Darren Woolley have clashed over a promotional video for TikTok in which US-based media agency leaders spruiked the platform. While Baxter considered the video "wholly inappropriate", Trinity P3 founder and CEO Woolley wondered whether Baxter took issue with it "either because he's just really bored, scared of being irrelevant or forgotten, or he's overly sensitive because of what's happening in the US [the government taking steps to ban TikTok]."

Yesterday, Baxter, the former Huge and Initiative CEO who returned home to Australia earlier this year, wrote about the clip posted by TikTok for Business on LinkedIn.

The video riffed off the 'Of Course' TikTok trend, and featured Dentsu CIO Cara Lewis, Havas CEO Greg James, Magna US global president Dani Benowitz, Publicis Media CIO Shelby Saville, Horizon Media CIO David Campanelli, and GroupM US CIO Matt Sweeney.

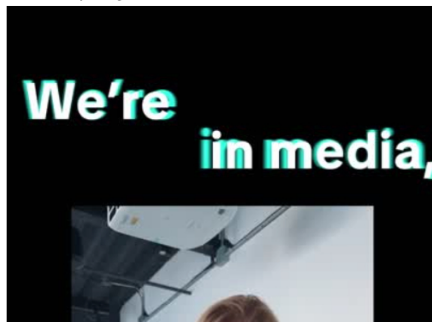


TikTok for Business

275,977 followers
1w · Edited

We're TikTok, of course dentsu, Havas, IPG Mediabrands, Horizon Media, Publicis Groupe and GroupM loaned us their media superstar talent to tell you all why your brand should be on TikTok.

On screen Cara Lewis, Greg James, Dani Benowitz, Shelby Saville, David Campanelli and Matt Sweeney are setting the tone on how TikTok is the key to scaling your brand's success - and, of course, jumping on a cool trend you might have seen around.



Baxter was not impressed: "Agency leaders are not here to represent the interests of media owners but instead act as OBJECTIVE advisors for clients.

"And then our industry wonders why clients have a credibility issue with agencies? A simple test to prove my point, would McKinsey, BCG or Accenture ever do this? No, I don't think so.

"Oh, and it doesn't help that this is one of the cheesiest pieces of 'content' I've seen in a long time."



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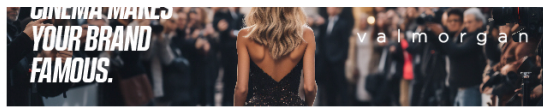
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Mat Baxter (He/Him) · LinkedIn · Following
Marketing, technology and agency leader
22h · Edited · Comment

Wow. This is wholly inappropriate. Agency leaders are not here to represent the interests of media owners but instead act as OBJECTIVE advisors to clients. Oh, and it doesn't help that this is one of the cheesiest pieces of "content" I've seen in a long time.

And then our industry wonders why clients have a credibility issue with agencies?

A simple test to prove my point, would McKinsey, BCG or Accenture ever do this?

No, I don't think so.

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TrinityP3's Woolley told *Mediaweek* that promo-style videos, like the one in question, is a "common practice" which "has been going on for years."

"Everyone from News Corp and the Nine Network to almost every publisher, news platform, or even advertising platform will ask media or agency people to talk about why they would consider a particular platform.

"I don't think that compromises them at all. I think it's an important job for all media agency people to be across all of the different platforms, their strengths and weaknesses, and consider all of those things in all their dealings on behalf of their clients."

Woolley said a more "insidious" issue was accepting gifts and benefits based on media spend.

"Incentives like that have a greater impact than publicly appearing in a video. At least when you're publicly appearing in the video for TikTok or any other media owner or advertising platform, everyone knows you did it. But getting gifts and benefits for putting your clients' media a particular way and not making them aware that you're getting those benefits is much more insidious."

Woolley noted that the timing of the video made it more "sensitive" in light of **US Congress attempting to pass laws banning TikTok in the country.**

After speaking with *Mediaweek*, Woolley also replied to Baxter directly in the LinkedIn comments section: "You're joking, right? How is appearing in a media owner/platform owner promo compromising objectivity?"

