How would you describe your role?

Xavier Obon: In a nutshell, my role is to keep abreast of new platforms, channels and technologies that are emerging and to see how our clients can benefit from them. Some of them are already affecting what we do. Others may not have an impact yet, but we still need to keep up with what's coming.

“Some new TVs come with cameras that can serve different ads depending on who’s watching.”

New platforms might be 3-D printing, cloud computing or wearable technology, but they can also be existing channels that have been used in a different way. For example, TV advertising is going through a tremendous transformation and is being used in a completely different way. Some new TVs come with cameras that can serve different ads depending on who’s watching. So, all these things are relevant to us. We need to look at both existing and emerging platforms and see how they are being used.

I’m part of a digital innovation team at JWT—a group of strategists, planners, developers, creative technologists and social media experts. We are the R&D of the agency—future-facing. I try to learn as much as possible about all of these new platforms and bring that knowledge back to JWT. As part of my role, I bring in third-party speakers, organize events and distribute “innovation” newsletters. The second part of my job is client-facing, where I try to educate our clients on all these platforms and analyze the implications on their business needs.

What are the most compelling emerging platforms?

Obon: Everyone is expecting the “iWatch”, a smart watch by Apple, although other brands have already launched their own versions of it. And there are many expectations for Google Glass, a wearable computer. It’s still the early days, but clients are getting excited because the potential
could be tremendous. 3-D printing has been around for a few years, but now everyone is trying to figure out how that’s going to affect advertising.

We do a lot of work for our global brand clients from here in London. For example, we’re looking at the implications of these new technologies for fast-moving consumer goods brands. Is there anything for them to explore, or are the technologies out of their range? For health and pharmaceutical clients like Johnson & Johnson, the implications might be larger. I’m analyzing all of those things and offering some guidance on how clients can be prepared for the near future.

“People do things in a completely different way now than they did five years ago. Advertising needs to catch up.”

What do you see as the greatest challenges facing your industry/business?

Obon: I think the biggest challenge we are all facing is the speed at which things are evolving. Every day there’s something new, which is a good thing—it brings many great opportunities. However, it’s a challenge if you don’t move at that speed.

These changes have an impact on everything from consumers’ media consumption habits to the pace of technology adoption. People do things in a completely different way now than they did five years ago. Advertising needs to catch up.

You cannot rely on the same advertising or marketing methods we had five years ago. Keeping up with all these new changes and their implications is the biggest challenge, and it’s affecting us as agencies. There’s an overlap of skills, and that’s becoming very apparent in, let’s say, social media. PR agencies are doing social. Digital agencies are doing social. Mobile agencies are doing social. Traditional advertising agencies are also doing social. It’s a land grab, and everyone is doing a bit of everything. As an agency, you can’t just be good at one thing anymore—you need to understand the whole ecosystem and have a clear understanding of how all of the channels work together. Otherwise, you could be in trouble.

How has eMarketer helped you in your work and informed your thinking?

Obon: One of the things I find most useful about eMarketer is the alerts. I set up alerts based on some of the topics I find relevant such as emerging platforms, wearable tech and startups—they’re all keywords that are high on my agenda. Without having to search the database, I get what I need, whether it’s a new report, article or interview. Then straightaway I just go to the platform and find the latest research and points of view focused on these topics. The interviews enable me to access relevant views from experts on what’s coming and what the implications are. All that knowledge goes straight into what we do for our clients.

We tailor-make our point of view based on third-party knowledge like the intelligence eMarketer provides. We back up our views with data, rather than just saying something’s going to be massive in three years’ time. We always need to have the solid data and evidence to support our thinking.

It sounds like the alerts are pretty critical for you.

Obon: They are. As you can imagine, one of the biggest challenges for everyone in the industry is the amount of data out there. It’s overwhelming. You could spend a whole day just going through press releases and newsletters. Most of the day is keeping up to date with this ever-changing industry. Having the relevant information delivered to my inbox every morning saves me valuable time. It allows me to go to the things I want straightaway, rather than having to manually filter and search. I find the alerts very useful.

What do you like best about eMarketer?

Obon: First of all, it delivers the information I’m interested in and just makes my life easier. It’s also really easy to use. If I’m working on a new business project or a client I’m not familiar with, it’s very easy to search by vertical industry. The other thing that is fundamental is that eMarketer is a global source of knowledge. Often, smaller research players only focus on specific territories, and it’s very difficult to compare regions. With eMarketer, you can look at several regions and have a benchmark on, let’s say, device penetration. It’s also useful not only having the regional vision, but having the global perspective and forecasts.
Do you consult the Digital World Atlas?

Obon: I do. We manage quite a few global brands from here in London. And sometimes we need to do work for smaller markets where our knowledge is limited. It’s very easy to go to the Digital World Atlas and find the profile of a country or region you were not aware of. In a few clicks, you can understand what’s happening in that region and compare it with other markets.

“eMarketer does the work for us—gives us data, charts, the informed point of view—and all the information is ready to be used. But on top of that, eMarketer does the analysis.”

How is eMarketer different than other digital research sources you use?

Obon: You curate the research from thousands of different sources. There is fresh content on a daily basis. Other sources publish one report every week, every month or every quarter—but it’s not an ongoing thing, which means waiting for the next release. Normally, you get a very limited amount of information, and it’s hard to get a point of view, conclusions and recommendations. You just get the data.

eMarketer does the work for us—gives us data, charts, the informed point of view—and all the information is ready to be used. But on top of that, eMarketer does the analysis. So it’s not just doing a survey and sharing the results, which a lot of companies do. We don’t have the time to analyze all that data and try to figure out the implications—eMarketer does it for us.

So getting a specific point of view and a contextualized understanding of an issue is important to you. How do the interviews play into that?

Obon: For example, we were recently looking into mobile payments, and one of the most innovative players in the UK is called Weve. I did a quick search on your platform, and there was an interview with the marketing director in the database. That basically saved my day because everything I wanted to know was there. There was an insightful piece with views about the company and the overall industry. That was definitely really good value. Then you have all the related reports, charts and other resources next to it. All the data on mobile payments was easily available if we wanted to follow up and get even more data or more context on that industry.

Another example comes from when we were working on a new business opportunity. We needed to find out smartphone penetration in Eastern and Western Europe. And what was the forecast for it? Was it worth launching a mobile strategy? As I said earlier, the good thing about eMarketer is that you get comparable data and forecasts. It’s not like you need to go to five different websites and then have five different figures that are not easily comparable.

Do you have an example of where you used eMarketer data to validate your thinking?

Obon: We’ve recently done it for HSBC and Hershey’s KIT KAT, but we do it all the time. We always support our thinking with solid data from reputable sources, rather than guessing it.

At the end of last year, one of our UK clients asked us to consider Pinterest for an upcoming campaign. At the time we didn’t think it was right for this client, but we had to prove it. We used eMarketer to gather the evidence that showed Pinterest was still in its infancy in the UK, its users were completely different from our target audience, and our client’s sector wasn’t resonating with Pinterest users. All that knowledge and our deep understanding of our client’s business helped us build a compelling argument against the use of Pinterest for that particular campaign.

It’s very easy to get excited and carried away by any new platform that appears in the market. The challenge is to know which one to use for each brand, and having access to the right data is fundamental when making those decisions.