

# building an advertising factory

Ask most people who work in advertising what industry they are in and they'll say "the service industry." Ask BBH and we'll say that we work in manufacturing. Why? Because we manufacture assets and properties that create brands which in turn significantly effect the fortunes of businesses.

Advances in global distribution was one of the major developments in the manufacturing industry. It allowed producers to centralize their factories into those places best suited for the purposes of manufacturing, which was almost always close to a supply of both raw materials and suitable labor. Centralize your manufacturing in the best place, and then distribute your product to market, became the model adopted by an increasing number of globally minded companies.

Why should an advertising agency be any different, particularly one that had begun its life in 1982 in this new global world? The view shared by many observers and commentators at the time was that the world lacked great advertising ideas, not media dollars or networks. The challenge we faced ten years ago was how to structure and organize ourselves in a way that improved our chances of manufacturing a consistently better quality product than our competitors and at the same time offer advertisers a different model to the traditional network?

Our answer was to commit to two important principles. The first was to have as few of these factories as possible whilst still allowing us to manufacture the highest quality product (right now that number stands at five, located in London, New York, Singapore, Tokyo, and Sao Pãulo). The second was to commit to a future as an independent agency, a critical factor in controlling our destiny and focussing on the quality of our output.

Interestingly we had also looked outside our industry and observed that some of the most creative companies were enjoying a high degree of success at the expense of their big established rivals, with success being driven by a product quality proposition. Virgin Atlantic vs. British Airways. Dyson vs. Hoover. Apple vs. IBM etc., etc.

“...because we manufacture assets and properties that create brands.”



In each case an entrant successfully raising the quality stakes when previously the only thing that mattered was scale.

But if manufacturing is one component, then the other is distribution. We knew we had to have a partner that could deliver our product to any market in the world. Leo Burnett emerged as the most likeminded, the most intrigued by this new model, and the most capable in terms of media delivery through its newly rolled out global media business, Starcom.

Our basic proposition was, and remains today, to offer clients that take a more centralized approach to marketing the opportunity to access creativity of the highest quality, the kind that was increasingly the domain of local "hotshop"-type agencies. We wanted to apply the same principles more consistently and more efficiently across clients' regional and global brand communications.

Over recent years there's been a real convergence of consumer behavior and attitudes towards brands, despite very real cultural, social, and economic differences. Equally many clients seemed to be seeking more consistent brand properties and communication platforms than a loose network of multi-local agencies were often able to provide. As noted by Simon Clift, Unilever marketing president for home and personal care, the optimum point could be found "somewhere between the mindlessly global and the hopelessly local."

B Y S I M O N S H E R W O O D

“Big ideas that cross borders” became the holy grail. Big ideas developed and produced from



centers of creative excellence populated by the best talent available. This demands a heavy investment in creative resource, and an even heavier investment in planning, often in parts of the world where planning is still relatively undeveloped. Planners and account people at BBH have to travel exhaustively, conducting and managing research in local markets, and often performing the critical task of aligning these markets to the central strategy and advertising concept before the execution stage.

Does it work? It’s a model that is not uncommon today with the likes of Wieden & Kennedy, Fallon, and M&C Saatchi working this way, and each of them boasts an impressive list of both regional and global accounts. But anyone thinking of following this trend needs to be realistic. It doesn’t work for all clients, and it’s a mistake we’ve made ourselves to believe that all global companies are prepared to operate this way. Experience suggests that success comes when clients have a healthy degree of centralized management in the first place. There also needs to be a real commitment to creativity and the need for a consistent creative platform. This big idea (for example “Just do it” for Nike, “Think Different” for Apple, and our own “Keep Walking” for Johnnie Walker) needs to be able to rise above the logistics of implementation and local market activation, both of which are important but neither of which are best served

*The global “Keep Walking” campaign delivers the big idea for Johnnie Walker.*

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by this model. Finally, flexibility is also a necessary ingredient in our manufacturing

business. The different brand teams on our global accounts are tailored exclusively around the needs of the brand. In some cases we operate regional account teams (Axe, Levi’s, Bertolli), in others the brand is run through a global team (Johnnie Walker) with various local adaptations. In all cases the key is retaining a degree of flexibility so as to evolve the structure as the needs of the brand change.

Ultimately, the real test is whether or not this model is capable of delivering big ideas and outstanding creative work. The global “Keep Walking” campaign for Johnnie Walker runs in 125 countries around the world. We run global ads from London, and our regional offices also produce their own creative ideas within the “Keep Walking” strategy. The success of the campaign has been demonstrated by winning creative awards such as a Gold at the Cannes Advertising Festival this year. The campaign has even crept into the vernacular—“Keep Walking” was recently used as a revolutionary slogan on placards during demonstrations in South America.

Axe (“the Axe effect”) has won no fewer than 16 international creative awards as well as Unilever’s most prestigious internal award for creativity, and Levi’s has, without question, become one of the most famous advertisers of the past 20 years. ●

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