"I think accepting gifts from media and platform owners, such as fully paid overseas trips to sporting events and knowledge sessions in the head office, in exchange for placing a significant portion of a client's budget with them, is much more compromising.

"Particularly if you don't declare it to the clients. The only travesty here is a bunch of Gen X and Ys pretending to be cool and hip digital natives and failing!"

Baxter replied: "No, I'm not joking. Agencies shouldn't be mouthpieces in promotional videos touting the benefits of any media owner. Every client situation is different and no media owner is right for every challenge. You know that. I know it too. So do agencies.

"As for the trips and other things – well that's even worse but that doesn't make this any better."

Woolley said Baxter was "reading way too much into the context" and added that it was a "courageous" move for TikTok given the US government's demand that the company sell the business. He replied to a number of other comments on the post, acknowledging that while "it is cringeworthy ... isn't it better to be public and transparent than hidden and suspicious? I think it's great to see media superstars being human."

Woolley reiterated that it was a common practice for agency staffers to talk about the benefits of a platform, and called the video "more transparent than many of the other deals that happen in media."

"I simply think you are hitting the wrong target. Perhaps it is because you feel you are either missing out or perhaps no longer relevant?" he said to Baxter.

Baxter quipped: "I'd like to think I'm still a tiny bit relevant! Let's agree to disagree on this one.

"It doesn't sit right with me but that's just my personal opinion and you are of course entitled to yours. And as for missing out – I'll be back with something exciting in the next few weeks (to make sure I become even more relevant!)."

Baxter has previously flagged he would be looking to start a new role mid-year.

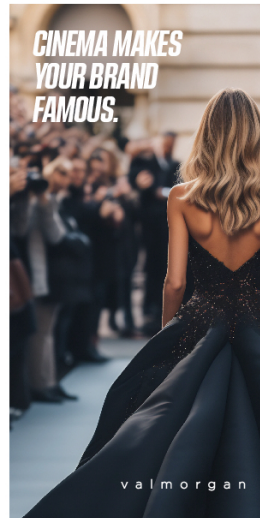


Darren Woolley (He/Him) · 1st
Founder & Global CEO @ Trinity P3 | Editor-At-Large (marketing & ag...
15h ...
You're joking, right **Mat Baxter**? How is appearing in a media owner/platform owner promo compromising objectivity? I think accepting gifts from media and platform owners such as fully paid overseas trips to sporting events and knowledge sessions in the head office for placing a significant portion of a clients budget v ...see more

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Mat Baxter (He/Him) · LinkedIn · Following
Marketing, technology and agency leader
14h (edited) ...



- Mat Baxter** (He/Him) [Author](#)
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- Darren Woolley** No, I'm not joking. Agencies shouldn't be mouthpieces in promotional videos touting the benefits of any media owner. Every client situation is different and no media owner is right for every challenge. You know that. I know it too. So do agencies. I don't like the entire premise of th ...see more
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- Darren Woolley** (He/Him) · 1st
Founder & Global CEO @ Trinity P3 | Editor-At-Large (marketi...
- Mat Baxter** I think you are reading way too much into the context here. Politically in the USA this is quite "courageous" as the Government has passed a bill demanding the company sell the business. But professionally this is no different to many other media owners and platform owners being ask ...see more
- Like · 1 · Reply
- Mat Baxter** (He/Him) [Author](#)
Marketing, technology and agency leader
- Darren Woolley** Haha. I'd like to think I'm still a tiny bit relevant! Let's agree to disagree on this one. It doesn't sit right with me but that's just my personal opinion and you are of course entitled to yours. And as for missing out - I'll be back with something exciting in the next few weeks (to n ...see more
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Sophie Madden, CEO at the MFA, told *Mediaweek* that trust and independence is critical: "I'm not familiar with the context or purpose of the video in question, so cannot comment on it directly."

"However, as to the role of agencies, media agencies exist to guide clients in finding the most effective strategies and channel solutions to tackle their business challenges. Upholding trust and impartiality is integral to delivering this and to achieving strong and successful client relationships."

Top image: Mat Baxter and Darren Woolley

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By **Amy Shapiro**
Posted on 8 May 2024

