# IAB EUROPE'S BITESIZE GUIDE TO CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN RETAIL MEDIA SERIES:

## A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR LEADING RETAIL MEDIA CHANGE

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This instalment of our Bitesize Guide to Change Management in Retail Media series has been written as a guest contribution by Colin Lewis, Founder of Commerce Media Works and a leading Retail Media practitioner.

## Retail Media Programmes Need a Structured Framework for Change

Organisations change when individuals change. Yet too often, change efforts focus only on tasks, deliverables and processes – and ignore how people experience and adopt change. Mismanaging change risks lost opportunities, disengaged employees, obstruction or just plain resistance.

Following a proven change methodology helps individuals and teams feel part of the process, not subject to it. A coherent framework for change embeds communication, feedback, and reinforcement so change becomes something people shape, not something that happens to them.

**WHILE RETAILERS AND BRANDS MUST IDENTIFY THAT THEY NEED A CHANGE MANAGEMENT PROCESS TO MAKE RETAIL MEDIA WORK, IT IS JUST AS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNISE THAT THE SELECTION OF A CHANGE MANAGEMENT MODEL IS LESS IMPORTANT THAN ACTUALLY HAVING ONE IN THE FIRST PLACE.**

**Here are just three of many different change frameworks that are available:**

### McKinsey 7S Change Model

1. **Strategy:** The plan for achieving objectives and allocating resource.
2. **Structure:** The hierarchy, reporting lines, and organisation.
3. **Systems:** formal processes, procedures, and workflows.
4. **Shared Values:** Core beliefs and cultural norms guiding behaviour.
5. **Skills:** capabilities and competencies of the team.
6. **Style:** Leadership approach and management practices.
7. **Staff:** People, their roles, and how they are recruited and trained.

### Kotter's 8- Step Process for Leading Change

1. Create a Sense of Urgency
2. Form a Guiding Coalition
3. Develop a Strategic Vision
4. Communicate the Vision
5. Enable Action by Removing Barriers
6. Generate Short-Term Wins
7. Sustain Acceleration
8. Anchor New Approaches in the Organisation Culture

McKinsey 7S diagnoses organisational misalignment and provides guidance across each of the 7S's. Kotter is about mobilising leadership and the wider organisation.

Kotter's model is one of the most accessible frameworks for mobilising an organisation around change. Its clear stages are easy to explain and apply to Retail Media

In addition, there are plenty of written and video resources available to help the team grasp each stage in plain language.

**You can group the eight stages of the Kotter framework into five practical Retail Media actions:**

1. **Establish urgency and a clear vision:** show the size of the prize for Retail Media and how competitors are already acting on the opportunity. define how Retail Media can change the profit profile of the retailer and deliver great propositions for supplier brands.

2. **Build a cross functional coalition:** assemble a cross-functional team (eCommerce, marketing, analytics, IT) to champion retail-media pilots.

3. **Remove barriers:** align decision making rights, KPIs and incentives.

4. **Communicate the Vision:** host town-halls and distribute "Retail Media 101" toolkits to show how the business is embracing Retail Media. Work directly with category teams to show it will work for them.

5. **Deliver visible short-term wins:** work directly with the top 10 suppliers to create the first campaigns, ensuring that the proposition delivers results for the brands and the Retail Media Network.

If there is one key point in the steps that apply to all change management programmes, it is this: long-term change requires early proof points. Leaders must design and celebrate tangible performance milestones within 12 months.

Three other caveats from John Kotter's approach:

- Premature declarations of 'victory' are fatal: use early momentum to tackle competing commitments, incentives and workflows.

- Anchor any new approaches in corporate culture: changes only stick when they become 'the way we do things around here.' Indeed, understanding the culture may be the key to unlock the change required by Retail Media.

- Complex transformations often require flexibility and adaptation: A strictly linear, step-by-step approach will make it difficult to adjust course when new challenges emerge.

**FIVE BARRIERS RETAIL MEDIA LEADERS MUST REMOVE.**

**Research by Lorsch and McTague point out five levers that can be applied to Retail Media related transformations:**

- **Uncover what is behind the scenes: uncover hidden competing commitments, incentives, decision making and workflows.**

- **Ensure Decision Making is in the Right Place: Shift authority closer to operational problems.**

- **Align Metrics & Incentives: Align incentives and operational scorecards with transformation goals.**

- **Fix Processes: Remove cross-functional bottlenecks that ensure that people follow legacy habits.**

- **Allocate Resources Correctly: Direct executive talent and resources exclusively to emerging priorities.**

### The Language Barrier: Create a Story that 'Speaks' to the Teams

Communication is the thread running through every stage of change, but it cannot compensate for misaligned incentives, unclear ownership, missing capabilities or weak reinforcement.

There is a paradox with the words 'change management'. They describe the process solution to a problem, but the words themselves create a much bigger problem.

Say "change management" inside a business and people hear resistance, fear, turmoil, unhappiness — something forced upon them.

**Bad Language**

**CHANGE MANAGEMENT** =

RESISTANCE

FEAR

TURMOIL

UNHAPPY

FORCED

A related problem is that people working in Retail Media use odd language: to most brand and retail management, Retail Media arrives as jargon: *'sponsored products', 'offsite audiences', 'DSP', 'data clean rooms', 'programmatic'.*

**What should we do about this paradox?**

[1] Source: HBR's 10 Must Reads on Change Management: September 2025

### Understand that Words Matter

1. **Do not lead with change management language:** avoid using words like 'change' and 'transformation' where possible. The story should simply focus on growth, customers, margin and competitive advantage for the retailer and benefits for the supplier.

2. **Create a story:** a step-by-step story that uses plain, simple figures and language — growth, customers, margin — NOT 'change in strategy'.

- **Partners such as brands or retailers:** talk about growth story, reputation, leading the industry.
- **Finance KPIs:** use words such as margin improvement, cash flow increase, scale or leverage.
- **Commercial KPIs:** talk about top-line growth, increased revenue, increased market share margin.
- **Competition:** appeal to management's competitive spirit with 'here's how we can beat them'.

### The Golden Rule of Change Management: Communication

Alastair Campbell's book Winners includes a pertinent remark from his time as Communications Head to the Tony Blair Government in the 1990s. It summarises the real challenge of communication: *you have to keep saying the same thing over and over again.*

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| **ALASTAIR CAMPBELL WINNERS AND HOW THEY SUCCEED** | *"Once strategies have been agreed and have been written down, they need to be repeated - endlessly. One of my SIG rules was just when the communicator is getting bored with saying something, that is when there is an outside chance of it reaching the outer radar of public opinion'."* |

Remember, while we might be 'living with Retail Media' 24/7, none of the people we deal with in the rest of the organisation spend more than a few minutes of their day thinking about Retail Media.

**Your message is always new to someone, so you have to keep repeating it — all the time.**

This is why politicians and media professionals use soundbites all the time – so people can remember them.

You might get sick of saying the same thing over and over again – *'Retail Media can transform the margins of our retail business or "Retail Media can deliver our brand growth goals AND deliver for our shoppers and partners".*

Whatever you choose, stick to the same 4-5 messages repeatedly.

Learn to say the same thing in different ways so you can communicate the Retail Media transformation repeatedly.

**The Retail Media Change Management Checklist**

1. Is there an active executive sponsor?
2. Is there a recognisable change management framework in place?
3. Is there a cross functional guiding coalition and does it have the power to execute?
4. Are decision making, KPIs and incentives aligned?
5. Do the teams have the awareness, willingness and ability to adopt the change?
6. Are early wins, adoption measures and reinforcement built into the plan?

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