

Creative Integrated Marketing, Advertising and PR Solutions on all Platforms



Taylor Bennett - Principal

CEOCFO: Mr. Bennett, what is the focus today at MESH?

Mr. Bennett: We are looking to really capitalize on an integrated marketing approach for our clients. For the first two or three years that we were in business, much of what we did was centered around creative. Only over the last five or six years, we have moved a lot more toward developing strategic ideas and PR solutions for clients on all platforms. Now, with social and digital media having such a big presence in what we do, we have many things to work with that are at our finger tips and more immediate, and we are taking advantage of that.

CEOCFO: What is the thought process or the philosophy of how you create a campaign?

Mr. Bennett: We always start with discovery – we never skip it. It's very important to understand our client's needs and figure out a creative solution for that. That is always the first step in what we do. We have an entire series of questions along with imagery that really help us to understand what their biggest challenge is right now and what their biggest opportunity is. We use that to start. The second thing that is really, really important is that every idea or every brand that we create starts with a basic idea that is defined by the business objective. Thus, we look at our clients' yearly and/or campaign goals – this can be anything from a financial perspective or lead generation to brand or product awareness. We look to find out what that is so that we have measurable results. We are in a very unique business as we are essentially driving business and success for companies, but we are doing it through some really crazy creative ideas and strategies. We think in ways that most people don't in order to create solutions and provide something that is completely unexpected. We have to be business-minded, but at the same time let the horses run when it comes to creating some ideas that really are unique. It's a balancing act.

CEOCFO: How does this concept translate into concrete action?

Mr. Bennett: One of the main things that we pay a lot of attention to is copy. We think copy plays a significant role in the way the brand personality is portrayed. We recently did a campaign, about a year or so ago, for a hospital here in Baton Rouge. Most hospital campaigns are very straightforward and a little vanilla. This was an OB campaign for a new hospital that was opening, so we created a nine-month campaign that really capitalized on the same anticipation and excitement that someone would experience before, during and after a delivery of a pregnancy. We came up with headlines that were married to that strategy. Examples are "We're expecting," and "Our eighty five acre bundle of joy", and "This baby is worth the wait." We really had fun with it by making the community more engaged in the personality of the brand and creating anticipation and excitement. On a national level, we worked with a company –and still do – Belgard Hardscapes. We were asked to reposition the marketing strategy for the brand, more to consumers, instead of marketing only to the trade, which were contractors and architects. Belgard is a paver; a home and garden product, so we developed a strategy to build your outdoor paradise or patio for entertainment. We came up with the tagline, "Be prepared for company." Every aspect for the ad was something to invite into your backyard; invite drama and invite personality... We just look for that one thing that is unique and sound with the strategy but separates the brand from any other brand.

CEOCFO: Are prospective clients coming to you because you have a reputation for this type of campaign or are they often surprised at what you are able to create or both?

Mr. Bennett: The best way that we get business is through referral. We get a lot of business that way. We are very fortunate in that our phone rings, and on the other end is someone who has just been referred or someone who has seen our work somewhere and is interested in doing business with us. To be honest, for us, that is the most successful

relationship. It does a couple of things. The first thing it does is that it provokes that prospective client to ask for references. If they like a campaign, typically they are going to ask whom we did it for and if they can call them. For us that is great, because they call on a client that is happy and has a successful brand and a successful campaign. That is the easiest way to get clients. An agency's biggest challenge is walking into pitches and pitching to a client who really has very little information or idea about us, our or company or where we come from. We are behind-the-camera folks here -- we really pay attention to the product that is going out the door; so for us, that is a challenge. Ultimately though, having something in a pitch scenario that we can differentiate ourselves with is what it's all about, and we've come up with some really good solutions moving into 2015 to do that. We are basically looking to hone on what we do best, which is creative, and use that to land business in those types of formats.

CEOCFO: Do most people come for a full blown campaign or do you find that people, over the years, will come for different parts of your services?

