



Choots Humphries

Growing Through Peer Collaboration

by **Choots Humphries**

Friends and family often ask me what I like most about my job. My answer is easy—I am surrounded by smart, driven people. Our industry is one started and fueled by entrepreneurs. And, entrepreneurs are a special breed.

Problem solvers built and continue to advance the affiliate marketing industry with innovative thinking and early adoption of new technologies. These people are consumed every day by thoughts of how to accomplish something in a better or more productive way. And often, these thoughts start with a peer conversation.

There are many moving parts in our industry. From advertisers and affiliates to networks and outsourced program managers (OPMs)—each has a unique set of problems and solutions to better work with one another. And, because our industry relies so heavily on technology, Gordon E. Moore's prediction of the driving force of technological change (Moore's Law) also greatly and accurately describes how fluid affiliate marketing is. The key is how this rapid technological change is applied to our industry to continue advancing.

Normally, we can rely on competition to ensure technology is best applied to providing an industry's customers with the solution that appropriately meets their needs. But, needs vary tremendously in our industry; one that is young and ever evolving. This opens the door more for discussion and collaboration—even among competitors.

Certainly, one would expect cooperation and collaboration from multiple partners serving a single client (e.g., a network and an OPM working to support an advertiser or affiliate). And, the challenges presented by customers are often a rich source of innovation or technological change. But, competition can be one of the greatest sources of inspiration—not to beat your competition, but to view the industry from a different perspective. To learn and broaden your view of both limitations and opportunities in our industry, discussion and potential collaboration with competition is often the best method for accomplishing such.

I strongly encourage you to engage more in 2016. Affiliate Summit is a great place to start—meet as many people as you can talk to at the conference. Join the Performance Marketing Association and sign up to participate in one of the many outstanding councils. Buy a drink for your competitor and sit down and get to know them and their business better. And, more importantly, share more about you and your business.

Becoming an industry thought leader starts with talking to the current leaders who are generally more than willing to have an intellectual discussion that could potentially advance our industry. As your perspective broadens, so too will your opportunities.

Note: There is a great case study on the PMA website (www.thePMA.org) titled Co-Opetition that offers a deeper look into the benefits of working with your competitors. [FF]