

THE DIGITAL ISSUE

KINGS OF THE WILD FRONTIER

From agencies like AKQA to media owners like ESPN and marketers like Unilever: Our A-List looks at the best in digital



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Digitas continues to move beyond its roots as a direct-marketing agency to becoming a strong full-service digital partner that engages marketers building brands and businesses.

January 2007 brought one of the biggest acquisitions of the year when Publicis Groupe snapped up Digitas for \$1.3 billion. Being part of a holding company has helped Boston-based Digitas build out its service offerings and win business. The agency last year added \$70 million in new revenue, with wins from Mars, Nike, Staples, Walt Disney Co., CNN and Procter & Gamble Co.'s Crest.

"We are thinking like a full-service marketing partner," says Laura Lang, CEO of Digitas USA. "Great work comes from insight, and we have always worked from insight. What's exciting about last year is these insights are now being translated into opportunities across the digital world." Digitas is also led by Chairman-CEO David Kenny and Chief Creative Officer Mark Beeching.

One campaign that shows how Digitas is thinking big picture is American Express Co.'s Members Project. AmEx launched the program in May, encouraging cardholders to submit, discuss, rate and vote on one charity project the marketer would finance, pledging to contribute \$1 toward the winning idea for every registered card member.



(FROM L.):

Ajaz Ahmed, AKQA; Vivian Schiller, NYTimes.com; Tom Bedecarre, AKQA; Penry Price, Google; Eric Johnson, ESPN; Dave Baronoff, Bad Robot; Babs Rangaiah, Unilever; Mark Beeching, Digitas.

By the end of the campaign, 186,508 card members had registered, more than 7,000 project ideas had been submitted and the website had garnered more than 1.5 million unique visitors. AmEx ended up boosting its donation to \$2 million to help UNICEF provide safe drinking water for children in developing countries. Digitas was instrumental in conveying AmEx's brand message about card benefits.

Digitas' migration to a full-service shop no doubt will be helped by another development: its role in the Insight Factory, a new Publicis entity that effectively bundles the services of Digitas, Leo Burnett and Starcom MediaVest. The unit was created in response to marketers' demands for better integration among digital, creative and media offerings; Digitas will help lead integrated brand strategy for Insight Factory clients. Digitas, which boasts about 1,300 employees, is also exploring other areas of specialty that will round out its offerings, such as content creation. Mr. Kenny is spearheading a Publicis-wide partnership with Google, in which the two

companies will collaborate to develop products and tools and exchange talent by embedding execs in each other's companies.

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But for all of Digitas' focus on full-service marketing, it hasn't lost any of the robust research and analytics capabilities that have become its trademark. In 2007, the agency developed proprietary tools to measure engagement and user-level analytics to drive behavioral targeting, sequencing and site patching.

Another new tool, the global-marketing navigator, is a web-based application that aggregates news and market-research materials and ties them to in-market execution so marketers can make changes to their campaigns in real time.

"We have a vision of ourselves becoming the lead agency for the digital age," Ms. Lang says. "Insights are going to come in so many different ways. We'd like to pride ourselves on the ability to capitalize on them."

—MEGAN MCILROY

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