Can you describe your role at Ogilvy & Mather?

Ronnie McBryde: I am here to support the strategy community. Planners are the driving force behind developing powerful brand and creative ideas. They will be involved in projects such as new business pitches, strategic and creative development, evaluation, and competitive reviews.

As the worldwide head of information and intelligence, I am the liaison for most of our global relationships with research companies. There are about 10 genuinely global research companies that I work with. Typically, these companies are research publishers or database companies, rather than market research companies that undertake primary research. In addition to these global relationships, there are also many UK- and US-focused research publishers. We have heads of information and intelligence for the UK and North America, and they might each have another 20 separate relationships.

“Google and YouTube searches should rarely be the first option—the best business intelligence research is usually behind firewalls.”

I’m based in the UK, and it’s a global role. Traditionally, O&M’s largest offices have been in New York and London, but we have 450 offices in 168 cities. So for the 440 offices that aren’t in the UK or North America, my aim is to get them access to the research they need to function at the top of their game.

My role is groupwide, enabling not just the strategy community, but also the 22,000 people in the group to have direct access to research resources via the O&M intranet. Google and YouTube searches should rarely be the first option—the best business intelligence research is usually behind firewalls. My job is to manage it all and ensure we have access to the best core research possible. And then we have to make sure the planning community is trained to get the most out of it.
Ogilvy & Mather has an enterprisewide subscription to eMarketer. Is it the company’s philosophy to offer all employees open access to all research providers?

McBryde: We have enterprisewide subscriptions with several research publishers such as Euromonitor, Warc and Mintel. We have a global enterprisewide contract with eMarketer. We’ve increased from 50 users last year to 1,340 registered eMarketer users in the past six months. I’m very pleased with it. It gives everybody direct access to the most up-to-date comparable data for digital, social media, mobile and ecommerce. Everybody is grateful to now have direct access. It’s a time-saver for a lot of people. It’s immediate access, rather than fishing around trying to get consistent data from traditional sources. And people are no longer dependent on “super users” to access data, while removing any issues with contractual usage rights.

You were a key influencer in making this happen. What is the value of giving everybody access?

McBryde: It just raises your game. The bar’s raised: The quality of research deepens our understanding of consumers. O&M has clients in most industry sectors and countries. To ensure we have an understanding of consumers, clients’ products and services, the industries, the sectors and the economy, we need global research that focuses especially on comparative data. That’s where eMarketer comes in.

What are eMarketer’s key differentiators from other research sources you’re using?

McBryde: eMarketer makes life a lot easier. Having worked on the research side of this business as an ex-IDC and Mintel analyst, I know the time-consuming nature and complexity of aggregating and comparing different sources of empirical data. It can be risky to take pieces of information from separate sources without an in-depth study of methodologies and definitions. eMarketer does the work for us—it’s a one-stop shop.”

In advertising, we tend to focus less on methodology compared with, for example, consultancies, but if someone else is doing the work of comparing and contrasting methodologies, it takes a lot of the work away from us in a positive way. Quality sourced research always gives the user greater credibility. Many smaller agencies don’t have the data to back up their assertions. Our clients are often some of the largest companies on the planet, and they expect O&M to have credible global research to back up any assertions we make and the strategies we develop. As a result, the quality of the strategic discussion improves, as does the value we can add to our clients’ businesses.

What are your biggest business priorities?

McBryde: O&M is the most creative and effective agency network, having won Cannes Lions awards in 2012 and 2013 and being ranked in the Effie Global Effectiveness Index in 2012. Maintaining this position is clearly the key priority of the business. In that context, you have to remember that O&M is more than an advertising agency. The organization handles all aspects of marketing communications: advertising (O&M Advertising), customer engagement/direct marketing (OgilvyOne Worldwide), public relations (Ogilvy PR), healthcare advertising (Ogilvy CommonHealth), shopper marketing (Geometry Global), digital production (RedWorks) and much more.

And this priority has to be put into the context of O&M’s parent company, WPP Group, whose aim is to derive up to 45% of its revenues from digital sources by 2018. That’s a big challenge. We have to make sure we are on the cutting edge in all the aspects of digital. O&M has 22,000 people globally, with more than 8,000 digital specialists. For me, in consumer and business intelligence within marketing communications, my goal is to make sure all the strategists, planners, consultants and analysts have access to the most appropriate, up-to-date research available. Meanwhile, it also has to be affordable. And one of my many challenges is to understand what each source provides in terms of value for money, because it’s a very difficult challenge to prove return on investment (ROI).

How do you make the business case for the ROI for research?

McBryde: There are two aspects to cost/benefit. On the benefit side, I often ask research companies to show evidence of the ROI in their product. That’s not easy. It may only take one business pitch win to justify a
subscription. One chart might change things. But it is nearly impossible to prove which chart was the one that tipped the scales.

The cost side is the more important aspect. For me, affordability is about ensuring we can charge internally for the cost of the research. Not only do I have to get budget holder buy-in to contribute up front to costs—no small feat in an organization the size of O&M—I also have to put processes in place to ensure research users make appropriate contributions. It’s important to have processes in place to monitor usage at a very granular level. With eMarketer, we know who’s viewed what research in each office and for which client.

“It’s important to have processes in place to monitor usage at a very granular level. With eMarketer, we know who’s viewed what research in each office and for which client.”

What do you like best about eMarketer?

McBryde: It’s very good at daily promotion of itself, constantly reminding me of what’s important and all the latest content. Many research companies are poor at making you aware of their latest research findings. That’s a day-to-day tactical thing I like. But you will suddenly get a quote or note to go on the social media section or there might be some research on, for example, Turkey. Anything outside the mainstream is always interesting.

So I’m interested whenever eMarketer has a report on Turkey or Vietnam. Or, ideally, countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nigeria—these countries represent huge opportunities and are so poorly researched. It’s always a joy to see a report coming out on any of the large emerging economies from any company.

The emerging middle classes in these countries are increasingly using smartphones, tablets and laptops. And we have to improve our knowledge of what they’re doing with digital technology.

For the US, the large European and BRIC economies, we have data and analysis from a variety of sources. But when you’re asked about consumers in Algeria and Nigeria, it’s much harder to get that research and to find consistent data that has been put together by somebody else.

What are some of the things you’re concerned about from a business standpoint?

McBryde: One concern is ensuring the teams that work on large global clients like IBM, Philips, Unilever and SC Johnson have access to the best data. The things that keep me awake at night are making sure that O&M offices in Latin America, Asia-Pacific, and the Middle East and Africa get access to the same quality of research as New York and London.

I’m trying to get global research contracts into place on a huge scale. It’s a challenge fitting together all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle that will finance a global enterprisewide contract. You have to take a lot of people in the organization along with you because of the contribution to budget. The first part of the battle is educating decision-makers—both strategy and finance—that a specific research subscription is a worthwhile investment, then getting their buy-in and cobbling together budgets from many distant sources. After that, you’ve got to roll out immediately and make sure everybody is aware, everybody is trained, everybody appreciates the value and everybody makes the most of the research. There’s always constant turnover of staff as well, and new people have to be trained.

Increasingly, my job is also about ensuring that access to research extends beyond the planning community. There are many strategists, analysts and consultants within the business who could benefit from greater access to our research resources, in addition to the marketers and planners. At O&M, there are more than 8,000 digital experts. At the moment, we have 1,340 registered eMarketer users, so there’s plenty of scope for increasing this number.