Mr. Bennett: That is a great question. When we first started, we started more as a boutique graphic design firm. Our business model was more transactional. The client would come, and we would develop the project for them. Once the project was finished, we were complete and done until that client came back for something different. Our business has moved into integrating more ancillary services. We have been able to go to a client, develop a budget for the year and develop a calendar to show them how we are allocating those dollars to maximize their spend. That is the most effective relationship. It really does a couple of things. It adds a little bit more value to the relationship, because it keeps at least one person in the agency on that account and they are constantly looking out for that client. If they see a competitor doing something that could be a problem or if they see an opportunity that was not necessarily in the plan, they will bring it up essentially being a strategic advisor. That is really part of our mission; to become one of the most trusted advisors outside of that company or that brand moving forward. Another entry is project work. We have two different paths for that to happen; two different people, really, to create those paths. We have one person who comes from a more creative background, who is very brand focused and able to develop very beautiful work. Then we have a team of people who are more long term, strategic communicators. It's interesting; once a client works with us on a project, we typically find other things that we can help them with. That is really what it is about. It is saying, "This might help you and this is a service in addition to what you came to us for right at the beginning, and we think it could help you." We are able to offer more effective solutions for the client at that point to help grow their businesses

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CEOCFO: When you are developing a campaign, how do you account for what might be changes that you do not know about? Are you able to move quickly and make changes?

Mr. Bennett: That is a great question. I will go back to the hardscape business. We have been working with Belgard since 2003. We started changing the overall marketing strategy to go to direct to consumer in 2006. This is a home product. It is basically putting an addition to your home outside, such as outdoor living rooms, patios, driveways and walkways. We all know what happened in 2007 and 2008 when the market crashed. Before that happened, we were selling that product to new construction, and it was doing well. We were also selling it as a very high end product, and the overall brand was positioned as something that was really exclusive. When the home market tanked we said, "How can we take the work that we have already put into this and move it just to reposition it?" because you never want to just totally dismiss what you have done for a client as a lot of time and resources that have been put into that. So we basically repositioned the brand to be an addition to the home. The overall message was simple: "This company has a great product that adds tremendous value to your home." Thus, we decided to go ahead and reposition the brand to add value to the home and allow people to spend money where they are living to have more in their home or right outside of their back door; and it worked really, really well. While other companies in the category sat on the sidelines, we kept moving forward. The VP of marketing, Ken O'Neill had a real smart, keen sense of doing that. We partnered with him, and they did a fine job.

CEOCFO: What is your day-to-day focus as CEO?

Mr. Bennett: I get to work really early; five thirty or six and put on the first of several pots of coffee. I feel as if it is truly my job to serve my team and my clients, and that is really what I do all day. I answer questions. I help lead. I develop a lot of the strategy including long term strategy for our clients. I develop a lot of the campaign ideas or play a big part in that. I enjoy doing that. It is truly something that I am very passionate about and will continue to do. I have such an awesome team here. We are so diverse in our disciplines and our talents. I think that for me a lot of it is just watching what it

happening. I think that everyone on the team is comfortable to come up to me and say, “What do you think about this,” or “how would you change it,” and we have very healthy conversations like that. Much of it is client management; just making sure that our customers are happy and that they are getting the value that they are paying for. We are moving into a new building, so right now a lot of time is being put to that and getting that ready and really planning for the future. We put a strategic plan together this year. Additionally, a lot of my time is focused on the things that many people here do not have time to focus on – just making sure that on a day-to-day, week-to-week and month-to-month basis that things are getting done so that we can meet our goals. We are trying something new this year. I really wanted everyone in the company to feel like they had skin in the game or they were a part of the success of it. We changed things up on the bonus structure to give a little bit more incentive there. We also are giving commissions to anyone who brings in new business. It is really important to include everyone in every aspect of the business that I can, and some really neat things are happening because of that.

CEOCFO: *Final thoughts?*

Mr. Bennett: For us, it is just all about taking care of the client and taking care of the people who are working for you. As I said, service is very important in our industry. Last, but certainly not least, is that there are so many things going on, as CEO or principal. For me, one of the most valuable things that I have been told was by Stan Richards with the Richards Group. He said, “Do not ever keep your eye off the product that is going out the door. Always have your eye on that because in advertising you live and breathe by the quality of work that comes out of your shop.” I am very thankful for Stan’s wise words, and I keep them in mind each day.

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



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