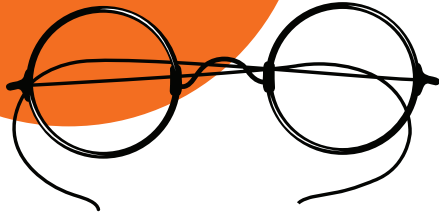


The age debate



Where do all the over 50s go?

This question is absent from the many industry debates around diversity, as gender gaps and ethnic representation dominate the headlines.

The underrepresentation of older workers is the unspoken issue, the forgotten inequality. Especially in our industry, where over a third (35%) of respondents don't see themselves in media past the age of 50.

In collaboration with industry magazine Campaign, MEC UK started the industry debate. We conducted a survey of more than 200 people of all ages working in media and advertising and found that 66% of respondents want to see better representation of the over 50s age category both in the workplace and in the ads we make.

A shocking 79% of those surveyed feel our industry is ageist and 59% think advertising a young person's game. Some 40% of respondents aged over 45 feel they have lost out on a job because they were 'too old' - double the national average. And 25% have been told (shamefully) they were too old to do the job.

Two further points illustrate the urgency. Some 42% of respondents have witnessed ageism towards others in the workplace and a staggering 32% personally experienced ageism - statistics that far exceed the UK averages of 19% and 11% respectively. The survey also reveals that 66% of respondents want to see more representation of over 50s in ads.

We ignore the stats at our peril. A revolution is needed to change attitudes and behaviours, policies and practices, within our industry and we need to act fast

for the good of our people, our businesses, our industry reputation, our clients and their consumers.

On 28 November, MEC UK hosted our first ever Age Debate. Joined by guest speakers, and brilliantly facilitated by ex-BBC newsreader Fiona Armstrong. In the spirit of diversity, our guest list included industry leaders, lawyers, representatives from ad industry charity NABs, clients, and the IPA, resulting in some serious and interesting debate.

The consensus reached was inevitable. Things needed to change, change fast, and the impact needs to be deep and wide to encourage greater age diversity, which brings with it an exchange of opinion, experiences and creativity that drives growth for our business, our clients, and our people.

Already, MEC is working on ways to do things differently to ensure we attract, develop and retain our older workers and to better celebrate the valued role they play in the workplace.

The removal of the maximum age limit of apprenticeships gives us our first opportunity in April. We'll look at how diversity can be embraced and celebrated from all angles through creative ways to nurture and retain this talent.

This year, our new Brave Your Bias initiative will make people more aware of the impact of their own personal biases because we need to gain a better understanding and be more mindful of how we can change our ways and confront our behaviour and thinking head on.

Let's join forces and change for the good. And fast.

Clare Alger
People and Culture Director UK