

THE WORLD 2

Project Da Vinci will 'offer something different'

WPP's new agency will redefine the nature of the relationship between agency and client, Jennifer Whitehead writes

If you owned several of the world's most famous advertising and media agencies—JWT, Ogilvy and MindShare, for example—the idea of setting up a new one to handle an incoming client might seem at best extravagant, at worst, madness.

But that's exactly what WPP has done as it takes over the \$4.5 billion global marketing account for the technology giant Dell.

Still working under the code-name Project Da Vinci, WPP boasts of having set up something completely different. Or as Jeffrey Wilks, the president of the business solutions group, puts it, the "first and biggest full-integrated global start-up in history".

Project Da Vinci might not have a permanent name yet, but it already has close to 600 employees—around 95 per cent of the estimated start-up total—based in 13 offices around the world.

It will also soon have a chief executive in the form of Torrence Boone, 38, who might seem a less than obvious choice to run a new, global marketing services agency.

He joins from the digital agency Digitas Boston, of which he was the president, having joined in 2001. Before that, he was the vice-president and general manager of Avenue A. He had a previous career advising pharmaceutical and healthcare companies on their business strategy.

An economics graduate from Stanford and with an MBA from Harvard Business School, Boone will report directly to the WPP chief executive, Sir Martin Sorrell, who insists his new recruit is "ideally suited" to the role.

"His deep experience across multiple marketing disciplines and his reputation as a developer of innovative marketing programmes make him uniquely qualified to lead Project Da Vinci as we focus on reinventing the approach for integrated marketing services," Sorrell says.



Dell... Project Da Vinci's 600 employees will concentrate on the technology giant before taking on other clients

What is the thinking in starting up something new, when you've already got some of the most famous brands in advertising in-house? It's hardly an approach that WPP's employees are likely to be advising their clients to take.

But if it succeeds, it's arguable that the rival holding companies will be taking a keen interest in what's going on.

"Media neutral" is a term that is widely used and abused, but probably rarely achieved in the existing global ad networks.

However, with the structure of the new network differing from the usual (and with none of the history that the "legacy" agencies have), there may be the possibility that the marketing efforts that come out of



Boone... digital background

Project Da Vinci are based on what will best solve client problems, rather than on the fact that it's got a really good direct marketing team on hand.

As well as WPP's hope that Project Da Vinci will be an agency that is genuinely "trans-disciplinary", it also aims to be "trans-locational", according to Steven Sonnenfeld, the former global business director of JWT and now the president of Project Da Vinci's consumer solutions group.

"It's just as easy to export ideas out of countries like China and India to our other offices as it is to take ideas from the US or Europe and adapt them for those markets," he points out.

Sonnenfeld and Wilks emphasise the role that analytics will play in Project Da Vinci's work, to

give a better idea of how marketing communications is working to solve problems for Dell. However, in spite of talking about the "analytics engine" that will be a major feature of the agency, they both strenuously deny that it will produce work of a dry, data-led nature and insist that creativity will be crucial to what it does.

Taking charge of creative will be Ken Segall, who worked on the Apple account at TBWA\Chiat\Day. Other senior staff have been drawn from across WPP's agencies—Kelly McGinnis from the PR agency Fleishman Hillard will take the role of chief corporate communications officer; Young & Rubicam's John Roulston-Bates becomes the chief technology officer, and Group M's Matt Rayner as the chief media officer.

"What we're doing is redefining the nature of the client and agency relationship. We're creating something with Dell where the two organisations are enmeshed and entwined," Sonnenfeld says.

As far as the work the world will see from Project Da Vinci, Sonnenfeld and Wilks say the agency has a



Wilks... 'biggest global start-up'



Sonnenfeld... 'high aspirations'

brief from Dell to do something completely different. It claims to have branding experts virtually "embedded" within Dell.

While Project Da Vinci has been set up to handle the global Dell account, previously run in a total of around 800 agencies globally, it will soon be open to other clients.

Sonnenfeld says: "Dell is the founding client, but it will eventually be one of many. We have very high aspirations and fully expect to be servicing a range of clients."

However, they won't be drawn on when it is likely to sign up its next piece of business. Nor on the nature of their remuneration deal with Dell—although with everything else that is going to be new about the agency, it's highly likely that it will be unconventional.

Project Da Vinci is undoubtedly a vast investment for WPP, and Sonnenfeld and Wilks joke that they've not been home in a month—such is the pace at which the agency is being built. No doubt the industry will be keeping a close watch on its progress, ready to emulate the idea if it works, or go in for the kill if it doesn't.

INSIDER'S VIEW ISRAEL

Israeli consumers' involvement in the creative process is aiding innovation and generating unprecedented loyalty, Gideon Amichay writes

The consumer as we knew him is dead. For my thesis at the Berlin School of Creative Leadership, I did extensive research on the "creative consumer" phenomenon. The results were brighter than ever.

The digital tsunami sweeping through the world laid the ground for this new consumer. He sits in his home, wired, technology at his fingertips. He has power. In minutes he can shoot, edit and upload a clip to YouTube, to be seen instantly all over the world.

Brands, advertisers and ad people are all tuning in—listening to their consumers and picking their brains for ideas, but also rewarding them for their involvement. Some ideas are innovative—but the real benefit is loyalty like never before.

But the creative consumer is not

necessarily all good. Most user-generated ads or ideas are mediocre at best. Most creative consumers have a complete lack of respect for copyrights, and can cause the brand real damage.

In Israel, we have a large community of creative consumers. One exceptional example of them in action is a campaign for Danone. The design of Danone packages in Israel has two sides: one side is a colour picture of fresh, appetising food, while the other half is a black-and-white picture of a human face.

Danone went on air (TV, press, internet) with a brand message: "We are what we eat." During the campaign, consumers were asked to upload their picture, via the internet or their mobile phones, on to their

favourite yoghurt together with a quote of what they considered to be a healthy lifestyle. The lucky 100 people chosen will star on supermarket shelves all over the country.

Participation in the campaign went way beyond all expectations: more than 118,000 people uploaded their picture on to the Danone packaging—almost 2 per cent of the Israeli population.

As far as I am concerned, the answer is unequivocal. The creative consumer phenomenon is great, and the main advantage is in the unbelievable generation of huge consumer involvement. I strongly believe that the creative consumer is the first stage in the evolution of consumers' involvement and an important step in becoming an

active element in a brand's life. Companies will have to understand this change and then formulate a different model that harnesses dialogue and new capabilities enabled by technology in order to conduct bi-directional discussion.

It is almost inconceivable that brands in the past were based on one-sided communications. Companies that use creative consumers will enjoy unprecedented involvement, providing a basis for ongoing improvement and innovation.

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