

## Marketing and Advertising Agency



**Ed Mitzen**  
Founder

**CEOCFO: *Mr. Mitzen, what is the concept behind Fingerpaint Marketing?***

**Mr. Mitzen:** We are a marketing and advertising agency. We opened up shop in 2008, and the reason why we named it Fingerpaint is because we wanted a name that was a reminder of the creative exuberance we had as kids before life made us color within the lines. We love the name, and it is very much tied to our culture, which is a very collaborative environment. We do not have titles or offices, and everybody owns stock in the company. We have been extremely blessed, and we have been doing very well since we started.

**CEOCFO: *What has changed over time?***

**Mr. Mitzen:** Fingerpaint is my second agency. I started another one called Palio back in 1999, so I have been lucky enough to be working in this field for 15 to 16 years. The way in which people access information and content changes every day. In the past, marketing and advertising was all about pushing your message out and trying to say it as loudly and creatively as possible. Now, advertising, marketing and PR are all about customer engagement, providing relevant content to the consumer and almost disintermediate marketing. You do not have to be a nuclear physicist to understand that digital is taking a much bigger role in our industry, and the ability to measure success and ROIs on particular campaigns based on online analytics is a big part of what we do, and it gets more and more important every day.

**CEOCFO: *Why is the lack of hierarchy important?***

**Mr. Mitzen:** Advertising is really a team sport. Let's say we are building a website for a client; we need copywriters, web designers, back- and front-end programmers, editors and analytics specialists. We might have eight or ten people working on a particular job, and I wanted everybody to feel equally important regardless of their role. I had a friend who was going on a big new business presentation a few years ago, and he spent a lot of money getting ready for the presentation. The assistant who booked the travel for the meeting accidentally booked him to the wrong office location, and he missed the new business opportunity. I think that is a great example of making sure that the person who is booking the travel feels their job is as important as the person developing the creative. Everybody plays a part, and I wanted a no-title structure in order to embody that.

**CEOCFO: *When you are adding people to the team, what are the intangibles you look at that identify who will appreciate that concept?***

**Mr. Mitzen:** We have interviewed people who come in and like what we are all about, but they want a big corner office or they want a senior vice president title. Not that there is anything wrong with that, and I totally understand how that could be a big motivator for people. But I think that culturally it means that this place probably is not the best fit for them. It is a good self-selector in terms of bringing on people who believe in how we do business. Just because we do not have titles, it does not mean that we are not structured. We have an organizational structure, so people know who they report to. We have job descriptions, and we have ways of promoting people even though we do not have a traditional title system. I think the advertising industry is a lot like the banking industry, where you will meet a 24-year-old who is a vice president. The clients have absolutely no idea what the difference is between a group copy supervisor and an associate creative director, as an example. We just thought we would do away with all the bureaucracy and make it nice and clean. It seems to be working well. We did a survey with the staff about six months ago and asked them as we were getting bigger and bigger if they still liked not having titles, and it resoundingly came back that they did like it. They want clarity around their role and how to grow within the company, but they like that aspect of our business.

**CEOCFO: *Who is coming to you for services? What is the common thread?***

**Mr. Mitzen:** I think the common thread our clients in all different verticals are looking for is senior-level talent without a lot of bureaucracy and bloat. I think a lot of times when you go to a big, global agency network; there is a lot of waste built in inherently. There is a lot of overhead cost, and there are a lot of senior people who might touch the account for ten minutes, and then the junior people end up doing all the work. We tend to get clients who do not want that big agency model, but they also do not want to sacrifice any work quality. Clients are looking for people who are digitally on the cutting edge of advertising work, and they want passionate people.

**CEOCFO: *How do people know you are the type of agency they want? How do you reach out to people and how do they find you?***

**Mr. Mitzen:** I think there are about 6,000 advertising agencies in the country, and they all do pretty good work, otherwise they would not be in business. A lot of our business comes through word of mouth from people who have heard of us, people who have worked with us in the past and people who have seen our work either in awards shows or written up in different industry publications. We also have a team that focuses on new business.

**CEOCFO: *When you are working with a client, how are you able to identify what they really want and need and not what they say or think they want and need?***

**Mr. Mitzen:** We approach every client and ask ourselves what we would do if we owned the company. How would we tackle the marketing challenge if it was our business? We know that when we make a client successful, and we help sell products and services for them, they are going to continue to utilize us. We approach every project like a business school case study— looking at the competitive landscape, diving into market research and data, doing customer interviews and employee interviews—and try to get a strong pulse on what the issues are and how we can ultimately shift behavior based on the product attributes. At the end of the day, an advertising agency's job is to sell things. We have to make sure that what we create works, and if it does not work then we have to be able to refine it and optimize it to improve the campaign performance.

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**CEOCFO: *When you are working on a campaign, how do you put together gut feeling, trends and ease of use? How do you get past your own biases?***

**Mr. Mitzen:** It all comes down to research and testing. The nice thing about modern-day advertising is that, now more than ever, we can test results of campaigns. If campaigns are online, you can tell how many people are clicking, downloading, sharing, calling, liking or joining conversations, and then you can tie that back to product sales to see if it is actually having an impact. If it is grounded in research, it is easy to remove your own bias.

**CEOCFO: *How do you spend your time as CEO?***

**Mr. Mitzen:** I love to work, so I work a lot. I really enjoy what I do, and I feel very blessed. I have a great group of people, as we have about 125 employees. When I am working, I do spend a lot of time in a lot of different areas, but where I tend to focus most is making sure the staff has everything they need to do their jobs properly and that we are taking care of our people. I spend a lot of time recruiting people and companies that might be able to help us grow. I also spend time trying to keep us relevant in the marketplace, whether it is getting booked on MSNBC to talk about Super Bowl advertising, doing speaking engagements or posting articles.

**CEOCFO: *Put it together. Why choose Fingerpaint Marketing?***

**Mr. Mitzen:** We produce great work. There are a lot of extremely smart people at Fingerpaint, with exceedingly high integrity and passion for what we do. We are based in Saratoga Springs, New York, with additional offices in Phoenix, Arizona and Villanova, Pennsylvania. Our people strive to help our clients win and have a high degree of integrity. Because we are all owners in the company, there is a sense of pride at Fingerpaint that is not common in marketing firms. Companies entrust us with their brand to make sure that we can protect it, grow it and nurture it. They also realize we are a very passionate, high-energy group of marketers.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

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